

RELIGION AND THE PART IT PLAYS IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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When the results of the 2004 Presidential election were tallied, many if not most of the pundits were surprised when the exit polls indicated that one of the major reasons the popular vote reached an all time high was the issue of religion and how each candidate portrayed his beliefs, and how they telegraphed their fealty to voters. Surprise? It shouldn't have been. Studies reflect that during our country's quadrennial presidential elections the depth of the religious belief by a candidate or the perception of that belief has played an important part in the outcome in several of our past elections. The importance or non-importance of religion tends to be cyclical. There have been periods when religion has been placed on the back burner because of more serious problems: most notably 1852 through 1878, when the issue of slavery and reconstruction were the primary issues and more recently 1932 through 1948 when depression and war were the predominant issues.

The outcome of the 2004 election, however, and even that of 2000, was primarily decided by a heavy evangelical Christian conservative turn out. At this point I want to be clear I am not using the phrase "Christian right" in a pejorative manner. It is a way for me to identify a group that over the past 25 to 30 years has elevated itself into a major voting block. I also want to make clear that I am not taking sides for or against any religious group.

Why in a country whose foundation was formed on the basis of freedoms: the freedom to practice or not practice religion; the freedom of speech; has the issue of religion played such an important part in our political structure?

When you begin to do research for a paper such as this, one of the difficult decisions is to find a starting point. Although our country had its first presidential election in 1789, I think it is fair to give King Henry the VIII some credit for the importance of religion in our elective process. He really was the architect of the two party system. When he felt the Pope would not acquiesce to his plank of infidelity and multiple wives, he started his own political party, the Church of England.

From Henry's time until 1630 when the settlers began to come to our shores, England went through one religious catharsis after another with monarch's ascending or

descending, depending upon their church allegiance and the strength of the monarch's army. In England, by the mid 17th Century, derivatives of the Church of England were in many cases allowed to practice their religion, but in most cases prohibited from positions of power. Quakers, Presbyterians, Unitarians, and Baptists were second-class citizens. With the advent of the Enlightenment came the dissatisfaction of restraint and the lack of religious freedom. This led to the decision by many of the early settlers to leave England and create their own society in the New World.

This history of state/church relations in our own country can be divided into many parts but I have chosen the six defined by James Marone in his book, Hellfire Nation written in 2003. They are as follows:

1. Puritan Foundations of Morality in Politics 1630-1776
2. The Federalist Period from 1776-1800
3. The Abolitionist Crusade from 1880-1865
4. The Victorian Quest for Virtue 1870-1929
5. The Social Gospel and High Tide 1832- 1973
6. The Puritans Roar Again 1976- Present

The Puritan period lasted for approximately 150 years and during that period New England, with the exceptions of parts of Rhode Island, was solidly Congregational; the South was Anglican; the middle colonies were a mix of Lutherans, Presbyterians, Friends, Mennonites, Moravians, Methodists and Shakers. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the country was 99% non-Catholic. Of the 22,000 estimated Catholics living in the colonies, 15,000 of them resided in Maryland.

From the beginning the leadership in this country emanated from the Puritans. They adopted a stance linking politics, morality, and religion that allowed Christian truth to transcend and control the world of politics.

The conservative view of the Puritan mission was to make a Puritan society operate in a Godly fashion. Success would lay in deference and harmony. The mission was all about authority and order. New England would be saved if all of its citizens would behave and it was to be a covenant with God. Best put by H.L. Mencken, "the Puritan attitude boiled down to the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, might be happy. But it was John Winthrop's "city on a hill" that best exemplified what the conservative Puritans were seeking. And 200 years later Ronald Reagan would resurrect that thinking.

A more liberal view was one of the dissatisfied sailing away from Old World tyranny and settling a vast unpopulated land. The place almost thrusts freedom on them. The settlers did not need to push Bishops or Kings to get ahead. Americans would be born equal instead of "becoming so." Unabashed individualism became the irresistible consequence.

