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## The Underside of Religious Liberty: Baptists, Catholics, and Moral Formation in America

The recent release of the Pew Forum's *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* brought unsettling news for Christian denominations. The survey reveals that more than a quarter of American adults (28 percent) have departed the religious faith of their childhood and nearly half (44 percent) have switched religious affiliation, either moving to another Protestant group or between any particular faith and no affiliation. The number of unaffiliated adults (16 percent, though nearly half say they are "religious") is more than double both the number not raised in such a faith (7 percent) and the number who identified as unaffiliated in the 1980s (5 to 8 percent). Those moving into this category outnumber those moving out by a three-to-one margin, and one in four Americans between 18 and 29 years of age is unaffiliated. The survey also shows that the numerical majority status of Protestant Christianity—which includes evangelical, mainline, and historically black denominations—is nearly at an end (51 percent), having steeply declined since the mid-1980s, when two-thirds of American adults identified as Protestant. The Catholic Church is faring badly, as well; approximately one-third of those raised Catholic have departed, and about 10 percent of American adults are former Catholics. Only immigration is keeping the Catholic share of the population steady at 24 percent.<sup>i</sup>

Regardless of the debatable aspects of its methodology, the Pew Forum survey undermines several long-held assumptions about a religious landscape that is changing faster than many observers had anticipated. Although many of the American colonies were populated by Protestant groups fleeing persecution, all but four eventually established an official church.<sup>ii</sup>

Still, the authority and influence of these churches varied widely, especially on the frontier, and minority denominations generally coexisted peacefully with the majority and were granted an increasing degree of toleration. The Great Awakening stirred an evangelical, anti-authoritarian impulse in a significant number of churchgoers, and many leaders of the Revolution were influenced by Enlightenment philosophy and wary of established religion. These trends provided the seedbed for the form of religious liberty that prevailed at the American founding. Unlike much of continental Europe, the United States separated the institutions of church and state while assuming, even encouraging, the involvement of religion in politics, and the combination of high religious commitment and considerable religious diversity that has endured since at least the Second Great Awakening is due in large part to this arrangement.

Many groups shared responsibility for its achievement, but it was Baptists who had heralded religious freedom from Thomas Helwys' fatal appeal to James I through Roger Williams' founding of Rhode Island and on to John Leland's lobbying of James Madison. Therefore we have located religious liberty at the center of our tradition, going so far as to claim it as our "trophy."<sup>iii</sup> We have also claimed that religious liberty is good not only for religion in general but also for Baptists in particular because of our success in winning converts solely by persuasion and the power of the Holy Spirit, a claim bolstered by the phenomenal growth of the Baptist denomination in the United States. Burdened by neither a legacy of state support nor a requirement of clerical training, Baptists adapted quickly to revivalism and frontier life and soon joined the "Protestant quest for a Christian America." By 1900 there were 4.2 million Baptists (over 5 percent of the population) and 43,000 Baptist churches in the United States. Other than black Baptist groups, the primary locus for expansion was the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), formed in 1845 during a conflict over slavery in the Triennial Convention and solidified

during the Civil War. The SBC comprised just 2 percent of the U.S. population in 1900, did not establish its collective funding program until 1925, and intentionally limited its identity and mission to the South until the late 1940s. Yet in 1950 it counted over 8 million members, five times more than the American (formerly Northern) Baptist Convention and over 5 percent of the population.<sup>iv</sup> By 2000 there were approximately 16 million Southern Baptists in the U.S.

The nature of Baptist churches and associations limits the reliability of such figures. Still, the SBC made news when it announced that in 2007 the number baptisms in Southern Baptist churches had fallen for the third consecutive year and that the convention's total membership had declined for the second time in a decade.<sup>v</sup> Baptists were also not exempt from the sobering impact of the Pew Forum survey. While 21 percent of respondents were raised Baptist, only 17 percent now identify as such, and roughly 8 percent of American adults are former Baptists. Though not to the same degree as some other denominations, Baptists are getting older; almost half (45 percent) are age 50 or over. At the very least, the survey indicates that Baptists and other Christians have underestimated the diversity and, indeed, the pluralism that continues to emerge from religious freedom.<sup>vi</sup> Contrary to conventional wisdom, the major shift is not a rise in the number of adherents of non-Christian religions; they still make up less than 5 percent of the population.<sup>vii</sup> Rather, it is a sharp drop in the number of Americans who connect their religious beliefs to a religious tradition in any tangible way, a development that calls the depth and coherence of those beliefs into question.<sup>viii</sup>

This essay is an introduction to my dissertation, in which I will re-narrate the history of religious liberty in the United States in order to show that its theological implications are obscured or misunderstood. In short, I will argue that the failure to recognize that religious freedom is a complex good that not only prevents coercion but also undermines moral formation

has left many Christians with an incoherent identity and, in turn, a muted (and sometimes false) witness. Baptists have often confined their analysis of religious liberty to historical description augmented by biblical exegesis, but understanding and overcoming its underside will require sustained theological reflection on freedom and ecclesiology.

### *Baptistification and Fragmentation*

The heart of this study will be a comparison of Baptist and Catholic engagements with religious liberty and concurrent struggles with identity and witness, that is, what it means to be Baptist or Catholic in America. Of course, Baptists long defined themselves in opposition to Catholicism and its Protestant state-church cousins. No longer in a position of dissent, however, the heirs of Helwys, Williams, and Leland applied the democratic spirit of the early republic to their congregations.<sup>ix</sup> Immersed in a culture woven together by a Protestant moral consensus, Baptists saw no need to articulate commonalities with their Christian neighbors. In fact, they saw that culture's existence as a vindication of Baptist principles and other denominations as competition for individual souls and the spoils of freedom's progress. However, the Civil War and industrialization began to undermine Protestant hegemony in the North, while the fundamentalist-modernist controversy marked the beginning of the end in the South, where Baptists were the "center of gravity."<sup>x</sup>

The series of conflicts that dominated Baptist life in the twentieth century, culminating in the conservative-moderate "holy war" in the Southern Baptist Convention, largely stemmed from divergent responses to cultural breakdown.<sup>xi</sup> In recent years many conservative Baptists have enforced rigid doctrinal statements and joined with other evangelicals (and some Catholics) to resist secularization and pluralism and to restore the role of Christianity in government and society. Despite the spate of articles and books proclaiming the decline or death of the religious

right, this alliance retains tremendous influence. In contrast, many moderate Baptists have reasserted the positive character of a secular government and a pluralistic society, seeing in them vindication of “soul liberty” (or “soul competency”), a corollary of religious liberty referring to accountability of each person before God. When these Baptists engage public life, they typically attempt to translate biblical and theological admonitions into universal moral principles.

Additional distinctions can be made, but the point is that both types of Baptists conflate being faithful with contributing to the health of America—the nation and the idea—a problem attributable to lingering sense of loss. This sense is evident in claims about *identity* that depend on the recovery of, for example, biblical inerrancy, Calvinist doctrine, or a set of “distinctives.” It is also evident in claims about *witness* that depend on the recovery of an evangelistic spirit, political influence, or social gospel methods.

Recognition of fracture and decline should lead to introspection and self-criticism, but the sparse Baptist responses to the Pew Forum survey have offered very little of either. Two examples will have to suffice. First, Al Mohler, president of the conservative Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, speculates that “the loss of a Protestant majority will lead to further adjustments in the cultural worldview.” Religious switching is “the inevitable product of religious liberty and religious diversity” but “also reveals that many Americans are looking for something they have not found in the tradition and affiliation of their childhood.” Here Mohler describes this “something” only in terms of “real people who desperately need to hear the Gospel—and to see authentic Christianity made visible.”<sup>xiii</sup> Second, Marv Knox, editor of the moderate *Baptist Standard*, connects religious churning not only to diversity but also to a “promiscuity” that has benefited Baptists. “We call it ‘conversion,’ and our ranks have grown because we have presented a compelling reason for unbelievers to believe in Jesus and for

Christian pilgrims unhappy in other sections of God's kingdom to immigrate to our shores."

