

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

RELIGION AND THE SWING VOTE

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**Introduction and Moderator:**

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**Featured Speaker:**

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**Panelists:**

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. GALSTON: If we could all begin to move toward our seats, please. The event is about to begin, since we've waited the ritual five extra minutes. Let me begin by introducing myself. I'm Bill Galston, a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution.

And I want to welcome all of you, and I do mean all of you, and there are quite a few of you, to this event, which is, in the first instance, convened to celebrate the publication of E.J. Dionne's latest book, sold out, *Reclaiming Faith in Politics After The Religious Right*, but more broadly to explore some of the very important questions that this book raises.

This event is the latest in a series sponsored by Governance Studies at Brookings. The series is entitled Governing Ideas, and there will be a steady stream of these events, about once a month.

And given the nature of this occasion, let me begin in all solemnity with the standard Brookings invocation. Please turn off all of your cell phones, pagers, and any other noise making devices other than your vocal cords. Just a very brief introduction to tee up the conversation. As some very, very good academic studies have demonstrated over the past decade or so, as we look around the world, we notice among nations an inverse relationship between wealth, on the one hand, and religiosity on the other. As a general proposition, the wealthier a country is, the lower the level

of political belief and observance, with one conspicuous exception: the country in which we live.

The United States has a per capita income greater than Sweden's and a level of religiosity higher than Lebanon's. This is a unique conjunction, and it gives a particular cast to American culture and to American politics, and as a result, it doesn't require an extended argument. To be able to say that how people of faith in America link their beliefs to politics and public policy is a matter of no little interest, culturally and politically. Indeed, it may well turn out to be decisive.

In the lifetimes of the people on this panel, there have been enormous changes along precisely this dimension of American public life. As we know, Evangelical Protestants who went into a period of political quiescence after the mid 1920's have been remobilized into American politics, first, on behalf of a Democrat, Jimmy Carter, then a Republican, Ronald Reagan, subsequently became a critical building block of the Republican conservative coalition, where they have remained, more or less, up to the present day. Catholics, of course, when I was a boy, were hard core Democrats. E.J. Dionne begins his book with a joke about that. They have turned into the quintessential swing voters, mainstream Protestants with quintessential hard core Republicans. They, too, have turned into swing voters.

I think everybody recognizes that there were very large

changes in political religious alignments that occurred in the 1970's and early 1980's. And this book raises a very fundamental political question, have we reached another turning point in the relationship between American faith and American politics, potentially as large and as consequential as the one that occurred a generation ago?

But this book also raises a substantive question which is not unpolitical, but which goes deeper than daily political contestations, namely, can we reach a somewhat greater consensus than exists now on an understanding of the appropriate relationship between faith and public life in our constitutional democracy, an understanding that offers a principled alternative to strict separation, on the one hand, and covertly or overtly theocratic claims on the other. I can't imagine a better group of people to help us unpack and address and perhaps even answer these questions. There is, first, the author, whose book we celebrate today, my colleague, E.J. Dionne, who is well known to everyone in this room. The extended biography is available to you.

So I will just say very briefly that he is a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies at Brookings, as you know, a syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post*, a university professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture at Georgetown University, he is a prolific author of at least four books that I can name, and perhaps there are others buried in his past.

He's the editor of many more, generates a steady stream of articles and articles and lectures. His best selling book, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, was published in 1991. *Newsweek* called the book, a "classic in American political history", it won the *LA Times* book prize, and was nominated for a national book award. I can go on and on, but let me just end by saying that a better colleague and a finer human being one cannot imagine.

To discuss this book, we have an all-star cast, and first to comment on it will be Richard Cizik, who's Vice President for Governmental Affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals. His primary responsibilities include setting NAE's policy direction on issues before Congress, the White House, and the Supreme Court, as well as serving as a national spokesman on issues of concern to Evangelicals. He's the author of over 100 published articles and editorials, and was, I believe, the moving force in a landmark document that everybody should be acquainted with entitled, *For the Health of the National, an Evangelical Call to Civic Engagement*.

And finally, Peter Steinfels, who's a man of many talents. I first encountered Peter's thought in the very late 1970's, when he wrote a book on the emerging neo-conservative movement, about which we've learned a great deal more in the ensuing 29 years.

He's also the author, more recently, of *A People Adrift, the*

*Crisis of the Catholic Church in America*. He served for about a decade as the Senior Religion Correspondent for the *New York Times*, and still is a regular columnist there. He served as an editor of *Commonweal* magazine, and about four years ago, Fordham University named him co-director with his wife, Margaret O'Brien Steinfeld, who's with us today, of a new Fordham Center on Religion and Culture. If you ever get invited to participate in one of their events, drop everything and do it; you'll have a good time and come away nourished intellectually and spiritually, as well as physically, I can promise you. E.J., the floor is yours for about 15 minutes. The two commentators will have about ten each. We'll then do a round of moderator's questions and proceed to questions in discussion from the floor.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you, Bill. That was a typically overly generous introduction. And I want you to give me guidance on my time because I cut the talk in half and it needs to be cut in half again, so I want you to sort of cut me off when it's time.

What an honor and pleasure to be with so many friends. I have friends in the room from Chicago, from Italy, from New York. Mostly it's by accident, they happened to be here, but God bless you for coming. And there are just folks from many different parts of my life here. And I'll thank Peter and Peggy in a moment. But I am sorry that I am losing my voice today.

I've been traveling this great country calling on Americans to

embrace hope and change in the possibilities of a great future, and, of course, I just made all that up, but I always wanted to say it. I just have a cold. But I actually do hope that my book might contribute a bit to the spirit of hope and change that has touched our country during this campaign, and I think we'll endure beyond it. I have an Obama reference at the end of this talk, so it is only right to have a Clinton reference here. I also -- this is the bipartisan Brookings Institution, I have a Huckabee reference in the speech.

It takes a village to write a book and to put on an event such as this. So before I say anything else, I want to thank Corinne Davis and Bill Galston especially, and also Peter and Rich Cizik. Corinne is a marvel whom I thank at length in my epic acknowledgements. Bill is an intellectual and spiritual guide.

Peter is a very, very dear friend, Peter and Peggy both, who have taught me so much. Rich is a real hero in my book. It's no accident that he was invited here today, or that he kindly accepted to come. And Peter and Bill are among the people to whom the book is dedicated.

I just recently learned I may have lost a decent review because of that, so I will learn something. My great thanks also to Dominique Melissinos, to Gladys Arrisueno, Erin Carter, and Emily Goldman, who is here today, all contributed to the event or to the book itself. As Bill mentioned, this is one of the only books on religion that begins with a joke. It is one of my favorite jokes. I promised Peter and Bill and Peggy that I would

stop using it, since it is at the very beginning of the book, but the spirit is weak and the flesh is willing.

And in any event, it works very well as a way to begin this talk, because it reminds us of how the words Jesus and religious were not always associated reflectively with the words right or conservative.

And everybody in the room has heard this, I ask your apologies, it is the story of Mrs. O'Reilly and her son, who was dutifully taking her to the polls on election day. Mrs. O'Reilly always voted straight Democratic; her son, a successful member of the upper middle class had become an independent and voted for many Republicans.

As was their routine, the son asked the mother how she would vote, and as always she answered, straight Democratic. The exasperated son replied, mom, if Jesus came back to earth and ran as a Republican, you would vote against him, and she snapped back, hush, why should he change his party after all these years. Now, a great many Americans have come to believe that he has, in fact, changed his party after all these years. On significant parts of the right and the left, there is a sense that religion has always been a conservative force and always will be. There were Republican candidates and political operatives who assume that religious people live on political right care primarily, or even only about issues such as gay marriage and abortion, and will forever be part of the Republican political base.



