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A Cautionary Tale of Two Extremes
Religion and Politics in the U.S. and the U.K.

Alejandro Garcia Davalos

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“I claim that human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social, political and religious. All act and react upon one another.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

Religion and politics are two of the most controversial subjects human beings encounter. Each and every person has an opinion on these topics and that is what makes them so volatile. As opposed to other matters that are more easily quantifiable and prone to academic discussion, conversations about religion and politics are informed as much by personal experience and beliefs as they are by more empirical data. Furthermore, these topics are seemingly impossible to avoid. Whether it is in a college classroom, at a comedy club, at a presidential debate or over dinner the discussions about religion and politics seem endless.

The exchange becomes even more controversial when these two topics are discussed together. Regardless of what specific religion is being discussed, once its role in politics is brought up the exchange tends to become more intense. This is very true of conversations in America where the intersection of politics and Christianity seem to often grab headlines. Yet when these conversations occur they tend to be limited to the specific understanding of Christianity that the person having the discussion brings to bear which in turn presents a narrow definition of the role that Christianity plays and leads to an incorrect view of religion, politics and the intersection of the two.

Growing up in a Christian school I have seen this first hand. The homogeneity of belief within the school left me with an incorrect understanding of the role that Christianity could and should play within politics and created a misconception of what a Christian should be concerned about and how he or she should act. This anecdotal example is supported by much of what we see in society today. Statements alleging “good Christians” should support or reject certain issues
or behave in certain ways are not uncommon. There is an idea of what a Christian should look like and, whether consciously or not, the Church has also helped perpetuate it.

Not only is this idea inaccurate, it is also dangerous. By supporting a narrow view of the role that Christianity and Christians, play in politics, the true breadth of belief within this faith is ignored and the positive impact it can have on society is diminished. The purpose of this paper is not only to shine a light on the more prominent Christian movements found in the United States and the United Kingdom but to also analyze how these have affected society and how, by forgetting some of the older or less prominent movements, the positive effect Christianity has had on society in general has been curtailed.

Due to the scope of the project, it was impossible to address all of the different Christian movements that have had an impact on society in the U.S. and the U.K. The ones I chose to focus on were picked due to their national prominence and the timing of their occurrence. The status of Christianity in either country cannot be wholly attributed to these specific movements, but at the same time, it would be naïve to ignore the impact that these movements have had on how the Church looks in the U.S. and the U.K.

The U.S. and the U.K. provide a perfect comparison for the study of religion and politics as they share a similar language, history and level of economic development. However they are very different when it comes to social attitudes towards government; which has in turn shaped their religious beliefs. In a study conducted in 1991, Johnston Conover, Ivor Crewe and Donald Searing found that although people in the U.S. and the U.K. both root justify their conception of rights through ideas of “exchange and individual opportunity,” what these rights actually look like in these countries is very different (p. 824). Americans tend to define rights as a form of protection of their individual choices whereas Britons focused on social rights that “place
responsibility for basic provision in the hands of the community and reallocate resources on the basis of need” (824). The similarity in the basis for their beliefs allows the two countries to be comparable. Still, despite the similarity in reasoning the outcomes, when it comes towards attitudes towards policy are very different, making them a valuable comparative case study.

Not only are the U.S. and the U.K. comparable regarding the basis for their beliefs, their populations also have comparable trends in religion. Although the U.K. is a more secular nation than the U.S., the trends within religion as a whole, and Christianity in particular, are comparable. In the U.K. 44% of the general population claims no religion (British Social Attitudes Survey-B.S.A.S.) whereas in the U.S. people responding in this manner represent 16% of the population but the large differences stop there (Pew Forum, Religion & Public Life).

This same study found that 27% of the population in the U.K. lose or change religions throughout their life span (B.S.A.S) compared to 28% of the American population (Pew Forum, Religion and Public Life). The two countries are also very similar in their Protestant population. 51% of religious people in the U.S. claimed to be Protestant compared to 54% of those in the U.K (Pew Research, Global Christianity). Both countries also share demographic trends. Women tend to be more religious in both countries as only 39% of U.K. women professed having no religion (B.S.A.S), as compared to 51% of males, and 13% of women in the U.S. answered no religion, as compared to 20% of males (Pew Forum, Religion and Public Life). Similarly, younger people in both countries tend to be less religious; the U.K. saw 65% of those aged between 18 and 24 state they have no religion while only 18% of those above 75 years answered in the same way (B.S.A.S.). The U.S. saw 31% of those in the younger age group profess no religion as opposed to 8% of those aged above 65 (Pew Forum, Religion and Public Life).
Therefore, although there are some differences between the two countries, they are clearly comparable and provide a fertile ground for the exploration of religion and politics. Yet, before discussing the specifics of religion in politics in these two countries it is important to address the key question regarding any academic inquiry: why is this important?