Knox does admit to feeling "an edge of anger, resentment, and sadness." "We live in a consumeristic culture, and it's no surprise that Americans sample and swap religious identity the way they change designer clothes." Like Mohler, he sees a genuine "search for faith," but according to him this search is "fulfilled in relationship," *first* with Jesus and *then* with fellow believers. "If we desire for Baptists to quit faith-swapping and we hope others will find a home among us, then our local churches must vibrate with loving, sacrificial relationships that give people a heart-warming, visceral sense of exactly what being loved by Jesus is like."<sup>xiii</sup>

There are agreements and subtle disagreements in their commentaries, but most striking are the questions both Mohler and Knox leave unconsidered. Is there anything inherent in religion in the United States that *fosters* consumerism? Is there anything inherent in being American or Baptist that *undermines* "visible" and "visceral" Christianity? How have Baptists changed and what does this mean for Baptist identity today? Knox does not mention that Baptists called other "Christian pilgrims" to convert not because the latter were unhappy but because Baptists believed they were *not* part of God's kingdom, that is, the church. If we no longer believe this, then what *is* the church and what is its relationship to local congregations? Meanwhile, Mohler does not mention the word "Baptist" but instead uses "we," "our," or "us" six times in reference to evangelicals. In short, Knox and Mohler are representative of the types outlined above. One type leaves the transmission of Baptist identity to the discretion of individuals and congregations and trusts that a relational (or "missional") witness is sufficient for negotiating the U.S. religious landscape; the other subsumes Baptist-ness in favor of a broader identity and favors a confrontational witness. However, in the eyes of the Christians described by the Pew Forum survey, both types are on the verge of irrelevance.

Discerning the survey's meaning for Baptists or any other group is made more difficult by its categories. Some Baptist groups, the SBC being the largest, are aligned with evangelical Protestantism (26 percent of adults), which has now surpassed Catholicism to become the largest religious tradition in the United States. Other Baptists—including the American Baptist Churches in the USA, the remnant of Northern Baptists, and the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which departed the SBC after the holy war—are grouped with the declining mainline (18 percent of adults). Baptists also comprise 64 percent of the historically black Protestant denominations (7 percent of adults). Though accurate in some sense, this categorization obscures many exceptions as well as the critical fact that evangelical growth is largely confined to nondenominational churches and the relatively unstructured Pentecostal and Holiness traditions. That is, not only is America's Protestant majority nearly a memory, the traditions that birthed it are declining at a much faster rate than is initially apparent.

Ironically, the ascendance of nondenominational churches is a consequence of “baptistification,” Martin Marty's characterization of the trajectory of American Christianity not as the growth of the Baptist denomination but as the prevalence of an approach to faith that grounds religious identity in personal decision.<sup>xiv</sup> Again, moderate Baptists have seen this as vindication. For example, Walter Shurden argues that Marty accurately understood the Baptist “style” as permeated by a spirit of “FREEDOM,” and William Hull adds that baptistification occurred because Baptists were “uniquely suited by history and temperament to offer common people an understanding of the Christian faith that coincided with their quest for freedom in a new land of opportunity.”<sup>xv</sup> “Common people” were able to act on their soul liberty because of religious liberty, but the Baptist style quickly spread beyond and eventually left behind a Baptist denomination no longer willing or able to seek the true church. Incredibly, just one in four

evangelicals was raised in the congregation of which he or she is now a member. Even if their movement is confined to similar churches, it is unlikely that they will experience continuity deeper than worship style. Though amorphous and indefinable, evangelicalism tends to obliterate other senses of identity, which explains Mohler's avoidance of "Baptist." People believe they are part of something when they identify as evangelicals. So, if not denominations, what provides this something with content? In other words, what motivates the affiliation of evangelicals and other Protestants?<sup>xvi</sup>

Religious liberty separated the institutions of church and state but did not dispose of the fragments of their alliance. Christians, especially Protestants, have survived parasitically on these fragments, which lingered the longest in the Baptist and evangelical South. The areas in which Baptists have long been outside the mainstream predict a bleak future. For example, Providence may be the location of the First Baptist Church in America and many streets on the campus of Brown University may be named for Baptist preachers, but finding a live Baptist in Rhode Island is a very difficult task.<sup>xvii</sup> Hot-button issues such as homosexuality and more mundane developments such as encounters with persons of other faiths have called many long-held assumptions into question. The disappearance of cultural fragments impacts religious behavior, but shifts in religious affiliation also affect societal values and institutions. As Baptist sociologist Michael Lindsay notes about the Pew Forum survey, "Religion is the single most important factor that drives American belief attitudes and behaviors. It is a powerful indicator of where America will end up on politics, culture, family life."<sup>xviii</sup> An optimistic view is that "baptistified" Christians are free to hear the voice of God, authenticated by the biblical text or personal experience, and to carry our convictions into the public square in order to benefit society. A better perspective is that our choices are not as free as we think, the vacuum left by

rejected authorities is filled by personalities and programs (religious or not) that reflect our selfish desires, and our irresolvable debates about identity and witness mask powers that are corrosive to faithfulness. This does not mean religious freedom is fully realized or a loss of status is a bad thing, but it does raise the issue of whether a strictly voluntaristic approach to Christianity contributes to vitality or superficiality.

*Secularization: Market and Myth*

Moderate Baptists (and other observers) regularly claim that nonestablishment and diversity lead to religious vitality. As evidence they contrast high levels of affiliation in America with low levels in Europe and provide a historical narrative that explains the difference. The underlying assumption is that while the particulars may have changed, the nature and import of religious diversity have not. For example, Derek Davis says the major shift was in perception and legal status. “While religious pluralism was a social reality in the colonies, it was not always looked upon as something that was desirable. Religious hostilities were everywhere, and peace among the various religious groups was often thought to be an impossibility. Gradually, however, this perception changed.” Davis concludes that the disqualification of religious tests for federal office “indirectly encouraged religious pluralism” and that the Second Great Awakening marked not the consolidation of Protestantism’s “de facto establishment” but its last gasp before “an immediate explosion of religious diversity.” Recoil from this explosion meant that the unity of the American people “more often than not was cast aside,” but affiliation and diversity have both experienced “phenomenal growth” since the nineteenth century. Predictably, Davis admonishes the religious right for concocting the idea of a “Christian America,” but he also criticizes scholars such as Marty and Robert Bellah who have argued that commonality is

declining and sought “a common set of symbols to be transmitted across regions, generations, and peoples in America,” that is, a civil religion.<sup>xix</sup>

Davis argues that the many attempts to cultivate a common faith to fill the void produced by the separation of church and state and the recognition of individual rights have failed. Nonetheless, the United States does have a form of civil religion that is a mixture of Puritan and Enlightenment ideas. Although “most Christian patriots . . . have never perceived any tension between ‘the god of Puritan particularism and the god of universal liberties,’” the two traditions are “simply incompatible” in a highly pluralistic society. Because the Puritan strain “distinctly follows after the medieval vision of a Christian commonwealth” that aims to impose its values on society through force of law, Christians committed to religious liberty should not try to blend the two, as Bellah does, but should support the Enlightenment tradition because it represents unifying commitments (e.g., freedom, justice) that are “essentially” but not “specifically” religious and are therefore amenable to most religions. A civil religion of Enlightenment values is no threat to faithfulness or the pursuit of truth, for “inherent in the official permission for religion to expand and assume multiple forms is the belief that a progress toward truth will ensue.” However, this process is outside the realm of government.<sup>xx</sup>

There are several problems with this picture, not the least of which is the separation of “private” religious beliefs from “public” moral principles. If laws are to be just, how can truth be separate from government, and if a law is unjust, on what basis can it be critiqued? Making religious faith dependent upon a particular nation-state and its unity risks emptying the former of any real influence. Further, is contemporary pluralism essentially the same as the diversity of the late eighteenth century? Of Davis’ many exaggerations, perhaps the greatest is his assertion that there was an “ever-increasing multiplicity of religions in America” at the time of the movement

for independence. He does recognize that the *amount* of pluralism has changed, but this only means that any remaining Puritan remnants in our society must be expunged. Would such an environment be amenable to religious affiliation, let alone healthy Christianity? The statistics seem to be clear: approximately 35 percent of Americans were formally affiliated with a religious group as late as the turn of the twentieth century; the number is nearly twice that (65 percent) today. So, what kind of religion is flourishing? Will pluralism and the search for religious truth produce ever more options, as Davis expects? The Pew Forum survey provides a few clues. According to Stephen Prothero, “The trend is towards more personal religion, and evangelicals offer that. Those losing out are offering impersonal religion.”<sup>xxi</sup> Luis Lugo, the director of the Pew Forum, says the survey indicates that “it’s a very competitive marketplace, so if you rest on your laurels, you’re going to be history.”<sup>xxii</sup>