There were liberals, though I think many fewer than conservatives think, who buy this Republican account and write off religious people as backward, reactionary busy bodies obsessed with sex. *Sold Out* insists that religious faith does not lead ineluctably to conservative political conclusions; it argues that the era of the religious right is over its collapse as part of a larger decline of a certain style of ideological conservatism that reached high points in 1980, 1994, and perhaps 2004, but suffered a series of decisive and I believe fatal set-backs during President Bush's second term.

The end of the religious right does not signal a decline in Evangelical Christianity, and it's one reason why I'm grateful that Rich Cizik is here. On the contrary, it is a sign, I believe, if a Catholic may use this term, of a new reformation among Christians who are disentangling their great movement from a political machine. This historic change will require liberals and conservatives alike to abandon their sometimes narrow views of who religious Americans are and what they believe.

Now, it's true that religious people hold a variety of political views. Religion is not the enemy of reason or science, people of faith are not blind automatons who never question themselves or their deepest belief.

At the heart of my argument is the view that religious faith, far from being inevitably on the side of the status quo, should, on principal, hold this world to higher standards. Religious people should always be weary of

the ways in which political power is wielded, skeptical of how economic privileges are distributed.

I should say I'm happy that the SCIU accommodated us today and it makes me glad I didn't cross a writer's union picket line to do a particular television show. They should also be weary of how their own traditions have been used for narrow political purposes and how some religious figures have manipulated faith to aggrandize their power. The people who do that only strengthen the arguments made by those who in the book I call a neo-Atheist. The doctor of original sin, the idea of a fallen side of human nature, these imply, in principal, to people who are religious no less than to those who are not. Throughout our history, our great religious traditions have preached the method of hope for more just and decent human arrangements.

One of my favorite teachers, Dafeo Loge and Harvey Cox, argued many years ago that the theological enterprise seeks to grasp the problems man faces in this historic present in the light of the past and his future that is in light of faith and hope.

Cox was right to call for a church which speaks with pointed specificity to its age, which shapes its message and mission, not for its own comfort, but for the health and renewal of the world.

Mark saw religion as the opium of the people, but that can be true only if religion is seen as utterly indifferent to what happens in this world,

or if it becomes a kind of decent drapery, to use Edmond Burke's evocative term, to disguise or rationalize the authority of those already powerful.

Such a faith would be incapable of challenging injustices. It would be indifferent to how God's children are treated by their governments or their employers or their societies. Such a faith would reflectively support the status quo by offering its blessings to whatever happened to be fashionable or to whomever happened to be in power. But that is not the faith of the scriptures and it is certainly not my faith.

The title of my book can be read in two ways. It speaks to our country's exhaustion with a religious style in politics that was excessively dogmatic, partisan, and ideological. It is a style that reflected a spirit far too certain of itself and far too insistent on the depravity of its political adversaries.

Linking religion too closely to the fortunes of one political party or to one leader or group of leaders is always a mistake. It encourages alienation for faith itself; where, after all, did Voltaire come from, by turning a concern with the ultimate into a prop for temporal power.

And that's my cell phone, I believe, which I failed to turn off, and I apologize.

It distorts great traditions by requiring their exponents to bob and weave in order to accommodate the political needs of a given moment or the immediate requirements of a given politician. Thus, do great traditions

drain themselves of their critical capacity? I do not for a moment pretend that this tendency is unique to political conservatives. But for more than a quarter century, it is the political right that is used and I believe abused religion. A great many people, including a great many religious people have had enough. They have had enough for the other reason embodied in my title. Reducing religion to politics or to a narrow set of public issues amounts to a great sell out of our traditions.

It is common to speak of religion as selling out to secularism or to modernity or to a fashionable relativism. But there is a more immediate danger, particularly in the United States, of religion selling out to political forces that use the votes of religious people for purposes having nothing to do with a religious agenda, and often enough for causes that may contradict the very values such voters prize most.

It is a great sell out of religion to insist that it has much to teach us about abortion or gay marriage, but little useful to say about social justice, war and peace, the organization of our work lives, the death penalty, immigration, or our approach in providing for the old, the sick, and the desperate. Religion becomes less relevant to public life when its role is marginalized to a pre-determined set of values issues, when its voice is silenced or softened on the central problems facing our country and our government. My book reflects impatience with the very way in which values issues have been defined, especially by pollsters, though, not by my friend,

Andy Kohut, in the back of the room, who stack up moral values as a choice apart from economic or foreign policy issues.

Voters worried about poverty, the war in Iraq, the justice of the tax system, or for that matter, an over powering state, are just as concerned about values as are those voters who check those little boxes on our polls.

I always ask audiences like this, has anyone in the room ever cast a ballot on the basis of immoral values. I've yet to have someone say yes, though I am determined to go out and have a drink with that person afterwards, because I would love to spend more time with him or her.

The idea that the religious wings are changing is one of *Sold Out's* central themes. Over the last two decades, as I say, much of the public discourse, shaped by the idea that religion was a right wing force, also shaped how religion was covered in our mass media. Once the media paid much attention to religious figures from Reinhold and Ebra hero in my book, Paul Tillick, Carl Bart, John Courtney Maury, Billy Graham, Martin Luther King, Jr. Beginning in the late '70's, the focus of interest narrowed. To be sure, Pope John Paul, II, earned his share of coverage. But in the United States, the attention lavished on Pat Robertson, the late Jerry Falwell, and James Dobson, suggested that to be religious was to cling to a rather narrow and very specific set of public and political views.

The public voice of religion as reflected in this supposedly liberal mass media was deeply inflected with the accents of a largely

southern conservative evangelicalism. The future of religious engagement with American public life will not be defined by the events of the recent past. In the new millennium, fresh religious voices are rising to challenge stereotypical views of religious faith.

I refer here not only to my friends, Amy Sullivan, Jim Wallace, Bob Edgar and others who have joined them in speaking eloquently on behalf of religious progressivism. There is also Rick Warren, a religious and political conservative who, nonetheless, insists that if Christians do not care about the poorest among them, they are not being true to their faith. There is Rich Cizik, who is a loyal conservative and insists that a concern for life entails an engagement of the stewardship of the earth. And, yes, there is Bono who said that he could be considered a man of the cloth only if cloth is leather. He, too, challenged Christians to stand up for the poor. I think the 2008 campaign will be remembered for many things, but one of the most important aspect is the change in the political landscape that has not yet received enough attention, it is this changing of the political winds.

The transformation is visible in many ways. The emergence of Mike Huckabee put the fear of God in the Republican establishment. The Huckabee surge eventually abated, but his candidacy marked a break with what had been standard operating procedure for more than a generation. Huckabee's Evangelical Christian army in Iowa ignored the importuning of entrenched leaders of the religion right and decided to go with one of their

own.

I disagree with Mike Huckabee on many things, but he does preach the gospel of populism that rejects conservative orthodoxy on trade the value of government and the beneficence of Wall Street. Huckabee is no William Jennings Brian, but Brian would have appreciated Huckabee's attacks on politics as a mere extension of economics.

The Democratic party, too, is changing. In Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, the Democrats have candidates who are religious literate believers, thoroughly comfortable in discussing their faith and its implication for their views on policy. Obama signaled the change in a powerful 2006 speech in which he criticized liberals who dismiss religion in the public square as inherently irrational or intolerant.

In the same speech, Obama caught the other aspect of the new mood, no matter how religious they may be or may not be, people are tired of seeing faith used as a tool of attack, they don't want faith to be used to belittle or divide.

For her part, Clinton has been open about the importance of her Methodist faith as First Lady, and she risked criticism from her own camp by declaring some years ago that even supporters of legal abortion should be working to reduce its incidence.