In Richard Hofstadter's thinking, there is an alternative view to Puritanism and a more generous one. The Puritan clergy was as close to being an intellectual class as America ever had. Six years after sailing into Salem Harbor they had established Harvard College. And the Bay Colony required every town of more than 50 families to organize a school.

The second phase of our discussion, the Federalist Period, begins with the adoption of the Virginia Declaration of Rights in 1776. Here we begin to see a different emphasis on religious practice and its effect on our emerging government. In the framing of the Virginia Constitution, George Mason, with the aid of Madison and Jefferson, authored the ringing phrase, “that all men have natural and unalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences and understanding.” Twelve years later our own Constitution defined the separation of church and state in adopting the First Amendment.

In the country’s first three presidential elections, it would be fair to say that religion did not play an important part in the final outcomes. In the election of 1800, the Federalists sought to gain support by depicting the election as a choice between “Jefferson and No God” or “God and a religious President.” Jefferson, over time, had described himself as a Deist, Theist, Unitarian, or rational Christian, although he shied away from discussion of religion believing religion a private matter. His enemies depicted him as a “howling atheist and an infidel”. He denied these accusations.

When the election ended in an electoral tie and thrown into Congress, Hamilton urged John Jay, Governor of New York, to manipulate the choosing of his state’s electors so as to prevent an atheist from becoming President. New England Puritans were particularly harsh in their attacks on Jefferson. Jefferson’s religious views were, in fact, very similar to Adams’ views. During the waning years of their lives, both Adams and Jefferson in their correspondence to each other complained about the religious activists in the 1800 election. In the final analysis, Adams and the Federalists appeared quite strong where Puritan churches were in abundance. On the other hand, Jefferson did very well with the populist voters, predominately Baptists and Methodists. In truth, the tight election was won or lost on a myriad of reasons, but, for sure, the issue of religion was an important one.

Before the election of 1824, only one out of every ten persons was eligible to vote. One of the requirements to vote was church membership and ownership of land. However, by 1828, all but two states have switched to the process of direct election. With the expansion of the electorate, it was almost inevitable that campaigners would appeal to sentiments and prejudices, as well as issues. The ten percent Catholic vote was a prime target in what was a 1824 rerun for both J. Q. Adams and Andrew Jackson. In 1828, Jackson resurrected a speech Adams had delivered some years earlier in Baltimore characterizing the Catholic Church as a “portentious system of despotism and superstition.” Adams accused Jackson of trying to regulate the due observance of the Sabbath, thus rivaling the bold but impious pretensions of King Henry VIII. As the campaign progressed, the anti religious charges against Jackson seemed to be having some effect, so much so that Martin Van Buren, a Jackson supporter, wrote to him asking whether Jackson had prayer in his own house and if he did to please casually mention it “...modestly during his campaigning.” Jackson won in 1828, carrying the workingman-non-Anglican voters located predominately outside of Protestant New England. Where Catholics were allowed to vote, they also voted for Jackson.

I would be remiss in not discussing the effect of the abolitionists, the anti-slavery issue, and the evangelical church's involvement. From about 1820 onwards, the seeds of the Abolitionist movement were sewn by the evangelical Christian movement, via the pulpit and the media. There is no doubt this movement contributed to the elections held throughout the 1820's-1830's and 1840's, but the real force was felt in the elections of 1852-1860. However, by the mid 1840's, in several elections, a secondary issue began to raise its head: the issue of the growing Irish Catholic immigration. In the election of 1844, Polk versus Henry Clay, Clay's platform pushed favoring discriminating for the protection of domestic labor, meaning non-Catholics. When Protestants in Philadelphia demanded the use of the Protestant Bible in the public schools, riots occurred in the streets. Fires set in the working class neighborhoods resulted in several deaths. In the end, Polk carried all of the big cities with immigrant populations. After the final results were in, Millard Fillmore of New York sent a letter to Clay stating that the Abolitionists and foreign Catholics have defeated us. Just eight years later, in 1852, both Franklin Pierce and Winfield Scott, realizing the growing trend of Catholic immigrants who had become citizens, campaigned heavily for their vote.