Lugo’s familiar perspective is rooted in sociology. Until the last two decades or so, sociologists of religion typically described the relationship of religious adherence to religious diversity according to the secularization thesis that has endured since the Enlightenment.<sup>xxiii</sup> The assumption was—and, for a minority, still is—that modernization erodes religious influence at the individual and social levels. Diversity is central to secularization. In short, the more modern individuals come into contact with faiths other than their own, the less they find the claims to certainty of any particular faith convincing, thus reducing their level of religious commitment. In the late 1980s, however, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark began to utilize historical data to claim that the presence of diversity *increases* the church adherence rate, at least in the United States.<sup>xxiv</sup> They describe their results in terms of free market principles and suggest that the greater the competition among churches in a location, the greater the commitment of individuals who live there. For Finke, Stark, and those who have followed them, “religion” is a constant and

individuals are as “religious” as the amount of religion available to them. Diversity prompts competition, which forces “religious firms” to supply more content in order to meet the demand of potential members; the more firms, the better. This “religious economies” model, also called the “new paradigm,” supposedly explains why denominations who become simultaneously refined in their theology and lax in their commitments fade, while new groups who demand sacrifice and provide “a religion that is capable of miracles and that imparts order and sanity to the human condition” arise to attract converts. This cycle is ongoing.<sup>xxv</sup>

Other sociologists have challenged Finke and Stark’s conclusions by using similar data to demonstrate the validity of the secularization thesis, but the new paradigm has been remarkably resilient and has been appropriated by historians and theologians as well as religious leaders. Some Christians employ it to argue that evangelicalism will inevitably triumph in culture and government, while others use it to defend secular government and religious pluralism. Either way, proponents of the paradigm have effectively demonstrated that secularization is not a given.<sup>xxvi</sup> Still, a vigorous sociological debate, involving dozens of studies, continues. Among the problems noted by critics is that the emphasis on “rational choice” obscures the fact that not every religious choice is a live choice, that is, every option is not “substitutable” for every other option.<sup>xxvii</sup> For example, members of an Assemblies of God community are not likely to be drawn to the liturgy of an Episcopal church, and most Christians are even less likely to consider joining a Hindu temple. Finke and Stark contend that religious groups with a large “market share”—say, Baptists in Waco, Texas—become lazy. However, the fact that those who switch religious groups usually move to a similar congregation means that most competition actually takes place within the same denomination or among ones that are closely related. As Daniel Olson explains, if both this fact and Finke and Stark’s thesis are true,

Baptist ministers would need to work the hardest and most creatively to retain the commitment of their members when they are located in areas of large, not small, market share where there are many nearby Baptist congregations that their members might be tempted to join. The greater efforts of Baptist ministers in these large market share settings would then lead to higher member commitment levels in areas of large market share (exactly contrary to what most research finds).<sup>xxviii</sup>

This is hardly an argument for the benefits of religious diversity. Although they have attempted to correct this oversight, Finke and Stark still largely ignore the ways in which choice is constrained by other sources of identity (e.g., race, culture) and factors such as income and location. They focus almost exclusively on Protestant firms, neglecting the decline of the Protestant majority and falsely limiting the makeup of expanding religious diversity. At the same time, their description of America as a religious marketplace obscures the fact that the long history of Protestant hegemony still means that in most places, “religious choice exists only within a narrow range of products.”<sup>xxix</sup> Olson was among the first sociologists to identify methodological problems with Finke and Stark’s calculations and to gather data indicating that in locations that *do* have a high level of religious diversity, church membership rates are, in fact, lower. Indeed, “in multiple regression no other variable has so strong an impact on church membership.” Further, cognitive and behavioral sociological mechanisms “suggest that religious pluralism may undermine either the plausibility of belief and/or the social reinforcement of religious involvement via pluralism’s effects on personal social networks.”<sup>xxx</sup>

The empirical evidence for a negative relationship between religious diversity and religious adherence is not definitive. In fact, Olson, David Voas, and Alasdair Crockett argue that the negative *and* positive correlations reported by secularization and religious economies theorists, respectively, reflect the distributions of whatever religious groups happen to be found in the data sets of particular studies; therefore most research in this area is virtually useless and must be abandoned.<sup>xxxi</sup> Yet neither side has not relented; Finke and Stark claim that “few current

theoretical propositions . . . enjoy nearly so extensive an empirical basis” as their own, while Steve Bruce asserts that tolerant and ecumenical religious forms continue to replace dogmatic and sectarian forms throughout the West.<sup>xxxii</sup> Some of this stubbornness reflects different approaches to the question. “Secularization theorists regard religion mostly as a set of traditions, which is increasingly forfeiting its social binding capacity due to rapid societal change,” and they cite data from Europe, Canada, and major U.S. cities. In contrast, “the economic market model regards religion more as a flexible and prolific element of social life that enables self-organization as well as social and political mobilization,” and its advocates cite data from across the nation.<sup>xxxiii</sup> There is truth in each of these conceptions, but they betray a view of religious traditions as inherently static and dependent upon social control via a state church or cultural hegemony. Is it possible that a tradition can be something more?

Secularization theorists recognize that a greater number of different religious views are present in American society today than at any time in the past. These views are an immediate reality for an increasing number of Americans, but the result is not always or even usually a higher level of competition and commitment. The new paradigm has brought into focus the powerful tendency of religious communities to establish their own relatively self-contained contexts in response to diversity. As Bruce points out, “the U.S. is unusual in the extent to which its federal and diffuse structure permits committed believers to construct distinctive subsocieties to preserve subcultures.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> The most important shift in the religious landscape, then, is that another American tendency—*individualism*—is finally overwhelming these subcultures, and several sociologists now approach the question of pluralism from this direction. Contrary to the secularization thesis, religion in the “flexible and prolific” sense is showing few, if any, signs of decline, but it is becoming de-institutionalized, privatized, and syncretistic; Grace Davie

describes this as “believing without belonging.”<sup>xxxv</sup> Therefore William Swatos and Kevin Christiano distinguish between secularization and “de-Christianization.” Not only do modern individuals and societies sometimes replace Christianity with other traditional religious forms, they also often approach other institutions and systems for “doing better” *religiously*.

People who say they “believe in education,” for example, are making an implicitly religious statement, just as much as people who say they “believe in Christianity” . . . People who “believe in” education or science may have lessened the apparent remoteness of their sacred, placing comparatively more control over outcomes at the human level, but note that their language is often similar. They “have faith” in our schools or in their doctors. They hope for a brighter future and so on. Peace, justice, even postage-stamp love emanate from these *competing systems of ultimacy* [emphasis mine]: “Ultimately” science or education will solve all our problems.

Rather than speak here of secularization, however, we should really recognize these expressions as manifestations of the “new religion” of Reason that emerged in the Enlightenment, which at least in its early forms identified rationality with Divinity—albeit the *deus absconditus* of Deism—and found in the pursuit of knowledge a spiritual quest. . . . Postmodernity, so called, is nothing more than the disenchantment of that sacrality the Enlightenment gave to Reason. It is the secularization of secularism.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The “return to the sacred” suggests that these alternatives are not fulfilling the spiritual “quest” of the modern self, but its response is to create its own religious truth according to its felt needs. “The loss of church authority, a more pluralistic religious market, and the growing individualism have led to a religious *bricolage*, an individual patchwork or recombination,” Karel Dobbelaere says. “The religious menu of the churches was not accepted, rather a ‘religion a la carte’ was individually constructed.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> Religious movements and organizations continue to arise but are unlikely to be accountable to authorities outside the self or sustainable over time. Likewise, individuals occasionally choose to adopt the beliefs and practices of a tradition (or several traditions) but are unlikely to participate in a way that contributes to it. Because many American Christians share the perspective of secularization and economic market theorists, they do not weep for the demise of religious traditions and denominations. Yet it is not the case that without these entities the self is at last unencumbered in its search for truth. According to