I believe that we are seeking a new religious balance. The new politics of religion is not about driving religion out of the public square, it

is about rethinking its public role. It is a corrective, not a reputation of that role. I do not assert in my book that religion is or always will be a liberal. On the contrary, I note some very important affinities between our religious traditions and the conservation tradition. But it is also true that American liberalism cannot be understood apart from an understanding of its religious sources. Advocates of the social gospel were among those who cheered Theodore Roosevelt in 1912, when he declared that we stand at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord. And the Lord in that instance was assumed to be on the side of TR's progressive party.

And I would be remised because this document plays an important role in my book, the Catholic Bishops all the way back to their 1919 program of social reconstruction were at the forefront of rethink of the thinking that culminated in the new deal.

I want to close just by -- there are a lot of things I'd like to say, but I guess you'll just have to read the book, and 200 and some pages is too long for a speech. But I want to point to one of my favorite parts of the book, which was inspired by Bill Galston, and I don't say that just because he is here.

Bill argued that encouraging doubt properly understood is one of the great contributions of faith properly understood. The Christian and Jewish traditions in particular will always call us to affirm a moral doubt that Bill has argued questions our motivations and pretensions to special virtue.



Bill quite naturally turns to Reinhold Neiber as a great exponent of this faithful form of doubt. And Neiber's thinking, as I've said, is key to my own understanding. In an assertion that might usefully have guided us before our country went to war in Iraq, Neiber warned a nation with an inordinate degree of political power, is doubly tempted to exceed the bounds of historical possibilities if it is not informed by an idealism which does not understand the limits of man's wisdom and volition.

Galston concludes, the absent of moral doubt makes it far too difficult to recognize and rectify our mistakes. The cure Neiber teaches is the humility that comes from the acceptance of limits to humans thriving.

Think of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, and I think it may be the best guide we have to how religious faith and politics interact. In that address, he noted that both sides read the same bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes his against the other. It may seem strange that any man should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other mens' faces. But let us judge not that we not be judged. The prayers of both could not be answered, that of neither was answered fully. Now, Congressman David Price, who's thought a lot about Neiber and Lincoln, argues that this passage puts the relation of our moral commitments in history to our religious reservations, about the partiality of our own moral commitments, more precisely than any statement or theologian has before.

The Lincoln expresses the moral commitment against slavery in uncompromising terms, along with the determination to finish the work we are in. But there follows the religious reservation, the recognition that ultimately judgment belongs to God alone. The refusal, even in this extreme instance, to presume an absolute identification between his own cause and God's will.

The Christian right is finally an abstraction. Billions of committed Christians who may well have responded to the appeals of a political movement at a particular moment are thinking not so much their politics as the public implications of their faith.

They were growing impatient with narrow agendas as they reach out to the poor in Africa and in their own communities, as they worry about the obligations for the stewardship of the earth, as they grapple with practical ways to reduce the number of abortions. The liberals are changing, too. They are remembering things they had forgotten about the spiritual sources of their own dreams. They are recalling that one of the greatest successes of the last half century was a civil rights movement led by a Christian preacher who was inspired by the Declaration of Independence and by scripture.

To end the religious wars and to allow religion to flower in public life, we need passion and we need humility. These two virtues do not always come together, but they must. We need a passion for moving our

nation out of a period in which public problems went unsolved and the possibilities of broad alliances were lost because of narrow political imperatives and their triumph over the idea of a common good.

And we need humility to understand how prejudices are believers against unbelievers and unbelievers against believers have obstructed our path and blurred our vision. We must realize that self-righteous is the enemy of righteousness, and you don't have to support Barack Obama or to pick a fight with St. Paul on the priority of love to reassert that hope is the virtue on which faith and love depend. Thank you very much.

MR. GALSTON: Thank you, E.J. Now for our first comment, Richard Cizik.

MR. CIZIK: Would you like me to go up there or sit here?

MR. GALSTON: Your choice.

MR. DIONNE: Depends how much you want to preach.

MR. CIZIK: Yeah, that's right, E.J., thank you. I'm congenially incapable of sitting and speaking, so I guess that means I come up here. I will refrain from preaching, but not too much, because I want to say that this is, as if you need to be told, an important book. Look, this is a significant book.

I think that if I could have written a book half as good or even a third or a fourth as good, I would have written this book, because I have to

tell you, something is really happening and you need to watch for it, because religion always leads to politics.

If you think it's the other way around, you've got it all wrong and you're in the wrong -- probably in the wrong place, because what happens inside this town has already, in the way of elections particularly, has already happened out there, but what happens out there, and the way it's done, and the way religion has been used I would suggest in the past has impacted what's occurred here. So if you have something that's gone amiss out there in I would say even our churches, in our religious politics, it will be reflected in the polarization inside Washington, okay. That's my premier premise and what I believe E.J. and I think Bill would agree with me, maybe even Peter. I don't know, Peter is the Catholic here, and we have Evangelicals and Catholics, we don't agree on everything.

By the way, you've all heard, I'll make it real quick, but you all have heard about the children who were given a poll and they were asked about religion and politics, and they said, well, it's very simple, the Egyptians drowned in the desert, Moses, he came down from Mount Cyanide with the Ten Amendments you heard about that, and then when Mary sang about the birth of the baby to come, she sang the Magna Carta. And so we sometimes do get it wrong out there.

I am an consultant, in effect. I want to tell you the story of the man who is riding, you see, in his Jeep Cherokee, he slams on the brakes,

he walks over to the shepherd and he says, if I can tell you what, you know, if I can tell you how many sheep you have, can I have one, and the shepherds totally -- he says, well, of course, so the man goes then, we can call him American Evangelical or catholic or Protestant or whatever, he goes back into his Jeep, gets on his laptop, goes to GPS, which we call in my circles God's positioning satellite, and with a minute he has -- you see a ream of paper, he comes back, he walks up to the shepherd and he says, very simply he says, you have 1,638 sheep, and the shepherd is totally dumbstruck, he says, how did you know, that's amazing, go pick one out.

Well, he goes and does so, he's driving away, when the shepherd walks up and knocks on his window and he says, sir, he says, if I can tell you what you do for a living, can I have my sheep back, and the American says, of course, and the shepherd says, it's very simple, I've already told you, you are a consultant, and he says, that's amazing, how did you know, he says, well, first of all, you came into my world, about which you know nothing, you've answered questions I've not asked, secondly, you leave out, charge me a lot of money for it, and lastly, fourth, he said, so you don't know diddly-squat, he said, you took my sheep dog.

And so some of us, like myself, we're not only in the position of having to cast a voice, have to play the part at times of a consultant to tell you what is happening. And the reason why E.J. has his finger on it is because in a significant measure, what has happened to the Evangelicals,

because what has changed, I would like, E.J., you grab a copy of that, or Peter, hold it up, it is our document. And what happened, you see, in our movement with the adoption of the document in '04 and then again in '07. Now, when I began speaking about the principal of caring for creation, they said that is the religious right, said, oh, that's not one of our principals, that's not what we care about, we care about two issues, and I said, well, now wait a minute, we're going to talk about this whether you like it or not, and that produced a back flash of sorts where they tried to take away my job and the rest, but we adopted it again in '07.

As the Board of the NAE, the National Association of Evangelicals, which represents 45,000 churches, 54 denominations, and upwards, if you count, you know, those in and out at any one time, 30 million people. And so they said, we'll adopt the principals again. To say to the figures on the right that, well, we're not going to deprive Richard of his job or his voice, but here's why not, it's because we have a wider vision.

And so this vision we wondered about. We articulated it, we went out and preached about it and did all these things, and we didn't really know E.J., whether something was really happening out there, until just a few days ago, it's called an election, and that's where people are forced to choose. And so what happened? Well, to say how things have shifted, you see, here was a guy who, frankly, the religious right figures had always had, and typically two, in fact, both of them, both the Huckabee and the McCain,

the leaders in the religious right, had -- not just typically, but disdain for.