The four Presidential elections between 1884 and 1896 were some of the closest in our country's history. In only one of the elections was religion to play an important part in the outcome and, as it turned out, it was probably the most important factor. In 1884 Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, ran a spirited campaign against James Blaine, a Republican. Blaine had won the nomination in a fractious party fight beating out the sitting President, Chester A. Arthur. Blaine's strategy was to go after the Irish vote, conveniently forgetting his famous Blaine constitutional amendment introduced in Congress that attempted to eliminate government funding for church related schools. Surprisingly, the Irish Catholics supported him, mainly as a reward for his harshness towards England when he had been Secretary of State. Blaine chose to end his campaign in New York City, hoping to carry that state and its heavy Catholic vote. The plan for the campaign's ending rally was to make an issue of ex-President Cleveland and his illegitimate child. Unbeknownst to Blaine, Presbyterian minister Dr. Samuel Burchard, at this same closing rally unleashed an infamous and unforgivable alliteration against Blaine's opponents. He said, "We are Republicans and do not propose to leave our party and identify ourselves with the party whose antecedents have been rum, Romanism and rebellion." Blaine never could recover from the incident and lost New York and a very close election, decided by less than three tenths of 1% of the total vote.

In the election of 1896 the major issue was metallic. The second most important issue was the introduction of William Jennings Bryan to the political stage. William McKinley, an Ohio Republican, favored the gold standard and Bryan, his Democratic challenger, was a free silver candidate from Nebraska. But tonight we will concentrate on the second issue. The Democrats were split at their 1896 convention and Bryan had the fortune to speak last and he delivered one of the great speeches in American history. In it, he said, "We will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: you shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold." Bryan's speech catapulted him into the nomination and on to the political,

moral, and cultural stage for close to thirty years. His conservative bent and Protestant pietism continued throughout his public life. True to the end, his last public appearance was as an advocate for the state of Tennessee in the fight against teaching evolution in the schools – the famous Scopes Monkey trial.

There was a 180 degree difference in cultural and religious thought that occurred within just a few years when one compares Bryan to Al Smith. In the election of 1928, for the first time in our history, a Roman Catholic was nominated for the Presidency from one of the major political parties. Al Smith, the well known governor of New York, ran against Herbert Hoover, a respected and, up until that time, competent administrator. Much of the ensuing race concentrated on Smith's religion and the issue of prohibition. The results proved disastrous for both Smith and his party. In 1928, Hoover's electoral margin was the largest in our country's history with Smith gaining just 87 electoral votes and carrying only eight states.

As early as the 1920 convention in San Francisco, Smith had clashed with William Jennings Bryan on the issue of prohibition. In 1924 Smith's name was put into nomination. But at the time of the 1924 convention, radio had been introduced and Bryan, in his golden voice, broadcast repeatedly from the convention floor chastising Smith on his stance for the repeal of Prohibition. Over 100 Ballots were taken with no indication of a winner. Finally, Smith capitulated and backed a compromise candidate: John Davis. But the seeds had been sewn for Smith's 1928 Presidential race. In 1928, after securing the nomination, Smith made a poor initial choice for a campaign manager. He named John Raskob, a General Motors industrialist and also a Catholic. The venom dispensers immediately hopped on this appointment labeling Raskob a "private chamberlain of the Pope." Much of the anti-Catholic venom came from the South, and the Democrats, in order to have any chance, would have to hold on to the Southern electoral votes.

It was fairly certain that whoever would run on the Republican ticket in 1928 would emerge the winner. But with the nomination of a Catholic on the Democratic side, a new element was added to the equation. The race drew more attention than any of our previous presidential elections. Surely, the spread of voice via radio during the 1920's added to the interest as well as Smith's religion and the issue of Prohibition. The election drew twice as many voters as had the election of 1916 and three times as many voters as in 1896. Both the issue of Smith's religion and the wet/dry issues were hotly debated in the press as well as in the pulpit. Evangelist Billy Sunday declared that Smith "has no more chance of being elected than the Pope has of being named Imperial Wizard of the KKK." He was right on both counts. Shortly after the election, the New York Times summed it up as follows: "Both issues were of importance but most historians will tell you that no Democrat was going to beat Hoover in 1928, regardless of the issues."