Swatos and Christiano, “If one ‘believes in’ the new paradigm, that [quest] dynamic will not go away; hence new sacred vistas will emerge and old sacred vistas will be revisited, but in a way that is relatively consistent with the sociocultural conditions *imposed* [emphasis mine] by high-technology multinational capitalism.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

In short, neither our Enlightenment heritage nor our consumer society is benign in relation to Christian faithfulness. We do not just participate in a marketplace; we are remade in its image, adopting its practices and applying its formulas to every area of life, including our relationship with God and the church.<sup>xxxix</sup> Further, religious diversity means that there is no longer a set of shared symbols and beliefs that can be used as warrants in public discourse. However, supposedly universally accessible arguments not only often fail to produce consensus but also often lack the necessary warrants as well.<sup>xl</sup> Weaknesses aside, traditions and denominations shield Christians from cultural, political, and economic powers and provide counter-formation that enables us to negotiate difference and cultivate an authentic common good.<sup>xli</sup> Yet the Pew Forum survey reveals that most of us opt out of contexts in which such training is possible, and a recent Vatican survey reports that only a slightly higher percentage of Americans (17 percent) than Europeans (15 percent) have basic knowledge of the Bible. At the very least, sociology tells us that the Baptist claim that the American form of religious liberty and the diversity it produces are good for Christianity in an unqualified sense is simply not true. The American arrangement is different in degree more than in kind, so there is no basis for arguing that accommodation of diversity has permanently stayed the decline of affiliation, which, according to the Pew Forum survey, is in motion and accelerating.

Again, numerical loss is not inherently negative, and whatever the actual correlation between diversity and adherence, it does not alter fundamental truths of how Christians are to

live. Genuine Christianity may be designed to lose the battle of the religious market. Still, the combination of individualization and competition—the latter of which has driven many of my generation to nondenominationalism—inherent in Protestantism and especially potent in the United States is proving deadly for Baptists in more ways than declining numbers. Therefore the task of Baptist ethics is, in the words James McClendon, “the discovery, understanding, and creative transformation of a shared and lived story, one whose focus is Jesus of Nazareth and the kingdom he proclaims.”<sup>xlii</sup> Sociology also provides a clue for this undertaking. A persistent problem with the new paradigm is its inability to account for the fact that there remains a high degree of religious commitment in areas that are overwhelmingly Catholic (e.g., Ireland, Poland). Even Laurence Iannacone, one of its proponents, acknowledges that “Protestant attendance rates are strongly related to market structure but Catholic attendance rates are largely independent of it.”<sup>xliii</sup> Although it is difficult to determine all the factors that contribute to this irregularity, it is worth pondering.

### *The Success and Failure of Americanism*

This study will argue that Baptists and other Protestants who recognize the challenges of the shifting religious landscape and heed the call to recover our story must commit to reason together, to *theologize*, with Catholics. Why make this argument? Some Baptists still consider Catholics enemies of the faith; many others accept that “Catholics are Christians, too” but think their theology and behavior, especially their loyalty to a hierarchical church, are seriously aberrant. This concern must be addressed, but the more pressing question is whether American Catholics remain different enough from their neighbors to merit special attention. The children of Catholic immigrants first dreamed of converting the nation, then, in response to Know Nothing nativism, sought to prove their loyalty to it. Over time they came to view the Catholic

Church's rejection of religious liberty as an embarrassment. In the late nineteenth century, a small group of "Americanists" who appreciated the freedom provided by the separation of church and state and who imagined Catholics to be the true heirs of the exceptional American project challenged this position, only to be rebuked by Leo XIII (*Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae*, 1899). Not until the adoption of the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1965) by the Second Vatican Council did the Church alter its teaching.

Catholic historians have traced an "Americanist tradition" that peaked with the postwar culture of Protestant, Catholic, Jew and the political theology of John Courtney Murray, the Jesuit theologian who countered the "new nativism" that threatened John F. Kennedy's candidacy and whose work on religious freedom was vindicated by the council. Murray concluded that America's public philosophy depends on a moral consensus not achieved by establishment or secularism but inherited from the natural law tradition and sustained by public argument about the self-evident truths extolled by the Declaration of Independence. While he recognized that religious pluralism is "against the will of God," Murray also noted that it is "the native condition of American society" and not a threat to "modest expectations" of civic unity. Still, he warned (correctly) that the consensus had been eroded by voluntarism and was further endangered by a transition from *religious* pluralism to *moral* pluralism.<sup>xliv</sup> He arguably whitewashed American society in order to craft an apologetic for Catholicism, but perhaps Murray's greatest error was his trust in the American Catholic community to guard the public consensus, a trust necessitated by his pragmatism and reliance upon the natural law tradition. A product of neo-scholasticism and an institutional subculture, Murray took much about Catholic identity for granted. That subculture's dissolution coincided with the social upheaval of the 1960s, but few Catholics questioned their Americanist assumptions. Instead conservative and

liberal parties laid claim to the vision of Vatican II, an ideological struggle that has trickled down to every level of the Catholic Church in the United States and radiated outward as political division. Today many Catholics recognize an identity crisis but vehemently disagree over what to do about it. They also disagree over whether moral pluralism has arrived and, if so, how the Church (and the state) ought to address it.

Catholic commentaries on the Pew Forum survey reflect this lack of consensus. Some blame the Church's progressivism, others its traditionalism. Still others are more nuanced but just as urgent. For example, *Commonweal* laments a "massive hemorrhaging" and proposes incorporating lay leadership and ministry, discussing ordaining married men to the priesthood and women to the diaconate, and clarifying "unintelligible" teachings on contraception and homosexuality.<sup>xlv</sup> Similarly, Phil Lawler of Catholic World News describes a "vast exodus" that is a result of more than the recent sexual abuse scandal. "While Church leaders speak confidently about a 'vibrant' Catholic community, the congregations are aging and thinning, the parishes are closing, the Catholic influence on our society is evaporating. . . . The numbers do not lie. American Catholicism is facing a crisis. The sooner we recognize that fact, the sooner we can plot our response."<sup>xlvi</sup> Finally, *America* declares that "the church in the United States is suffering an exodus of the faithful unprecedented in its history." "Suddenly Catholicism in the United States finds itself assailed not by the bigotries of ages past but by the indifference of our current milieu. Have we reached the point where American Catholics are just like everybody else, where Catholicism is nothing more than a 'high church' option in a broad spectrum of Christian religious choices?"<sup>xlvii</sup>

John England, the first bishop of Charleston, South Carolina, despaired over low numbers of congregants and a lack of candidates for the priesthood as early as the 1820s. England worked

hard to overcome public skepticism about the compatibility of Catholicism and American democracy.<sup>xlviii</sup> Yet today's crisis is attributable to comfort with American religious norms. Their Church's position on religious freedom long made them the object of Baptist polemics, but the survey appears to be the latest evidence that American Catholics have been, in a word, "baptistified." On a practical level, they have struggled to replace the formation and inertia of the subculture and to account for faithfulness in the midst of religious choice and polarizing politics. The decline in the number of persons who identify as Catholic and the crisis mode of some respondents will continue for the foreseeable future. Still, several commentaries on the survey reveal a key difference from Baptists. Like Knox and Mohler, Keith Fournier, a Catholic deacon, recognizes that "the modern 'seeker' movement and the very trend called 'church shopping' are symptomatic of a deeper longing to belong to God." However, the mobility of these "shoppers" indicates that their fulfillment will not be found in the latest form of entertainment that passes for worship but through "participation in the very inner life of the Trinity," the heart of the liturgy.<sup>xlix</sup> *America* agrees that the fact that half of those who have left Catholicism are now unaffiliated indicates something more at work than "anger at the institutional church or the oft-cited desire for a more personal or emotional experience of faith." The first response to apathy, then, is to revamp catechesis and adult faith formation, "heeding the call of John Paul II for a new evangelization of formerly Christian but increasingly secularized cultures," a move seconded by Fournier.<sup>1</sup>