And so what happened; in spite of their best efforts, you see, to steer people to another candidate, I don't need to mention his name, they failed. Why? Because the people said, I don't care who you think I should vote for, I'm going to vote for who I want to vote for.

And so, you know, what was happening, you see, was that despite this broader vision that was developing, which Huckabee was, you see, he was articulating it, saying about the environment creation care, saying about, well, about a lot of different issues, the President's foreign policy was, you know, a bunker mentality and arrogant and the rest, he rose to the top.

And lo and behold, here you have McCain at the top of the heap, and you see, he was the candidate most despised by the political religious commentariate, the most despised. And so even the Evangelicals, as evidenced by South Carolina, other primaries are -- you see, with a changed vision, and quickly, a vision, you see. Well, in the bible we say, without a vision, the people perish; I would amend it to say, with a vision, the nation perishes. And we have a new vision of what is happening, and it's a slow moving earthquake, and if you don't watch it out there, you won't know what's happening here.

And so everything has changed. We have an open field politics this fall. And, yes, passion and humility, you say in the book to end

the religion and cultural wars and to allow religion to flower in the public like we need passion and we need humility, and you've got to have both.

I don't know if you know this, but in this great book called, From Good to Great, the author, Jimmy Canal, says, you've got to have passion, but if you don't supplement it with humility, well, then you really go astray. And I happen to think that that's a prescription for success. And it's this vision, the broader vision, accompanied with humility, which will ultimately change America. And by the way, pardon me if it sounds triumphal, I'm not intending to mean so; there is an expression as Evangelicals go, so goes the west, and as these Evangelicals, west, not west out there, is that the west, anyway, you know, not California, Oregon, Washington, where I come from, but you see, western civilization, and as this movement changes, it's going to change politics. It's got a strategy, too, and the strategy isn't the zero sum game, winner take all strategy of the past that was characterized by the polarization and the rest.

Who was it that said the last national election, it probably was my friend, Harry Jackson, he was one of those who voted to have me ousted, but Harry is my friend, so in untypical fashion of an Evangelical, you reach out, you don't try to slice and dice up your opponents, you invite them and be kind to them and win them with love.

But Harry says the last, and he's a conservative, and I'm a conservative, the last election you see in '04 was -- in 2000 was about fear.



This election, you see, will be about vision and passion, and you see that evidenced already in both parties. Time's up.

So the strategy, you see, has to be, Bill, a common good strategy, not the zero sum game, and if you play that strategy, you potentially win. If you play the fear factor, as some would like to do on Islam and the rest, I think you'll lose that one, too, even with the Evangelicals. Lastly, if your tactics aren't different, if you pretend you see a broader vision of what is good, and even if you have a strategy that accompanies that vision, but if your tactics really are simply to play people against one another, and as to say, as in the book, to use religion for a narrow agenda is a sell out, you see, that's what you say, I agree. And people are discovering that, and that is what is changing.

So people are yearning to get away, you see, from this polarization. By the way, lastly, let me say, Evangelicals are not cultural warriors, they don't define themselves that way, they really don't like it, and they are intrinsically people who are characterized, yes, imagine that, by Jesus, who said you love your enemies.

But it's ultimately in our hands. I say that to the Evangelicals to change this, because we have been significantly a part of the problem, and we're recognizing now that fact, and we are changing.

And the one issue -- I'll close because I know my time is up, the one issue, you see, which is a gateway issue into all the others that

forces people to challenge their own assumption and to even consider voting for the other party, because that's what will happen in this open field politics and this election cycle. Red states will go blue, blue, red, people who wouldn't have voted for the same person, who voted for one person in March may not vote for that person in November, it's wide open. But, see, the change comes because I believe, on one issue, what we call creation care, people are changing their entire assumption, and they're saying, you see, that the government that has supposedly been here acting on our behalf, has, in fact, been doing in this administration just the opposite.

And these young people especially have that vision, and they get it, and when they get it, ultimately it will be reflected in politics generally. Thank you very much.

MR. GALSTON: Peter Steinfels.

MR. STEINFELS: I'll speak sitting down because my handwriting is too small and my eye sight is too bad to manage from that podium. The first thing to be noted about Sold Out and its author are their generosity. I was going to say that E.J. is certainly the most generous political commentator in the country, except that would be setting far too low a bar.

E.J., in his book, is generous to Evangelicals, to Atheists, he is generous to pro-lifers, to pro-choicers, to people both for and against gay marriage, he is generous to the *Paypasee* and to the *New York Times*, the

two institutions that claim infallibility, he is generous to Rich Cizik, to Bill Galston, to me and my wife. There are seven pages of acknowledgements, and I'm not sure whether they include his kindergarten teacher. I do know that Sister Genevieve, his sixth grade teacher, is mentioned in the text.

The acknowledgements I suspect include everyone in this room. If anyone, in fact, here hasn't been mentioned, if you just sign the note pad that E.J. will circulate, he will acknowledge you in his next book.

In short, E.J. is generous to a fault, and I'll get right around to the fault, which is, I suppose, why he so generously invited me here today. American politics is at a turning point, he writes, essentially because so many Evangelical Christians are broadening their political agenda, so many Catholics are actively resisting recent attempts to narrow their political agenda, and many liberals or progressives are recognizing the legitimacy of religious folks having a political agenda that is engaging religiously in public life.

Now, all these developments are true, and all of them make me happy, and I greatly appreciate E.J.'s skill at recounting and analyzing them. But let me raise some doubts and ask some questions. Are we really at a turning point? Is 2008 really after the religious right? Do we really have a good chance to end, as E.J. hopes, and I quote him, "the religious and cultural wars and to allow religion to flower in public life"? Or perhaps, as A.J.P. Taylor said in a famous observation about the European revolutions of

1848, are we at one of those turning points in history when history fails to turn?

Disenchantment with the Bush Administration and discrediting by association with its appalling record of diplomatic, military, humanitarian, economic, ecological, and moral failures, you'll see I have a bit of the Mrs. O'Reilly in me, all that has undoubtedly sent the recent religious right into disarray. But hasn't its demise been predicted before, only to see it reincarnated in new forms and with new leadership?

And I'll remind E.J. of a book that he wrote about the Democratic party with the prophetic title we see in 2008, They Only Look Dead. But even if the religious right is finished, as we have known it, the non-religious right is not.

One of the merits of E.J.'s account is his demonstration that the outcome of the 2004 election did not turn on religion. Class and race and a lot of other factors still do count. It is also worth keeping in mind that the two signature policies of the Bush years, a unilateral assertion of American power and international affairs, and tax cuts, especially for the well to do, did not originate with the religious right, even if it was all too willing, in my view, to endorse them.

The neo-conservative and conservative think tanks and the case lobbyists who conceived and sold those policies remain well funded and very much in business, and so do the Rush Limbaugh's and like minded

radio hosts.

The threat of radical Islamist terrorism and the cultural and economic anxieties created by immigration remain capable of arousing fear and emotion regardless of religion.

Will the Evangelicals previously drawn to the religious right, and the Catholics, as well, now pursue the kind of communitarian faith based politics in various left and right versions that E.J. urges, or will they withdraw and minimize the more specifically religious character of their political engagement and pursue instead politics of economic self-interest and nationalist fear or even xenophobia? A lot could depend, of course, on unforeseen events. A terrorist attack in the United States, for example, or a dramatic set back overseas, or the depth of the arriving economic turn down. Just as the non-religious right has not gone away, neither have the culture wars. I'm sure that E.J. would acknowledge that among Americans, there are real significant cultural disagreements and not merely misunderstandings, disagreements about the ultimate meaning of life and human destiny, about the sources of moral authority, about how we best live out our sexuality, and a lot of other fundamental things.