When one dissects the numbers, it's a conundrum. Smith received most of the Catholic vote, but carried just one state with a heavy Catholic populace. Yet seven of the states he did carry were all in the South and did not have heavy Catholic populations. Interestingly, my research material at USF Library, a Jesuit institution, emphasized the religious issue.

Other material I researched emphasized the Prohibition issue. Historians, regardless of their emphasis, do not dispute that Smith's 1928 candidacy paved the way for Kennedy's run in 1960.

The elections of 1932, 1936 and 1940 transcended one of the most difficult economic periods in our history. Religion played a minor role in the elections. However, the election of 1932 molded the membership of the Democratic party that would last for 35 years. Urban dwellers, Negroes and Whites, and Catholics and Jews all gravitated to the Democratic party and became the bulwark of its membership. Catholics had always been strong supporters of the Democratic party. But Negroes, the term used in 1932, had, when they could vote, voted heavily Republican from 1860 until 1932. Jewish voters had supported both parties. This bloc held together well into the 1960's. Roosevelt, not known as a devout person, listed in his "Four Freedoms" address of January 1941, "the freedom for every man to worship God in his own way." It was said that whenever he gave this speech over the next four years, he would glance towards heaven when mentioning religious freedom. At his second inaugural in 1937, he asked both Protestant and Catholic clergy to offer prayers at the ceremony and this set a precedent for the future.

The elections of 1948 and 1952 also revolved around issues other than religion. The popular religion of the 1950's looked like a free floating mix of God, patriotism, and the American way. True, it was the period when "Under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance, but that became more of an election issue 20 years later.

In 1960, John Kennedy said, "I am not a Catholic candidate." Whole books have been written about his candidacy and battle to overcome the Catholic stumbling block.

One generation after the great migrations from Europe to the United States, the descendants of that generation had begun to occupy positions of unquestioned influence in the political affairs of our country. Between 1920 and 1932, only one of 25 appointments to the Federal Judiciary had gone to a Catholic under Republican administrations. However, after 1932, the appointments were one in every four! According to S. Lubel's book, Future of American Politics, the percent of the country's Catholic population doubled between 1928 and 1959. Added to this change were other urban minorities and a continuing Democratic solid South that provided a broad coalition for the party.

In 1956, Kennedy's name was put into nomination for the Vice Presidency and although he led all other contenders after the second ballot, he lost to Estes Kefauver by just 68 votes. In early balloting, several of the Southern states that had moved away from the Democrats in the Eisenhower elections, backed Kennedy in the abortive 1956 nominating process. This was significant and was not lost on the Kennedy team as it began to prepare for the Presidency in 1960. In the 1958 off year elections, he was easily re-elected to the Senate, as were five new Catholic governors- including states with large electoral votes. Eight new Catholic senators were elected along with 91 Catholic representatives in the House. The possibility of a Catholic candidate for President was not so far fetched.

As Kennedy headed into the nominating process in 1959-1960, in an effort to anticipate and dampen the religious issue, he explicitly stated in *Look Magazine* his views on a number of issues and concerns to non-Catholics. The deflection tactic worked well in many instances but several religious organizations came out against Kennedy. The National Association of Evangelicals viewed the election of a Catholic with alarm. Alabama Methodists declared, "the people of Alabama whose attitudes are basically Protestant, do not intend to jeopardize their Democratic liberties by opening a door to the White House to political machinations of a determined power hungry Romanist hierarchy." Dr. Ramsey Pollard, president of the nine million member Southern Baptist convention emphatically stated, "I will not stand by and keep my mouth shut when a man under the control of the Roman Catholic Church runs for the Presidency." When Kennedy arrived in Indianapolis to file his petition, he was met by a group of the Indiana Bible Baptists challenging him to a debate stating, "We resolve that a Roman Catholic President cannot impartially defend the Constitution while remaining true to his religion." Kennedy's response was simply, "Why didn't you issue this challenge to me when I joined the United States Navy?"