Fournier also sees good news in the record level of Catholic "reverts" and "a growing number of Christians from other communities [who] are seeking the solidity, maturity, historicity and depth of Catholic faith, worship and life."<sup>li</sup> Although their numbers are small, these groups are signs of the "new evangelization" set in motion by Vatican II and expanded by John Paul II,

who frequently repeated the necessity of stating the gospel's old content in a new way. Avery Dulles identifies four characteristics of the new evangelization: it requires the participation of every Christian; it is distinct from foreign missions, that is, "directed to the Church itself"; it is directed to cultures as well as individuals; and it envisages comprehensive Christianization, that is, "catechetical instruction, moral doctrine, and the social teaching of the Church." In short, evangelization encompasses much more than personal conversions; it is the presentation of the *evangelium* ("gospel") in its fullness. According to Dulles, while the late pope declared that evangelization "must strive to make human cultures harmonious with Christian values and open to the gospel message," this effort "is not a matter of dominating cultures but rather of serving them."<sup>lii</sup> Further, John Paul noted that a "total" evangelization "will penetrate deeply into the social and cultural reality, including the economic and political order" and, at the same time, "will naturally have its highest point in an intense liturgical life that will make parishes living ecclesial communities."<sup>liii</sup>

Particularly striking is the confidence with which John Paul and his interpreters deliver the message of evangelization. Because it is a transnational body with a hierarchy that safeguards its tradition, the Catholic Church does not depend on numerical success *in* or the political success *of* any nation, does not require a frantic quest for a response to a changing religious landscape, and does not risk disappearance if such a quest fails. It also has ready resources to be called upon by movements of clergy and laity alike. Several such movements, also small but vibrant, are emerging to negotiate the loss of Catholic given-ness and influence. For example, Fournier was among the first to identify a phenomenon that has come to be called "evangelical Catholicism."<sup>liv</sup>

*Pluralism and the Promise of Evangelical Catholicism*

Evangelical Catholics sometimes emulate features associated with evangelical Protestants such as conducting revivalistic meetings, utilizing multimedia technology, and worshipping with contemporary music. William Portier also connects them to a Christian reconfiguration that includes younger evangelical Protestants “returning, in a corresponding movement, to history, liturgy, and a sense of the church as a visible witness.” Yet the word “evangelical” can be misleading, for here it refers not to evangelicals’ theology and ecclesial forms but to the active, public ethos they exemplify. Historian David O’Brien first applied the evangelical Catholic “style” to Isaac Hecker, the nineteenth century founder of the Paulist Fathers and a convert from Methodism. Portier explains that on O’Brien’s reading, Hecker’s engagement with American culture was “a creative response, neither ‘denominational’ nor ‘sectarian,’ to the ‘evangelical imperative’ created by the modern political conditions of religious liberty and pluralism.” Evangelical Catholics echo Hecker’s style and thereby confound the conventional categories of “conservative” and “liberal” and contrast between pre- and post-Vatican II.<sup>lv</sup>

Portier argues that “the future of the church in the United States is both evangelical and Catholic.”<sup>lvi</sup> The future of the church, not just the Catholic Church, is *evangelical* because religious liberty and religious diversity require that Christians contend for the faith without the benefit of a subculture such as that formerly enjoyed by Catholics and Southern Baptists. This means the church had to be “baptistified” to some extent, the benefits of which include its no longer being able to coerce membership. As the Pew Forum survey indicates, voluntarism in this ordinary sense produces mobility, which allows believers to seek religious truth outside the communities into which they were born and to become more engaged in their commitments. However, there is another, sociological sense of *voluntary* that Ernst Troeltsch contrasted with

*inherited or institutional churches.*<sup>lvii</sup> As noted above, Baptists, conditioned by persecution, accepted this dichotomy and subsequently flourished in the early American republic. This is why, for example, many Baptists (and evangelicals) believe institutions inherently threaten freedom, a notion absorbed by a large number of Catholics.

The survey also indicates that pluralism presents several challenges to the incarnational imperative noted by Portier. First, it promotes a Lockean view of the church as a strictly voluntary association that tends to be joined with “a metaphysics in which human will has ontological priority over the created order.” Second, it insists that churches (and denominations) can be “public” only insofar as they observe the rules of political and social space; Christian convictions that cannot be universalized must remain “private.” Such “reservation” churches are, in the end, “not really free to engage fully with the world.”<sup>lviii</sup> Third, pluralism fosters churches that are increasingly composed of persons who choose to be together, including Catholics who now commute to the parish of their choice. “As a result,” Vincent Miller observes, “religious communities lose internal diversity, becoming enclaves of the like minded.” Such sectarian enclaves do not participate in the debates that produce and renew living religious traditions; they also cease to “critically engage and challenge the world around them” and to “school us in getting along with others amid disagreement.” Thus they are inevitably twisted by a consumer model and contribute to society’s divisiveness even as they mirror it. This is why, for example, many Catholics believe voluntarism inherently threatens catholicity.

In a culture of choice, religious communities lose their deep traditions: the subtle insights passed on between generations; the little rituals that make a way of life; the nuances where hard truths are tempered with mercy. These are learned by watching one’s grandparents, not by listening to a sermon or reading a mission statement.

. . . Mega-churches have very clear and often complex doctrinal statements. But they don’t need to hold a global church together, or maintain continuity with centuries of teaching. Communities whose insights go back to Maimonides, Aquinas, Luther or

Wesley, and whose breadth encompasses continents find their complexities and nuances hard to summarize for easy consumption.<sup>lix</sup>

The flip side of the sectarian slide is the growing number of Americans who are relinquishing their religious identity, though perhaps not their “spirituality,” altogether. It is impossible to predict if one trend will outdistance the other; regardless, the challenge facing the church is the same. As Portier says of evangelical Catholics, “They will not only embrace Catholic identity voluntarily, but will also have to struggle to differentiate the freedom of faith from the culture of choice encouraged by contemporary pluralism.”<sup>lx</sup> The future of the church is *catholic*, then, because the church that survives the death throes of Christendom will do so through intentional and substantial, rather than optional and partial, connections to its Great Tradition. It is catholic because this church will include members of many Christian traditions, all of whom must overcome fears and stereotypes of one another. The future of the church may also be Roman Catholic, but if so, it will be Roman Catholic in a new way.

We can expect to see frequent contradictions and dead ends throughout the process of renewal. For example, there is no easy way to describe evangelical Catholics; suffice it to say they are not necessarily charismatics, converts from evangelical Protestantism, or economic and political neo-conservatives. Some are, but others are Catholic Workers; still others study and teach theology; many more are involved in campus and parish ministries. However, all evangelical Catholics have grown up without the clear boundary markers of the subculture, felt the full weight of religious voluntarism, and shared the “native condition” of pluralism with the rest of American society. Sociological studies have shown that most younger Catholics have a weak and contingent relationship to the Church and that their Catholicism is secondary to their self-constructed personal religious identity.<sup>lxi</sup> In contrast, evangelical Catholics accept pluralism but do not embrace it as a natural state. At their best, they do not separate orthodoxy from social

justice and are not preoccupied with polarizing issues, especially those dating from the reception of Vatican II. They respond to the persistent dilemma of Catholic identity by affirming the Church's universal and christocentric character in continuity with the council and the teaching of John Paul II. In contrast to Baptists hindered by a devotion to "FREEDOM," evangelical Catholics recognize that authority (rightly understood) can help them resist individualism and consumerism and that a global Church can help them challenge nationalism and militarism.