These differences not infrequently are reflected in political problems, in practical problems which become political problems, posed to the political order, but also struggled over in the market place, in the arts, the media, the classrooms, in video games, indeed, even in the pulpits.

Many of the most fraught differences have to do with passing on values to children or, I say at my age, to grandchildren. The problems are not going to disappear. The question is whether we can have cultural debates rather than cultural wars.

E.J.'s proposal is that all parties check their demonizing and disdain that believers recognize, that the same views on divinely authorized morals are not held by all, and that liberals and progressives should accept the role of religion in public life. His proposal is necessary, but I would argue not sufficient. Take the last point, the legitimate role of religion in public life. Are we talking about religious language, religious institutions, religion authorities and leaders, are we talking about public debates, electoral politics, legislative lobbying, or judicial argument?

Intuitively, Americans have learned to make many distinctions between those different categories, even if they can't always articulate exactly why. They draw lines between what they think should be said in the pulpit and what they think should go on during an election and so on.

But all too often, both those positive and those negative about an active presence for religion in public life simply follow the whose ax is being -- rule. Whatever supports the measures, I favor, is fine. Whatever supports the measures, I oppose, is illegitimate.

The New York Times wrote a major editorial hailing the Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Los Angeles for threatening civil

disobedience by church personnel should Congress pass a draconian immigration bill. What would the paper's reaction have been if the legislation under consideration had been about reproductive rights? Finally, while E.J.'s account of the developments among Evangelicals and his hopes for the trajectory of American Catholicism seem, to me, to be well founded, he has less to say, I find, about a real change among liberals and progressives.

The new public religiosity of leading politicians is, I believe, both sincere and expedient. But I have my doubts about those officials and staffers who will fill all sorts of posts in what I hope will be the coming Democratic administration.

Some will feel that this is pay back time, just as Republicans and Democrats have done in dreary cycles. Others will be spontaneously attuned to running rough shot over religiously based obstacles to the causes they favor so strongly. And still others will, in fact, share an express the theological ignorance and secular dogmatism that even non-believing reviewers have protested in the writings of the neo-Atheists.

How can yet another over reaction to an over reaction be prevented? The flash points of abortion and gay marriage haven't gone away. And I think E.J.'s hopes in these areas for compromise are, typically for him, a bit optimistic. Stem cell research has become, for liberals, the kind of popular panacea and symbolic statement of a world view that tax cuts have been for conservatives. Who can be against it, especially when the

one, like the other, is actually promoted by big money? What is impressive about the course corrections E.J. describes within Evangelical Christianity and American Roman Catholicism is that they were largely driven from within each tradition, they were driven by the impulse to be true to itself.

If there has been a course correction within the liberal progressive world, it is not clear to me, at least, that it has similarly been driven from within rather than imposed or pressed from without from political expediency, first of all.

Liberals and progressives to fulfill E.J.'s hopes need the equivalent of a Jim Wallace or a Rick Warren or a Rich Cizik tirelessly campaigning for correction from within liberalism, progressivism's own authentic resources.

E.J.'s book is itself a contribution in that vein, to be sure. And I am not sure I want E.J. to take up that task and narrow his own scope of broad commentary on our political life in that way. I simply hope and actually pray that someone will do it. Thank you.

MR. GALSTON: Well, in this day one AZ, after Zorn, it seems appropriate to call an audible from the sidelines, and so although it was not planned, it seems to me that these remarks have been sufficiently challenging so that if our colleague, E.J., can limit himself to five minutes, he, hereby, has the floor for five minutes.

MR. DIONNE: I just want to make a couple points. When



Peter said he's generous to a fault, what came to mind is, ah, now the mud slinging begins, so I thank you, Peter, for that. And I just do want to put in a word for Sister Genevieve, who does appear in my book, and I actually think she's important to the book because she was my sixth grade teacher who got kicked out of a Catholic congregation in south parish because she organized a bi-racial first communion service.

And I always said that my views on civil rights were probably as much shaped by Sister Genevieve as anyone, and she didn't do that because she was a radical nun, she wasn't a radical nun, she did it because she was a Christian and didn't think a segregated first communion service was a good idea. And so anyway, I still love Sister Genevieve.

And the other thing, Peter made me finally realize why my very favorite moment in all of these inspirational Barack Obama speeches is when he says, they're criticizing me, they were accusing me of being a hate monger, and I love the idea of being a hate monger, a hope monger, not a hate -- yes, I boo my own line there, blame it on my throat, a hope monger, I like the idea of being a hope monger, not a hate monger.

Just a couple quick points, are we really at a turning point, that's an entirely fair question, especially for someone -- to someone who wrote a book about the victory of progressivism in 1996. And I think the evidence is quite substantial on that point.

In particular, when I talk about the changes going on in

evangelicalism, I don't just root it, because if you -- the idea that a few people I admire like Rich Cizik are doing what they're doing, I actually think there's a great sociological change going on in the Evangelical church, that the rise of the mega church is -- the mega church is itself a kind of suburban and exurban phenomenon, and that mega churches are -- suburbs and exurbs are almost inherently moderate.

I do not in this book argue that Evangelical Christians are all suddenly going to be like Mrs. O'Reilly. I don't argue that they are going to engage in a mass political conversation. What I do argue, and I think the evidence is quite strong on this, is that the people who attend Evangelical churches who are very serious believers are far more moderate than their past image or behavior suggests they are, and that there's a great deal of change going in, particularly among a younger community of Evangelicals.

Of those two very neuralgic issues of abortion and gay marriage, I do think there is a change. I agree that abortion is never going to be an easy issue to resolve simply because the argument over when life begins is a genuinely difficult question. But I think that you're seeing even in Congress, of all places, a kind of coming together of pro lifers and pro choicers who look at the current debate and say, what are we actually doing to reduce the number of abortions.

I think I argue to my pro life friends in the book that it is highly unlikely that abortion is going to be illegal in the United States any time soon,

perhaps ever. But there is substantial evidence that various actions by government and also moral -- could substantially reduce the number of abortions. We had 400,000 fewer last year than we did 20 years ago. Some of this had declined in the teen -- the birth rate among teenagers. And I think liberals who are pro choice should want to reduce the abortion rate, because the things you would do to allow poor women who want to choose life, to bring their babies into the world, are exactly the kinds of things liberals would want to do in order to provide such women with health care, with job opportunities for the way of supporting their children.

And on gay marriage, I think it's very striking that the new moderate position on gay marriage is to support civil unions. Ten years ago, civil unions was a radical position. I argue in the book that I have come to support gay marriage for the most conservative of reasons, which is that a society that values fidelity and commitment should not get in the way of the desire of people who are gay or lesbian to express fidelity and commitment.

But I don't pretend in this book that large numbers of people who oppose gay marriage now are going to come to that view. But I do believe that there has been an enormous change in peoples' attitudes toward gays and lesbians.

The last quick point, Peter talks about the mixture of sincerity and expedience going on among politicians. I believe everything politicians do is a marriage of sincerity and expedience. And you pray that the balance

is right. Reinhold Nieber once said that original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian church. But when I listen to Barack Obama talk about his faith, or Hillary Clinton talk about her faith, or Mike Huckabee talk about his faith, I see three people who actually are grappling with how in our current situation faith should be expressed in public life, who understand some of the tensions and the contradictions.

And lastly, I write in the book about Tim Kaine, the Governor of Virginia, and I won't go -- I go into some detail about Tim Kaine, but I always said that you knew Tim Kaine was sincere about his faith because he not only went to mass the day before he won election, he actually went to mass the day after he won election.

MR. GALSTON: Thanks, E.J. As moderator, I came armed with a long list of questions. But my higher duty is to restrain myself in the interest of group discussion. And so I would like to restrain myself to one question, and to frame it this way.