There were two states whose primaries proved pivotal to Kennedy's nomination. Wisconsin, holding its primary in early April, had voted Republican in the last three elections. Wisconsin for years had constituted a striking laboratory in American society. Germans, Norwegians, Poles, Irish, Jews, and many other ethnic groups created a vivid mixture in the heartland. If Kennedy were to carry the state in the primary against Hubert Humphrey, he would have to grab most of the Catholic vote and that included Catholic voters who were registered Republicans. Wisconsin was a cross-over state. Kennedy positioned himself "as middle of the road." Conservative Republicans and Democrats preferred this to Humphrey's liberalism and Kennedy carried the state. But when the results were in, there was no question that Catholics had voted in a block for Kennedy. James Reston, *New York Times* editorialist, noted that there was no longer any chance of avoiding "the issue", namely the Catholic voting bloc in Wisconsin. The next big hurdle came in West Virginia, a state that had a 3% Catholic population. It was the defining moment in Kennedy's push for the nomination. He worked the state up and down, bringing in the likes of FDR, Jr. who campaigned day and night with the miners. Much of the national news media concentrated on Kennedy's race in West Virginia. In the second week in May, West Virginia voted 3 to 2 for Kennedy and proved to the public, and especially to the movers and shakers in the Democratic Party, that he could carry a predominately Protestant state.

The 1960 election was close. But if we examine the numerical results, it was not as close as other Presidential elections. Kennedy carried states with heavy concentrations of Catholic voters. But he also carried several Southern states heavily populated with non-Catholics, industrial states, and even Texas. It would have taken both a shift of Illinois and Texas to give the election to the Republicans in 1960.

The election of LBJ and Nixon in 1964, 1968 and 1972 were also fought on grounds other than religion. With that said, Barry Goldwater's 1964 candidacy is seen by many as

an incubator for the growth of the conservative religious right that would ultimately lead to the election of Ronald Reagan 16 years later. The Goldwater candidacy brought together a committed group of conservatives who split the Republican party, forcing out of power many moderate Republicans, nurturing the conservative ideas that ultimately brought them to power.

In the election of 1976, there is general scholarly consensus that the presidential candidacy of Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist, a born again Christian with overtly Evangelical beliefs, was a big plus in the unseating of President Ford. It also marks what many historians term the ascent of the religious right or Christian right movement in Presidential politics. He brought to the campaign trail what authors Richard Petard and Robert Linder referred to as: "Jimmy Carter and that old time civil religion." With what was perceived as moral decay in Washington with Watergate (Carter positioned himself outside of the Washington culture) as well as Carter's very public stance on born again, several of the conservative Southern states votes moved back into the Democratic Carter camp. Carter won by less than a million and a half votes and under 66 electoral votes.

Carter throughout the 1976 campaign sprinkled moral and religious vignettes. Several times he used philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr's phrase, "a sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world." Carter's readings and philosophy came out of early Southern Baptist Church teachings. Throughout the campaign he mentioned that he and his family read the Bible and prayed together. He also publically stated that he used prayer in making decisions throughout his life. Ford, also an announced born again, could not overcome the moral decay still emanating from the Watergate crisis that many associated with a loss of family values. As an aftermath of this election, the moral majority coalesced and, in 1978, Pat Robertson came into such political prominence that, within a decade, he would run for the Presidency himself.

Carter's tenure was fraught with many religious based issues in the international arena. He set the stage for the first steps of rapprochement between Israel and Palestine. However, towards the end of his term, he ultimately lost face with the hostage taking by the Iranian Muslim clerics in Tehran.

In my reading, I came across a story from a July, 1986 article concerning an incident between Watergate conspirator Charles Colson and ex-President Jimmy Carter, both born again. The two politicians were working together on a Habitat for Humanity project in Chicago. Colson commented to Carter that he was similar to his ex boss Nixon in one respect: they were both slave drivers but with different results. Said Colson, "Under you this job has me only doing hard labor and it won't have me ending up in jail."