Such resistance does not mean evangelical Catholics are sectarians in the pejorative sense employed by theologians after H. Richard Niebuhr, but it does mean they mark, in Portier's words, "the end of Americanism." In short, "Catholic Americanism has always been about whether immigrant Catholics could be good enough Americans." Evangelical Catholics signal a future in which answering this question in the affirmative will no longer be a motivating concern or, for that matter, a given. Further, while many older Catholics see the embrace of traditional beliefs and practices as a return to the pre-Vatican II past, Portier asks, "What if post-subculture conditions are giving rise to new kinds of Catholics?"<sup>lxii</sup>

#### *Re-theologizing Baptist Theology in the United States*

These new kinds of Catholics generate new ecumenical possibilities. Their practices are analogous to those of some younger Protestants, of whom (like their Catholic counterparts) not all identify with the label "evangelical." These Protestants sympathize with the shadow of subcultural breakdown and the response of older generations, from evangelicals who fret over the "emerging church" to moderate Baptists who see only fundamentalism in orthodoxy. Although quite a few have become Anglican, Catholic, and even Orthodox, others have started movements such as the emerging church and the "new monasticism."<sup>lxiii</sup> A key difference is that Catholics, no matter how evangelical they appear, have a framework that grounds their practices

and prevents them from eschewing congregations or picking and choosing liturgical elements. In other words, their Catholicity ensures that if they survive, they will be “living ecclesial communities,” that is, both communal and ecclesial. Such communities are less likely to become sectarian and more likely to endure than corresponding groups of Protestants. As Portier explains, “Pluralism’s inner contradictions pose a dual threat to evangelical Christians. On the one hand, they encourage evangelicals themselves to be individualistic and anti-institutional. On the other, they encourage Christians who are not evangelicals to internalize the implications of pluralism as a natural state and to distrust evangelical forms.”<sup>lxiv</sup>

Although the differences between “catholicity” and Roman Catholicism are real and important, so is the affinity between the communities noted above. Returning to the Pew Forum survey, that 8 percent of American adults are former Baptists and 10 percent former Catholics tells us that these traditions share a tenuous existence. At the same time, both traditions are doing comparatively well. The Catholic Church retains the highest percentage (68 percent) of its young faithful, but Baptists keep the highest percentage among Protestant denominations (60 percent), just ahead of Lutherans (59 percent). Every other denomination has a retention rate lower than 50 percent. Baptists may stand nearly alone in maintaining their vitality, a credit to their tradition and spirit. Still, the number of *adults* leaving the Catholic Church has been fairly constant over time; Baptists and other Protestants cannot say the same.<sup>lxv</sup> If we accept that the U.S. religious landscape, particularly the nature of diversity and pluralism, has fundamentally changed and that Baptists and other Protestants lack something essential for navigating this change, then an arduous process awaits us.<sup>lxvi</sup> According to Portier,

Post-subculture students of theology are looking for a re-theologized theology, one whose evangelical form, if it flows from a truly ecclesial sense of mission, is better suited to dealing with the new pluralism. Without assimilation or consensus, ours is a fractured and unstable pluralism. But it also embodies the providential irony by which, beginning

with the dynamics of a culture of choice, people can come to know Christ and to know the church as more than a Lockean voluntary association. In a voluntarist culture, where the Church needs to be more clearly the Church, Catholic theology must begin from the Church's holiness.<sup>lxvii</sup>

Although Portier is describing Catholic theologians, Baptists should recognize the wisdom and necessity of joining this project. Portier connects re-theologizing to spiritual formation, Catholic social teaching, and especially the contested area of natural law. Baptists in America must begin from a slightly different location that is closely related to natural law: religious liberty, as well as other aspects of freedom. Re-theologizing Baptist theology requires going back to our beginnings and re-narrating our history in light of the changes and imperatives described above and with special attention to the parallel story of American Catholicism. This re-narration will reveal strengths and weaknesses in each tradition. Regarding pluralism, several questions must be considered at length. First, if not pluralism, what factors are causing the decline in religious affiliation? Second, if not pluralism (or inertia), what factors determine Christian faithfulness in the United States? Third, are Baptists doomed? If religious liberty (and Protestantism itself) produces pluralism without end and the locus of Baptist-ness is the individual, our irrelevance may be built into our DNA and "baptistification" may be only a step on this path. Fourth, is there anything surprising or counter-intuitive in the checkered past of Baptists and Catholics? Fifth, what can Baptists learn from Catholicism?

Baptists recognized the *necessity* of religious liberty earlier than Catholics, and the latter may yet have much to learn, but Catholics have better understood its *implications* and therefore have much to teach Baptists. As early Baptists understood, religious liberty means more than freedom from the institutions of church and state. Because we lack a robust theological understanding of freedom, contemporary Baptists perpetually risk substituting cultural, economic, and political conceptions for the Gospel requirement. Discovering ways in which a

more authentic and useful theology of religious liberty, including its moral implications, may be developed and handed on by Baptists, Catholics, and other Christians is the goal of this project. It is but a small part of a multi-level interaction that must include congregations in which shared commitments are likely to emerge *and* ethicists who engage in a process akin to *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*. For example, if McClendon is right that soul liberty implies “the rejection of violence as the basis of community,” then Baptists would do well to renew their early emphasis on the gathered community as the locus for moral formation.<sup>lxviii</sup> “Living ecclesial communities” draw their life not only from Jesus and the Bible but also from the church and its tradition. They provide the space necessary to question whether religious liberty is tied to liberal democracy and to renew an identity more important than loyalty to the idea of “America.”

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<sup>i</sup>Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2008), <http://religions.pewforum.org> (accessed May 26, 2008).

<sup>ii</sup>Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island were exceptions to establishment. Also, the First Amendment did not disestablish churches in the states; Massachusetts was officially Congregationalist until 1833, as was Connecticut until 1818.

<sup>iii</sup>See J. Brent Walker, ed., *The Trophy of Baptists: Words to Celebrate Religious Liberty* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003).

<sup>iv</sup>William H. Brackney, *Baptists in North America: An Historical Perspective* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 44, 111-12. See Robert T. Handy, “The Protestant Quest for a Christian America,” *Church History* 22, no. 1 (March 1953): 8-20. Black or African American Baptists also increased steadily from the abolitionist era onward and numbered more than 15 million in 2000. However, I will limit my discussion to historically white groups because they have almost always gathered and acted separately.

<sup>v</sup>Rob Phillips, “SBC Baptisms: Lowest Since ’87,” Baptist Press, April 23, 2008, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=27890> (accessed May 26, 2008). In 1998 the SBC experienced its first drop in total membership in more than 70 years.

<sup>vi</sup>Religious *diversity* indicates that a variety of religious groups are present in a society. Though sometimes used interchangeably with diversity, religious *pluralism* implies something more: that diversity is at least accepted and at most encouraged. Religious pluralism is distinct from but related to (and often confused with) a pluralist theology of religions that accepts that all (or nearly all) religious paths are equally valid. It is also distinct from but related to moral or ethical pluralism, the philosophical position that different or conflicting views of reality can still be true, and political pluralism, a basic democratic principle. Thus religious pluralism can have very different meanings depending on the individual or group employing the term.

<sup>vii</sup>According to Tom W. Smith, while the “market share” held by Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and other non-Christian religious groups in the U.S. has increased appreciably, social survey data indicates that both the size of these groups and their growth has often been exaggerated; thus the religious landscape has not changed as

radically as some (e.g., Diana L. Eck) claim. Smith, "Religious Diversity in America: The Emergence of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Others," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 3 (September 2002): 577-85. See Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

<sup>viii</sup>The approaches of Yves Congar, Alasdair MacIntyre, Robert Schreiter, and others to religious traditions "all show that because there are such tight connections among actions, beliefs, and attitudes in a tradition, one cannot understand beliefs without understanding the actions and attitudes with which they are linked in a practice or set of practices." Terrence W. Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 52. For a description of "practice," see James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 28.

<sup>ix</sup>Nathan O. Hatch argues that Christianization of the U.S. was due to democratization and the religious vitality of the masses, while Jon Butler argues that it was accomplished via a renewal of congregational and denominational authority. I am more sympathetic to but not wholly persuaded by Hatch's argument. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>x</sup>Edward L. Queen II, *In the South the Baptists Are the Center of Gravity: Southern Baptists and Social Change, 1930-1980* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1991), 16. Queen borrows his title from a comment in Victor I. Masters, "Baptists and the Christianizing of America in the New Order," *Review and Expositor* 17 (July 1920): 297.

<sup>xi</sup>It seems Joe Edward Barnhart was the first to apply the phrase "holy war" to this conflict, at least in print, in *The Southern Baptist Holy War* (Austin: Texas Monthly, 1986). The most detailed account is David T. Morgan, *The New Crusades, the New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996). Following Barry Hankins, I use the terms "conservative" and "moderate" because the respective groups prefer them to the pejorative labels "fundamentalist" and "liberal" employed by their opponents. Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 12. I also recognize the problems inherent in the left-right spectrum presumed by political and religious rhetoric and will avoid furthering its dominance whenever possible.

<sup>xii</sup>R. Albert Mohler, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," AlbertMohler.com, entry posted February 26, 2008, [http://albertmohler.com/blog\\_read.php?id=1104](http://albertmohler.com/blog_read.php?id=1104) (accessed May 26, 2008).