In my opening remarks, I said that this book raised two large questions, one political in the regular sense of the term political, and other in a deeper sense of the term political. We've already seen that there's some controversy and disagreement about the answer to the first of those questions, namely, have we, in fact, reached a turning point politically. And I'd like now to pose a question that probes our understanding, perhaps shared, perhaps discordant of the second question, and that is of a

sustainable relationship between faith and politics.

And let me pose it this way. In this wonderful document that the NAE adopted a few years ago and readopted more recently, we read the following words, "We thank God for the blessings of representative democracy which allow all citizens to participate in government by electing their representatives, helping to set priorities for government, and by sharing publicly the insights derived from their experience."

The document then goes on to say, "We support the Democratic process, in part, because people continue to be sufficiently blessed by God's common grace", that's the critical phrase, "that they can seek not only their own betterment, but also the welfare of others."

Now, by God's common grace, as I understand it, Protestants mean the understanding and the motivation that is available to human beings as human beings, not by virtue of being Protestant or catholic or Jewish, but by virtue of being human beings made in the image of God to some extent. And other faiths have doctrines that are equivalent to the idea of God's common grace. Many interpretations of natural law in the catholic tradition and the famous Noahide principals in Judaism, the principals that are available to and binding on human beings and human beings as the sons and daughters of Noah and not Jews in particular.

So here is my question; why isn't what this document calls God's common grace enough to shape political discussion and guide us? Is

there a legitimate role for what Catholics as Catholics, Evangelical Protestants as what they are, other kinds of Protestants and Jews to bring to the public square, is that necessary, or is that a source of division, and is what is available to us all as human beings perhaps not a better, more unifying, and perhaps more sufficient guide to our politics? That's my question to all of you.

MR. DIONNE: I'm going to let Rich go first on that. I'm happy that they'll go first, but I think it's specifically about a document, and then I want to take that up.

MR. CIZIK: Well, let me -- is your question, Bill, that you're asking, aren't we, as Evangelicals, conceding here that by God's common grace, that we seek our -- the betterment of others and not our own, isn't that sufficient enough of an understanding to guide us in these matters; is that the question? Or am I, as an Evangelical, not understanding?

MR. GALSTON: No, I think you're understanding me perfectly. It is -- there is something available to us as human beings, something that we have in common.

MR. CIZIK: Yeah.

MR. GALSTON: All of the faiths represented up here and many others besides have that understanding and converge on the content of that understanding. Wouldn't it be good and sufficient for decent politics to rest our arguments on that rather than something that is specific to a

particular faith?

MR. CIZIK: Well, the problem is that that common grace, which is to say a rain falls on the just and the unjust, where all the recipients of God's goodness, that's -- it's just a little bit different than adoption of say a catholic notion of natural law. I mean we, as Evangelicals, believe that natural law helps you to understand what you should do, and that we are all the recipients of, you see, a conscience that tells us what we should do, right, it speaks to us, but it's not sufficient to know what we should do in the public policy arena. Because, well, let's face it, that sense, that divine sense of conscience is marred by this innate flaw we all have called sin. And so for us, you see, we say natural law isn't sufficient, and you have to have additional guidance.

Now, we, as Evangelicals, have not been very good in the past in providing what that law to be. Catholics have this area between, you know, their scriptures and public policy called moral theology. Well, Evangelicals have never had a moral theology to help them from the word to the practice, from the orthodoxy to the orthopractice.

And so what we have attempted to do is to provide that in this. And what we're saying is, these are the principals, and they're all the principals, and it's the first time, to my knowledge, in American evangelicalism that it's ever been done.

And so what we're saying, yes, it helps, but it's not sufficient.

And, therefore, you're still going to have, yes, those politicians who, excuse me, I was going to say religious politicians, but you're going to have those in the religious right, you see, who will continue to make claims based upon a special revelation, the word, that they should do this in the public arena, politics of abortion necessarily. There are going to be those leaders who will make that case and say you should do this because of that, you should vote for Republicans, well, because we know the Republicans are God's own party, and you know, they've adopted a pro life stance, and so you're going to have that.

But what E.J. is saying here, and which I believe is true, is that something is changing. And we are saying that we're not going to be guided by those who would use religion for their own partisan political purposes. Does that make any sense?

MR. GALSTON: Absolutely; Peter.

MR. STEINFELS: Yeah, I'd like to take my own cut at that. It seems to me the idea behind your question, Bill, is whether, in fact, when religious people come into the public square, they should state their arguments and make their arguments in some neutral language of public reasoning which is accessible to all regardless of what religious tradition they're from.

And, in fact, in that wise speech by Obama, at one point he actually made an argument, a very brief phrase, saying something like that.



Now, that's very sympathetic to me, partly because I grew up familiar with the catholic natural law analogy to that kind of argument. There's sort of a middle language rather than explicitly religious language. And if you look at documents by the catholic bishops on nuclear arms and peace or on the economy, you'll notice that they have a section which is very scriptural and specifically theological, followed by a section which can be addressed in human rights terms to all citizens who are rational creatures.

I think that that's something to be encouraged. But I think it's not something to be a restrictive sort of rule for public debate. And for these two reasons, first of all, many people can't do it. For many Americans, simply the explicitly religious language and their moral language are so interwoven, and you know, they're not the most sophisticated philosophical folks in the world and this is the way they talk about things.

The second problem is that, in fact, in the translation into a kind of neutral public reasoning, two things happen; on the one hand, often something is lost that is specific to the religious dimension, and on the other hand, this supposedly neutral public reasoning often, in fact, reflects a particular, in fact, historically usually liberal ideological philosophical perspective. So what I say is, when this can be done, do it, but don't make it an absolute rule. That leaves me with the problem in a pluralistic society, when we have many people of different religious positions with different religious sacred texts and authorities, how do we bring that language in.

I think we have to bring that language in, first of all, recognizing that it is not authoritative for other people, although it may have a resonance for other people. But secondly, we have to learn to talk in one another's religious language.

I think this is a new condition for citizenship in a multi religious pluralistic society. We should be able to -- I should be able to make my arguments to someone ultimately committed to Buddhism and say, you know, your own position may suggest that this has got something to do with the sanctity of life or whatever, compassion; other people who are not Catholics can make their arguments in terms of elements of catholic faith, and so on and so on. And this goes for secular strong ultimate positions.

We have positions of feminism, commitments to egalitarianism that are just as ultimate for those folks as are many of our religious positions, and we have to be able to talk in that language. And I think this requires a new dimension for our kind of multi cultural, multi religious society of theological sophistication. And this is the point that I get back to is, I'm with E.J. about what's happened with Evangelicals and with Catholics, but I'm not sure if he's addressed what's happening in the cultural world, not just the political world of Obama and Clinton, but the cultural world of liberals and progressives, where the main recent phenomenon has not been speeches like their's, but it's been a wave of neo-Atheist popular writing.

MR. DIONNE: I want to get to the neo-Atheist, but just before

that, I wanted, if Peter will forgive me, to praise the generous spirit of his earlier comments on the need to learn to speak each other's religious language. Just very quickly, let me divide this into two questions, which is I think what's implied in your question, is that there is something distinct between our shared commitment to Democratic and liberal principals, I use liberal in the broad sense, that most conservatives in the United States are liberals, and specific religious traditions.

And, you know, to pick an extreme case, if given a choice between a catholic who would use, or I would argue, distort the tradition to support Nazi's and Atheists who opposes the Nazi's, I will stand with the Atheist. I could do so justifying it on catholic grounds. Indeed, some Catholics did not enough. But there are conflicts that occur where -- on faces where people choose to take a stand against broadly speaking liberal Democratic values.

In the book I cite Jeffery Stout's wonderful example of Professor Princeton, who says, couldn't we learn from the experience of solidarity in Poland, where a magnificent coalition of believers and non-believers, inspired by the same level liberty, in some cases for similar reasons, and in some cases for different reasons, found themselves able to stand together and create extraordinary change.