In 1964 Ronald Reagan co-chaired the California Goldwater committee. His nationally televised speech for Goldwater, "A Time for Change" made him an instant hit with the conservative element of his party. Reagan's personal life up until the time he entered politics would not be one that would endear him to the evangelical faithful. He had been divorced. He was known to have a drink, tell off color jokes, and his children, by both his first and second wives, were not close to him.

But one of the most remarkable features of both of Reagan's campaigns was his ability to mobilize large numbers of evangelical Christian voters, many of whom had voted Democratic or not at all. Reagan was able to unite the religious and economic conservatives under the single banner of limited government and traditional family values. He cultivated their support by supporting voluntary school prayer and opposing abortion. As Richard Perard and Robert Linder have written in their book, Civil Religion and the Presidency, the fact that modern evangelicals were susceptible to conservative appeals came as no surprise since fundamentalist preachers had bitterly denounced the New Deal in the 1930's and aligned themselves with anti-Communist movements in the 40's and 50's.

From 1964 through 1980, the political right was building a disciplined well organized and financed network of loosely knit affiliates outside of the framework of the Republican party. The religious right threw itself body and soul into the Reagan campaign, believing he was a Godly, evangelical Christian who would re-awaken spiritual America. The new right came out against abortion, pornography, state-supported care centers, the E.R.A. and homosexuality. The religious right, just as it did in our most recent election, took credit for the victory although most political experts, at least in 1980, maintained that the pocketbook was the major issue. Inflation, plant closings, rising interest rates, and energy shortages were more of a factor in Reagan's victory. No matter! The right had established itself as a force to reckon with and every election since 1980 one candidate or another has catered to that group. In 1984, when the Reagan/Bush team ran for a second term, Reagan appeared before evangelical bodies, Roman Catholics, and Jewish gatherings, but purposefully ignored the meetings of "mainline" Protestant denominations and ecumenical organizations.

Sooner or later, we have to visit William Jefferson Clinton. A quick reminder for all of us: the 1992 election pitted George H. W. Bush, a sitting President, against not only Clinton, but Ross Perot, a Texas businessman who created his own party. Most historians blame the loss of President Bush's election on the Perot third party candidacy, and that is validated by the breakout of the religious vote. Perot siphoned off 23% of the mainline Protestant vote, a group that split almost evenly for Bush and Clinton. But Perot also took 15% of the total evangelical vote. The evangelical voters split almost two to one for Bush – and that, my friends, cost George H. W. Bush the 1992 election. Clinton won a plurality of most other secular and non-secular groups: Catholic, Jewish, non-traditional Christian and atheist/agnostic but not the mainline Protestant or the evangelical voters. Had there been no Perot candidacy and had Bush been able to carry the evangelical vote lost to Perot, he undoubtedly would have won the 1992 election. But Perot was there! And the evangelical right voted heavily for him. One carry over from the 1992 election was that in 1994 the Republicans, with heavy support from the evangelical right, carried both houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years.

Two years later in the 1996 Presidential election, the Dole campaign trust kept the religious right in the background at the convention and during the final twelve weeks of the campaign. They paid him back by sitting on their hands and not going to the polls.

Clinton was able to recapture some of the traditional white Southern mainline Protestant vote in both 1992 and 1996, and forged a winning combination with the traditional New Deal Democratic voters. Many of these voters were to remain with the Democratic party in 2000, but many of the Dole disenfranchised evangelical voters returned to the fray in 2000. States that had gone to Clinton in 1996, namely Florida, Louisiana, and Missouri, all with heavy evangelical populaces, switched sides and, of course, we all know the rest of the story.

The 2000 Presidential election was the defining moment in which the winner of the Republican nomination publically embraced the Christian right. Please understand that I am not using the term “Christian right” in a perjorative manner.

Why would a country founded on certain freedoms including the freedom of religion with the right to practice or not allow this issue to play such an important part in our political elections?