<sup>xiii</sup>Marv Knox, Editorial, "U.S. Faith Swapping and Relationships," *Baptist Standard*, March 14, 2008, [http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=7647&Itemid=136](http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7647&Itemid=136) (accessed May 26, 2008). The *Standard* is the official newspaper of the moderate Baptist General Convention of Texas.

<sup>xiv</sup>Martin E. Marty, "Baptistification Takes Over," *Christianity Today* (September 2, 1983): 33-36.

<sup>xv</sup>Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 2; William E. Hull, "Our Freedom in Christ," *Christian Ethics Today* 3, no. 5 (December 1997).

<sup>xvi</sup>I am convinced that evangelicalism is incoherent and insufficient as a Christian tradition. The best argument for this position is D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). However, I see no way to entirely avoid the term "evangelical."

<sup>xvii</sup>Curtis Freeman made this observation after spending a week researching Baptist history in Providence. An attitude that perpetuates this state of affairs (and reveals a remarkable shift) is apparent in a recent column by Libby Ivins, wife of the pastor of the First Baptist Church in America. "Some folks prefer structure in their religious life. First Baptist has sought to develop faith apart from the rules. It's not a 'sit-down-and-order-church,' but a 'cafeteria church,' where one is free to pick and choose what they believe. It's a kinder, gentler place which allows for the freedom to disagree and still be friends. And more importantly, to support one another during times when it's hard to believe. There's no need for a priest to interfere with the direct contact between us and God because we

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are ‘priests to each other.’ . . . The only exclusion is self-exclusion.” Ivins, “The Priesthood of Every Believer,” *Baptist Studies Bulletin* 7, no. 7 (June 2008), <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/bulletin/2008/june.htm> (accessed June 17, 2008).

<sup>xviii</sup>Quoted in Neela Banerjee, “Poll Finds a Fluid Religious Life in U.S.,” *New York Times*, February 26, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/26/us/26religion.html> (accessed May 26, 2008).

<sup>xix</sup>Derek H. Davis, “Editorial: Religious Pluralism and the Quest for Unity in American Life,” *Journal of Church and State* 36, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 246-51, 254-55. Davis uses pluralism and diversity interchangeably. In their landmark study *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah and his coauthors concluded that Americans find it difficult to employ moral language in ways that point toward a shared vision of the nature and purpose of life. Instead they tend to correlate “success” with being faithful to one’s values, “freedom” with the ability to choose them without coercion, and “justice” with the establishment of procedures that provide equal opportunity to exercise one’s freedom. Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 22-26.

<sup>xx</sup>Davis, 257-58. “The Founding Fathers are well known for their belief that religion would be purified as its practice was freed from compulsion, and that false religion would collapse. If, however, contrary to their expectations, the available choices in religious belief have expanded rather than narrowed, perhaps it is because humans, when given the freedom to do so, are simply prone to understand truth in endless varieties. To grant to government, in the interest of promoting a unifying civil religion, the authority to narrow the range of available choices would threaten truth itself since it might in the end be mistakenly excluded.”

<sup>xxi</sup>Quoted in Banerjee.

<sup>xxii</sup>Quoted in Robert Marus, “Broad U.S. Religious Marketplace Spurs Conversion, Study Suggests,” Associated Baptist Press, February 26, 2008, <http://www.abpnews.com/3047.article> (accessed May 26, 2008).

<sup>xxiii</sup>Peter L. Berger, a prominent proponent of the secularization thesis in the second half of the twentieth century, predicted that religion would be confined to a few isolated sects by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

<sup>xxiv</sup>Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, “Religious Economies and Sacred Canopies: Religious Mobilization in American Cities, 1906,” *American Sociological Review* 53, no. 1 (February 1988): 41-49. Finke and Stark have refined their argument in several places, notably *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) and *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005). The first edition of the latter book was published in 1992. For a summary of the new paradigm, see R. Stephen Warner, “More Progress on the New Paradigm,” in *Sacred Markets, Sacred Canopies: Essays on Religious Markets and Religious Pluralism*, ed. Ted G Jelen (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 1-29. Although they were the first to use an economic model, Finke and Stark were not the first sociologists to claim that religious diversity is good for religious commitment. Around the same time, Robert Wuthnow argued that denominationalism and ethnic diversity had fostered the high level of religious commitment in the U.S., an idea Andrew M. Greeley had suggested nearly two decades earlier. Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Greeley, *The Denominational Society: A Sociological Approach to Religion in America* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1972). For an account similar to *The Churching of America*, see Greeley, *Religious Change in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>xxv</sup>“We shall argue repeatedly that religious organizations can thrive only to the extent that they have a theology that can comfort souls and motivate sacrifice. In a sense, then, we are urging an underlying model of religious history that is the exact opposite of one based on progress through theological refinement. We shall present compelling evidence that theological refinement is the kind of progress that results in organizational bankruptcy.” “There comes a point, however, when a religious body has become so worldly that its rewards are few and lacking in plausibility. When hell is gone, can heaven’s departure be far behind? Here people begin to switch away. Some are recruited by very high-tension movements. Others move into the newest and least secularized

mainline firms. Still others abandon all religion. These principles hardly constitute a wheel of karma, but they do seem to reveal the primary feature of our religious history: the mainline bodies are always headed for the sideline.” Finke and Stark, *Churching of America*, 8, 282-83.

<sup>xxvi</sup>Rodney Stark counters the claim that Europe is an example of secularization by providing evidence that levels of individual belief (“subjective religiousness”) remain high and that attendance has been low in northern and eastern Europe for centuries. Stark, “Secularization: The Myth of Religious Decline,” *Fides et Historia* 30, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 1998): 8-18. This article traces the history of the secularization thesis and evaluates its use among social scientists.

<sup>xxvii</sup>“The idea of substitutability implies that two religious groups are in competition to the extent that there is some group of potential adherents (a market) who could conceivably choose to join either one group or the other.” Daniel V. A. Olson, “Competing Notions of Religious Competition and Conflict in Theories of Religious Economies,” in *Sacred Markets, Sacred Canopies: Essays on Religious Markets and Religious Pluralism*, ed. Ted G. Jelen (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 141.

<sup>xxviii</sup>Daniel V.A. Olson, “Quantitative Evidence Favoring and Opposing the Religious Economies Model,” in *The Role of Religion in Modern Society*, ed. Detlef Pollack and Daniel V. A. Olson (New York: Routledge, 2008), 103.

<sup>xxix</sup>Lori G. Beaman, “The Myth of Pluralism, Diversity, and Vigor: The Constitutional Privilege of Protestantism in the United States and Canada,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 3 (September 2003): 311-12. “In fact, there has been little erosion of the religious mainstream. Diversity is a diversity of ‘brands’ or style, and represents a shift in religious form that remains true to Protestant substance.” According to Beaman, Stark and others assume a nature of pluralism that is unexamined. Marginal religious groups are not taken seriously in social surveys, the media, or the legal system, and their identity as “other” is defined by the “normal” of Protestantism and, to some extent, Catholicism.

<sup>xxx</sup>Daniel V. A. Olson, “Religious Pluralism and U.S. Church Membership: A Reassessment,” *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 2 (Summer 1999), 150, 154-55. “All else being equal, lack of religious regulation in the U.S. may lead both to high levels of religious pluralism (nationally) and high average levels of church adherence. However, the results presented here suggest that pluralism has its own, additional, direct and *negative* effects on church adherence rates. Taken together, these results suggest that high rates of church membership in the U.S. persist in spite of, not because of, religious pluralism.” Olson, “Religious Pluralism,” 171. Although it was conducted after Olson’s article, perhaps the most conclusive study supporting this conclusion is Mark Chaves and Philip S. Gorski, “Religious Pluralism and Religious Participation,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 261-81.

<sup>xxxi</sup>David Voas, Daniel V. A. Olson, and Alasdair Crockett, “Religious Pluralism and Participation: Why Previous Research is Wrong,” *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 2 (April 2002): 212-30.

<sup>xxxii</sup>Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, “Beyond Church and Sect: Dynamics and Stability in Religious Economics,” in *Sacred Markets, Sacred Canopies: Essays on Religious Markets and Religious Pluralism*, ed. Ted G. Jelen (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 42; Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>xxxiii</sup>Detlef Pollack and Daniel V. A. Olson, “Preface,” in *The Role of Religion in Modern Society*, ed. Detlef Pollack and Daniel V. A. Olson (New York: Routledge, 2008), xiv.