The other piece of it is the public reason, the argument that Peter raised, I once debated Ralph Reed, and I said, Ralph, I'll always

defend your right to base your religious -- your political conclusions on your faith, but you must explain to me where you find Jesus supporting a cut in the capital gains tax, I just can't find it in my new testament. And I think it's very good for us to have arguments of that sort within our own traditions.

And then the other example I cite is a rather well known example of President Bush, in that debate in 1999, when he was asked who his favorite political philosopher was, and he said Jesus. Now, purists insisted that Jesus wasn't a philosopher exactly, and indeed, it was -- Alan Keys looked at him and said, no, Jesus isn't a philosopher, Jesus is the word which is theologically sound. But in another sense, Jesus did have a philosophy, and it was a perfectly fair answer.

And actually, Gary Bower, in the same debate, started saying, I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. He drew a set of political principals from Jesus.

What was troubling about the Bush answer to me at the time and still is what came next, which is, he was asked to elaborate on his answer, and he said, well, if you haven't had the experience, meaning Jesus changing your life, it's very hard to explain to anyone who hasn't, and to me, that's when he crossed the line in a pluralistic society, where there was -- it is a fine thing for a politician in public to justify his political commitments in the name of religion, but he must, as Peter suggested, do so in some way that's accessible to those who don't share those commitments.

So to pick a final quick example, I may believe that we should help the poor, because I learned that from the scriptures and from what Jesus said, but it is not enough for me to tell you, you must vote for this increase in the earned income tax credit because Jesus tells me that that's the right thing to do. And I think we can draw those distinctions without too much difficulty.

MR. GALSTON: Okay. We've now reached your phase of the proceedings. I believe that there are portable mikes that can be circulated. So I'll begin with the woman on the aisle.

MS. MULL: My name is Mary Mull and I work with the -- New Support Committee. I was wondering about, because I lived in other countries and faith based organizations, whether they're Islamic or Evangelistic or Protestant or Catholic, seemed to go into areas of especially under developed countries where no one else will go, and I was wondering what you think about the fact.

I know some people think that there shouldn't be funds of faith based organizations, and to me, many of them -- the ones that I know were not propagating any faith. And I worked for some, I worked for Jim and -- World Organization, and then there's the American World Organization, and they did tremendous work in areas where some people would never go --

MR. DIONNE: Thank you. I have a small argument in the book with Christopher Hitchens, and I always thought Christopher made it

easy for believers when he had that sub title that said religion poisons everything. And anybody who's been a debater loves the idea of knocking down what amounts to a straw person. That's a non-sexist word for straw man, I guess, a straw person argument.

And it is absolutely clear what you -- there is just a deep truth in what you say in terms of the work of religious people in lifting up the poor all over the world. And not only just doing the work of charity, but in many cases, doing the work of organizing the poor to act into our own interest.

I understand that Barack Obama's salary as an IA -- an Industrial Areas Foundation organizer was actually paid for by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which helped finance the Industrial Areas Foundation.

Now, what I argue in the book is that, you know, the whole notion of government aid to faith based institutions is not new, it wasn't invented by George Bush. Thanks to my editor, I found some scholarship that chose that Franklin Roosevelt actually tried to create partnerships with African American churches in the '30's, when he was trying to convert African Americans from Republicans to Democrats, and this scholar named Omar McRoberts at the University of Chicago talked about this banner that was unfurled at a Roosevelt rally in 1936, of the three liberators, and it was Jesus who liberated us from sin, Lincoln who liberated us from bondage, and Franklin D. Roosevelt who liberated us from social injustice.

So the question, and we will see if the Democrats unfurl such a banner this year. But, you know, I think that there are -- the arguments about what lines can you and can you not cross ought to be carried out in a better way than we did when Bush proposed this in '93.

I think there are certain lines that you can never cross in terms of the government directly financing religious conversion. Now, it gets very tricky. I was at a session once, somebody from the gospel mission -- the gospel mission folks, and he introduced himself by saying, look, we're the people who hit you over the head with a bible and pour soup down your throat, and these are extraordinary people who do work with the most down and out.

He said he didn't want government aid, because he felt that government aid would get in the way of his very -- the very close link between the act of helping the poor and the act of converting people to Jesus. And so I think that there are forms of partnership that we have had, we don't want to cut government aid to religious hospitals through Medicare or Medicaid, we don't want to cut student loans to somebody who chooses to go to Wheaton or Notre Dame or Yusheba, and so, to me, it's a question of where -- there's a gray area there, and how do you negotiate those things.

And we've been successful in the past, and I think this is one case where my hope about a certain generosity in spirit getting us out of some rather stupid and dogmatic arguments about this might allow us to

make some progress.

MR. GALSTON: I'll move to the front now for a little while, yes. And the first questioner established a very useful precedent of self-introduction.

MR. MITCHELL: Gary Mitchell from the Mitchell Report. I'm intrigued by the way that Peter Steinfels puts the question that I've been thinking about, and that is -- comes to E.J.'s point about maybe if one of those magic moments, a turning point in history, and Peter's question was, are we at a point where we can have religious debate instead of religious wars. And we've been talking, but it seems to me we've been talking about this as though there are two parties to this, the religious community and politicians. And, in fact, what we know is that the public debate these days gets done via the media, for the most part. And my question is, what's their role in all of this, and to what extent might -- to what extent -- let's assume that the religious community and the political community are at some point where they might be able to do religious debate instead of religious war, what's your view of the role that the media plays in this and how it might impact it?

MR. DIONNE: I want Peter to jump on that. I'll give a quick answer, which is, I'm rather critical of my own profession in this book because I think that it's been a whole lot easier to get on television if you took a rather extreme position or a very partisan position, and if you took some



other more complicated position, you know, I ask the question in the book, would any talk show book Reinhold Neiber today, and when you think about it, you know, Neiber was on the cover of *Time* magazine, and you had very serious people who were part of the mainstream conversation about religion.

Neiber -- Heshel, all sorts of folks, and that as this became politicized, it became harder and harder to have those kinds of voices. And I also think it may be an odd problem with a certain liberal attitude toward religion, which is, if you assume religion only exists on the right, then you think you're being fair by only having a certain kind of voice on the right as part of this debate, when this is a very complicated and interesting debate. And there are a lot of very interesting voices, and there are people within traditions having great arguments with each other.

I was grateful, I think he had to leave, Nathan Diament was here from the Union of Orthodox Congregations. When I teach my religion and politics class, I usually try to invite Nathan and David Saperstein, who's head of the Reform Religious Action for Reform Judaism, partly because I want my students to understand that there are great debates that go on within traditions.

And I don't think the media, except for Peter Steinfeld's column, and there are some excellent religious writers, some of them in this room, but on the whole, especially when we get to politics, we don't do nearly as good

a job as we should in promoting a more intelligent argument. I'm curious where Peter is on this.

MR. STEINFELS: Thank you. Just three quick points. First of all, it would seem to me a great benefit if there could be -- E.J.'s general point that religion is legitimate in public discourse could be admitted by the media, and that would veto the idea that you can rule something out entirely, flatly, a priori, because it is in some explicit way religious. That does leave those questions I raised in my remarks about, are we talking about religious language, are we talking about electoral organization in politics and so on. Those are legitimate things and they can be explored.

But if the media simply bought that first point, you know, we're going to start from there, that's the point of departure before we start making distinctions. The second point is that we have to have more people in the media whose theological education did not end when they were 13 years old, which is the running average, I think.