Geoffrey Layman, in his book, The Great American Divide 2001-Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics, states, “Governor George W. Bush, heretofore considered a pragmatic Republican was supposed to waltz into the Republican nomination. Bush-in doing so, was to move the GOP away from the highly conservative activist stands on abortion and other social issues and rescue the party.” In early 2000 it was clear that the waltz was not keeping up with the band! John McCain showed great strength in the early primaries and Bush, realizing he was involved in a tight race, visited the fundamentalist Bob Jones University and publically announced that the party retain its traditional support for a constitutional amendment banning abortion and then said he was unlikely to appoint any openly gay individuals to his cabinet. The Christian right had become a major issue in this election!

It is not necessary to go over the Florida recount, the court fights, and the dissatisfaction of half of the country’s voters towards the outcome. What is important is to review the shift of voters from the Clinton middle of the road coalition to the more conservative right in the Bush 2000 and 2004 victories. We know that each of the elections was decided by one and two state margins. We know the popular vote was very close in both contests with the winner in one receiving less popular vote than the loser.

What we should ask is, how could the Republican party, a party that 25 years earlier made up of mainly upper income conservatives with ties to moderate and liberal mainline Protestant churches, make a transformation that was one of the most dramatic in American politics? What propelled the Republican party into a position where it began to siphon off the traditional Democratic political constituency and invigorated the evangelical Christians who ultimately became the most active part of the Republican electoral coalition? These groups represented the winning margin in the 2000 and 2004 election. It was not an instant movement. It was a 25 year evolution. Did it occur because Republicans began to embrace a more conservative direction? Had the time come when the country could no longer stomach the liberal culture that had been in effect for the past 40 years? Or was it only specific issues of abortion and homosexual rights?

Catholic and Southern whites initially moved into the Republican camp for separate reasons. While both groups came to resent coercive Federal power, Southern whites were reacting to the imposition of civil rights. Catholics, the great beneficiary of Federal intervention since the New Deal, did not fear civil rights. They jumped ship when the Federal courts sanctioned abortion and liberal judges failed to curb the violent crime that arose markedly in the big cities.

By the 1970' s this dispirited group lay in ruins. In 1972 the urban white voter, the Protestant Southern voter, and the Catholics began to bolt to more conservative candidates – candidates who promised not to intervene in their everyday life and protect them from the great Satan on the other side of the Iron Curtain. And the name of the party made no difference – 1976 Democrat / 1980 Republican.

With the advent of the black voter registration in the South and membership in the Democratic party, the Southern whites, in reaction, also began to register, and in most of the South the figures show that for every two blacks registered, seven new white voters became enfranchised and these newly registered white voter headed straight for the Republican party. Initially, many of the Northern conservative urban whites aligned themselves with the early black registration drives and political battles. It is easy for us to remember that it was the Catholic and Protestant “collars” who were seen on the bridge with Martin Luther King and who went door to door in the voter registration drives. In many cases it was the liberal urban Protestants who funded the civil rights movements.

Layman's book tracks religious and moral issues with graphs and charts that show us a history on several issues. He lists everything from church attendance, party membership, religious voting patterns, and voting by ethnic membership. If you look at history, you will see that from 1960 through 2000, not much had changed except in one Democratic sector: evangelical Christians, regardless of race, political party and geography, increased their propensity to vote. They switched from their long-standing voting patterns and involved themselves in participatory politics. The transfer of allegiance began with forces from outside the organized church. Transfer of citizenry from the cities to the suburbs, and their mobility were major factors. Population shifts from the North to the Southern inner city to suburbs in the Midwest, the subsequent loss of allegiance to old church ties and the evangelical churches in the new homesteads were waiting with open arms for the newly arrived. This, and the advent of the civil rights reforms leading in many cases to forced busing and open schooling, began to push white Southern voters, previously aligned with the Democratic voter since Reconstruction, into the Republican party.

Some will say it had been a 25 year run with Ronald Reagan's election of 1980 which was the first glimpse of the strength of the evangelical power in politics. My own guess is that the 1992 Republican convention was the embryo of George Bush II's later victories. In that 1992 convention, Pat Buchanan in a nationally televised speech said, “there is a religious war going on in this country, a cultural war that is critical to the kind of nation we shall be, as critical as the cold war itself, for this is a war for the soul of America.”