<sup>xxxiv</sup>Steve Bruce, “The Poverty of Economism or the Social Limits on Maximizing,” in *Sacred Markets, Sacred Canopies: Essays on Religious Markets and Religious Pluralism*, ed. Ted G. Jelen (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 181.

<sup>xxxv</sup>Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Davie has also argued that in Europe there is actually a *reverse* proportional correlation between institutionalized “religion” and individual “spirituality,” that is, a decline in churches leads to a rise in personal belief. However,

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even if this argument is correct, it is difficult to discern the nature of this “spirituality” or whether this correlation applies to the U.S. Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Dartman, Longman, & Todd, 2002).

<sup>xxxvi</sup>William H. Swatos Jr. and Kevin J. Christiano, “Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept,” in *The Secularization Debate*, ed. William H. Swatos Jr. and Daniel V. A. Olson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 17.

<sup>xxxvii</sup>Karel Dobbelaere, “Toward an Integrated Perspective of the Processes Related to the Descriptive Concept of Secularization,” in *The Secularization Debate*, ed. William H. Swatos Jr. and Daniel V. A. Olson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 31. Again, some Baptists explicitly embrace this development; see note 17. For an excellent discussion of bricolage in relation to rationality and everyday life, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988)

<sup>xxxviii</sup>Swatos and Christiano, 17-18. “This is not to say, however, that religion *reflects* (or is a ‘mere reflection of’) sociocultural formations, but rather, that at its spiritual core in activating the sacred, the religio-social complex always seeks to overcome *specific* sociocultural formations.”

<sup>xxxix</sup>See Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>xl</sup>Because Western culture has all but lost the narrative that gives meaning to its ethical grammar, its quest for a universal rationality independent of religious or other similar commitments is bound to collapse into the assertions, the will-to-power, of individual selves. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 6-8.

<sup>xli</sup>For an analysis of the common good in the context of the history outlined in this paper, see Coleman Fannin, “Religious Liberty and the Common Good: A Baptist Engagement with the Catholic Americanist Tradition,” in *Faith in Public Life*, ed. William J. Collinge, College Theology Society Annual Volume 53 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 81-109.

<sup>xlii</sup>James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 30.

<sup>xliii</sup>Laurence R. Iannacone, “The Consequences of Religious Market Structure: Adam Smith and the Economics of Religion,” *Rationality and Society* 3, no. 2 (April 1991): 169. This irregularity also includes areas that are overwhelmingly Mormon.

<sup>xliv</sup>John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 37-39.

<sup>xlv</sup>Editorial, “The Missing,” *Commonweal*, March 14, 2008, 5.

<sup>xlvi</sup>Phil Lawler, Phil’s Forum, “Pew Survey Shows America’s Vast Catholic Exodus,” Catholic World News, March 2, 2008, <http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=56894> (accessed May 26, 2008).

<sup>xlvii</sup>Editorial, “Lost Sheep,” *America*, March 17, 2008, 5.

<sup>xlviii</sup>See Peter Clarke and James Lowell Underwood, “Bishop John England and the Compatibility of the Catholic Church and American Democracy,” in *The Dawn of Religious Freedom in South Carolina*, ed. James Lowell Underwood and W. Lewis Burke, 184-98 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>xlix</sup>Keith Fournier, “The Pew Report Is an Invitation to New Evangelization,” Catholic Online, March 11, 2008, [http://www.catholic.org/national/national\\_story.php?id=27140](http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=27140) (accessed May 26, 2008). For a remarkable and disturbing account of a church shopping couple, see Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 141.

<sup>i</sup>Editorial, “Lost Sheep.”

<sup>ii</sup>Fournier, “Pew Report.”

<sup>iii</sup>Avery Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization: What Does It Mean?,” in *John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring the Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 29-32. See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990, sec. 3, 52-54; *Centesimus Annus*, May 1, 1991, sec. 50. According to Dulles, in *Redemptoris Missio* (sec. 86) and elsewhere, John Paul linked evangelization with preparation for the third millennium of Christianity. The American bishops also outlined three goals for evangelization: “to bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others”; “to invite all people in the United States, whatever their social or cultural background, to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith”; and “to foster gospel values in our society, promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society, so that our nation may continue to be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ.” National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*, November 18, 1992, sec. 45-60.

<sup>liii</sup>John Paul II, Ad Limina visit of Puerto Rican bishops, October 27, 1988; *L’Osservatore Romano* (English ed.), December 5, 1998, sec. 7, 14, quoted in Dulles, 32.

<sup>liv</sup>Keith Fournier, *Evangelical Catholics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990).

<sup>lv</sup>William L. Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” *Communio* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 38, 35-36. See David J. O’Brien, “An Evangelical Imperative: Isaac Hecker, Catholicism, and Modern Society,” in *Hecker Studies*, ed. John Farina (New York: Paulist, 1983), 87-132. The English translation of Hecker’s biography was the spark that ignited the Americanist controversy. See also O’Brien, *Isaac Hecker: An American Catholic* (New York: Paulist, 1992); O’Brien, *Public Catholicism*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).

<sup>lvi</sup>Portier, 37. Portier uses both “Catholic” and “catholic,” the latter in the early church sense of “universal Christian” discussed by Robert E. Webber in *Ancient-Future Faith: Re-thinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 25-26. The reconfiguration mentioned by Portier has also been noted by the popular press. See, for example, Jay Tolson’s cover story “A Return to Tradition: A New Interest in Old Ways Takes Root in Catholicism and Many Other Faiths,” *U.S. News and World Report*, December 13, 2007, 42-48.

<sup>lvii</sup>Portier, 41-42. The distinction between voluntary and institutional was central to Ernst Troeltsch’s church-sect typology, which H. Richard Niebuhr incorporated into his “Christ against Culture” type. Troeltsch linked “voluntary” with “sect” and “institutional” with “church,” but it was Niebuhr who popularized the notion that “sectarian” Christianity is insufficiently “public.” See Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 1, trans. Olive Wyon (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951), chap. 2.

<sup>lviii</sup>Portier, 41.

<sup>lix</sup>Vincent J. Miller, “Culture of Choice Creating Religious Enclaves,” *On Faith*, entry posted March 3, 2008, [http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2008/03/culture\\_of\\_choice.html](http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2008/03/culture_of_choice.html) (accessed May 26, 2008). Miller, a Catholic theologian, is commenting on the Pew Forum survey.

<sup>lx</sup>Portier, 41.

<sup>lxi</sup>Portier, 49. See James D. Davidson et al., *The Search for Common Ground: What Unites and Divides Catholic Americans* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997); Dean R. Hoge, et al., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

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<sup>lxii</sup>Portier, 61, 52. “If religious identity is voluntary and Catholics fully subject to the dynamics of a pluralist religious mix, we might expect the ecclesial sense of many Catholics to continue to weaken. We might even expect the Catholic Church increasingly to resemble a large liberal Protestant denomination. But we might also expect a significant minority of post-subculture Catholics to be Catholic in a more evangelical form. Like the other members of their generational cohort, they will be drawn to Catholic-specific identity markers such as the Eucharist, the pope, and Marian devotion. But in style or form, they will be more like evangelical Protestants than either their Catholic contemporaries or subculture predecessors.” Portier, 54-55.

<sup>lxiii</sup>See Jason Zengerle, “The Iconoclasts: Evangelicals Turn Toward . . . the Orthodox Church?,” *New Republic*, August 27, 2007, 21-23. The best account of the new monasticism is Rutba House, *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2005).

<sup>lxiv</sup>Portier, 43.

<sup>lxv</sup>Catholic News Agency, “CARA concerned over some interpretations of the ‘U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,’” May 17, 2008, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/new.php?n=12674> (accessed May 26, 2008).

<sup>lxvi</sup>William R. Hutchison traces the history of American pluralism that culminated in the a whole new form in the second half of the twentieth century in *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>lxvii</sup>Portier, 43.

<sup>lxviii</sup>McClendon, 30. At their best, moderate Baptists who make identity claims look backward as a way of going forward, but they are too concerned with explicit notions of identity and neglect the practices that sustain it.