And I mean I have spent my life working with the most brilliant and sophisticated people, who would never have stopped their education in dozens of other areas, from the science of polling, to the science of the cosmos, to all sorts of things, medicine, et cetera, with what they knew at 13, but who feel perfectly satisfied with the idea that they know what religion is about, they know that this is what Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, et cetera, believe, because they're depending on what they were told when

they were -- got age appropriate education perhaps up to that point. I do want to just mention one of -- those are the two beginning points. The last column I did for the *New York Times* was about the interesting fact that none of the exit polls asked Democrats in any of the caucuses or primaries whether they were Evangelicals.

Now, I, in doing the column and in talking to people like John Green about the problem of exit polling, I got more sympathetic to the problems of the exit pollsters, what they have to do quickly.

Of course, they, in the midst of a campaign, will not talk about this at all, and I can get sympathetic with their refusal to open themselves to lobbying and so on for the make-up of the exit polls. But I do think that at some level, it reflected a background assumption that when it comes to Democrats, Evangelicals are not all that significant.

And part of the problem here may be, that could be true right now, but it might be all the less true four years from now, and we won't have the baseline data to -- against which to measure a change.

So I'm not, you know, the pollsters may be right in terms of having to make the choices they do for a limited number of questions, but it is the kind of thing that raises your point, that underlines your point that the media is a great intermediary in the way all this takes place.

MR. DIONNE: Just a very quick point on what Peter just said, because I think it's very important. I take it as evidence, number one, that

the whole conversation is change, because I don't think it's conceivable that even four years ago the Democrats would even complain that the exit pollsters weren't asking about Evangelicals in Democratic primaries, and so it shows an awareness of this problem.

Number two, it shows something badly defective, because most of the time when we use the word Evangelicals, people are actually saying white Evangelicals. There are a lot of Evangelicals in the Democratic party, a lot of them just happen to be African Americans, and it's a very weird form of double prejudice, I think, when we don't acknowledge that, you know, that an enormous number of Evangelical Christians are black, and it changes your whole view of what you're talking about.

MR. CIZIK: See, white voted for Bush, 58 to 41, blacks voted against him 88 to 11. By the way, if you think the national media is asking all the right questions, how many times do you think in the entire '07 presidential race the question of climate change arose? I can tell you, because it was added up. The same number of times the presidential candidates were asked about UFO's, three times. By the way, why do you suppose they all stood, including Tucker Carlson and everybody else, on television the other night saying, well, how did this happen, there were only two candidates racing, and we got the wrong two. I mean this is classic in every respect.

It's just too bad there aren't more E.J. Dionnes, you know, Nick Kristofs, and Mike Gersons, and Peter Steinfels. If there were more writing

on these issues regularly, then we'd have a better educated public.

MR. GALSTON: Well, I have to say that, speaking as a Jew, Peter Steinfelds' comments about people whose theological education ends at age 13 cut me to the quick, but I'll forgive him.

MR. DIONNE: But don't --

MR. STEINFELS: This was a reference to confirmation.

MR. GALSTON: I understand. I'm going to entertain one more question from the front and then I'll move back again; yes, sir.

MR. MONTEL: My name is Joe Montel I do religion and peace making, or try. Peter, in his initial critique of E.J.'s incomplete assessment of the -- change, referred to -- entrenched interest, implied, you know, entrenched economic interest, and that always raises to me what may be the issue of how certain more traditional Evangelical Protestantism was married to the -- strongly influenced by the content of the Covenant of Wealth and came to justify what evolved into a kind of social Darwinism, a secular social Darwinism, a justification of wealth, and that's what's not going away, even though I strongly agree that what Rich Cizik represents and articulates is sort of returned to the social gospel among Evangelicals.

MR. CIZIK: Just don't call it that to my enemies, because then I'm really doomed.

MR. MONTEL: And --

MR. CIZIK: Biblical faith.

MR. MONTEL: Okay, whatever. I'm a flawed Catholic, I never get the language right. But that's really a fundamental issue, and they aren't going to go away, and people who pay Rush Limbaugh are not going to go away, and they see that as an alliance on religious conservative issues and economic conservative issues. But I'd really like -- you're all informed on this whole concept of the covenant of wealth, when I Google it, I get nothing, and I'd like to see how deeply rooted it is in this political culture and whether what I call the social gospel or the biblical gospel can be kind of reintegrated into the political discourse.

MR. GALSTON: That's an important question.

MR. DIONNE: The notion that I was looking for a Neiber line and I remembered it because it took us so much trouble to find the footnote for it, where, you know, I celebrate a kind of Neiborian liberalism in this book and talk about, you know, a rich history of -- a connection between American progressivism and religious thought.

But the Neiber line points out that in our history, just what you say is true, that there was a deep connection between certain conservative religious strains and a justification of the way wealth was distributed, you know, it was a kind of peculiar form of Calvinism married to social Darwinism, and you know, that view has always been with us, will always be with us.

In fact, some of my favorite lines in the book come from some work Peter did some years ago on the relationship between liberalism and

Catholicism, where there was an ugly pamphlet, and it's actually more interesting and complicated than I'm making it, but the pamphlet's title is "Liberalism is Sin." And now, some of what it opposed is economic liberalism. So I think this battle among Christians has existed for a very long time in our history. And, yes, we are seeing a kind of reappearance of social gospel like thinking.

Rich doesn't want to use that term because an awful lot of Evangelicals think of the social gospel as so watering down the faith commitments of Protestantism that it kind of replaced a faith in Jesus, His Savior, with a faith in -- with a belief in Jesus' principals toward the poor, and that's not strong enough of religion for a lot of Evangelicals.

Nonetheless, you know, the Williams Jennings Brian style of evangelicalism was profoundly progressive. We forget how progressive Brian actually was. Remember him in terms of the scopes trial. And even his war on evolution, I think it's worth remembering, was, in part, an attack on social Darwinism. He didn't like the way Darwinian thought was being applied because it was being used to justify the riches of the -- the power and wealth of the wealthy and powerful, justified in the name of the survival of the fittest, so that I think you're seeing a reappearance of both social gospel style thinking and Brianism, and then the Catholics, we Catholics have these big fights over what parts of the teaching should be emphasized in politics, but the teaching on the poor is quite unambiguous.

There's a wonderful writer I quote called Lou Daily who has looked back on how much of new deal thinking was related to and in some ways came out of the thinking of the catholic bishops at the turn of the century, around 1919 and 1930.

So I think that tradition sort of rises and falls at different times. I do not believe I am being falsely generous or optimistic in seeing it as on the rise again. But, Peter, feel free to take issue with me on that.

MR. CIZIK: Well, what is Huckabee about, Peter? Huckabee is about economic populism more than any other issue.

MR. STEINFELS: I would say that -- I mean I think this is a very helpful historical reference, and that these connections can go underground and have a subterranean existence and influences. But I would point out that those people who have wealth and make important decisions about wealth have not tried, by and large, to justify their position in a Democratic society on those grounds. They have actually mobilized populous views, anti-government and anti-elitist views rather than anything smacking of the Covenant of Wealth and justification by success in this world in order to reinforce their position.

And secondly, they have presented the arguments in terms of a kind of utilitarian concern with productivity, that these people in society deserve this kind of reward because it's an incentive that ultimately helps everybody.



So I have to say that at this time in our history, I don't see that historically very interesting and significant element in our religious background as playing the key role that might have at one point.

MR. DIONNE: I talk a lot in the book, by the way, about a concept I'm very fond of, which is the idea that wealth carries a social mortgage, which is a great idea until we had our current foreclosure crisis, and now that might raise some questions about it.

MR. GALSTON: Well, on this sobering note, since we're already about 15 minutes over, I think it's my responsibility, and it's not a happy one, to bring these proceedings to a close. But let me hold out hope that the author of the book, at the very least, will be available to answer more questions as he's signing copies of it, and perhaps even the panelists will be circulating for another couple of minutes, although that's not part of your official job description. But let me thank E.J., and Richard Cizik, and Peter Steinfelds for a splendid discussion.

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