Is Christianity Relevant?

Despite the fact that many believe the relationship between religion and politics is a given, the research done on this subject is split. Many people argue that due to the increasing secularization found in both the U.S. and the U.K., the role of religion in politics has been diminishing over the past few decades and will soon be, if it is not already, negligible. One of the most prominent proponents of this view is constitutional law scholar and senior fellow at Stanford University Dr. Michael W. McConnell.

In “Religious Freedom at a Crossroads” Dr. McConnell argues that religion is being pushed aside and society is shifting its focus onto civil liberties and meeting secular demands (p. 120). In discussing the status of the Religion Clause in the Warren and Burger courts, McConnell points out that the decision of the justices does not suggest a direct hostility towards religion, but rather an indifference that makes religion a smaller player in politics (p.126). Furthermore, he sees the fact that justices have allowed public displays of religion (e.g. nativity scenes) only when they are in proximity to other secular symbols (e.g. a Christmas tree) as a clear picture of how the Supreme Court has pushed religion into the background (p.120-125). The continuous decisions by the court to exclude religion from the public sphere in order to avoid “establishment,” and their unwillingness to grant exemptions from public laws, show the downfall of religion in the American public sphere.

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1 The Religion Clause was established under the First Amendment and protects the religious establishment from encroachment by the state and ensures the right to exercise religion freely. The “Warren and Burger Courts” refers to the Supreme Court presided by Earl Warren (1953-1969) and Warren Burger (1969-1986)
Despite Professor McConnell’s keen observations, there are other scholars who disagree with his opinion. One of these scholars is Stanford Law Professor Dr. Kathleen M. Sullivan. In “Religion and Liberal Democracy,” Sullivan states that she “find[s] any picture of rampant secularization difficult to square with numerous indicators of religion’s lively role in contemporary American social and political life” (p. 195-196). She points to the existence of several politically prominent clergymen in the Catholic and Protestant churches (e.g. John Cardinal O’Conner, Jerry Falwell and Donald Wildmon) as proof that religion is not being pushed to the wayside. People may argue that the existence of a few prominent figures is no indication of a lively role of religion in politics. Yet, the existence of these figures needs to be understood within the context of larger, overtly religious social movements, such as the movement against abortion, that do support the idea of a lively religious debate in the public sphere. This growth of religion, Sullivan argues, is due to the same factors McConnell blames for the demise of religion (p.222). She believes that the increasingly indifferent, and arguably hostile, stance of the courts against religion has led to the resurgence of an increasingly politically active church.

Regardless of whether the secularization of the American and British society has led to a diminished role of religion in politics or not, religion in general, and Christianity in particular, still have an important effect on society and politics and should not be dismissed. For Christians it is important to pay attention to the relationship between the Church and the state not only because it is in line with Biblical teachings but also because the way in which Christianity interacts with society has a significant effect on the way in which the church is viewed.

The Bible is full of examples of people who engaged with society and the phrase “in the world but not of the world” is one of the more popular ones in the Christian vocabulary. Most
mainstream Christians would agree with the idea that they are called to engage the world. This can be seen in the world of politics, as discussions of political issues are commonplace in the Church and can have a large effect on the national level. The effect stemming from the way in which Christians engage the world is not simply limited to the political arena. The fact that religious people in general, and Christians in particular, tend to be civically engaged has a spillover effect that should not be overlooked by the secular world.

The clear importance of this topic for people who have a religious background should not discourage their secular counterparts from paying attention to the topic. Whether or not individuals subscribe to any specific religious beliefs, the effects of those who do on society is very important. A study conducted by British cross-party think tank Demos in 2012 found that religious people in the U.K are more likely to volunteer, be civically engaged and politically active. Specifically, this study found that religious people are more likely to have signed a petition or have participated in a demonstration than their secular counterparts and that religious people are more likely to be willing to take on leadership roles in the community (Birdwell, p. 18). This affects society as a whole since active participation and a willingness to accept positions of leadership increase the likelihood of religious people in the U.K. stepping into important decision-making positions that can shape society as a whole, including the non-religious section of the population.

The findings of the Demos study are not confined to the U.K. In conducting very similar research in the U.S. Robert Putnam and David Campbell uncovered comparable findings. They concluded that religious Americans are, in fact, more generous neighbors and conscientious than their secular counterparts. Religious Americans, according to Putnam and Campbell, are twice as likely to give to charity as their secular counterparts and tend to give a larger proportion of their
income (Donohue, paragraph 8). These discoveries echo the ones made by the Demos study and can also be seen anecdotally throughout the U.S.

Recently, the role of religious people in political conversations in the U.S. has been felt and seen as the Supreme Court debates the legality of same-sex marriage. Although many outside observers view the role of religious groups in this case as mainly supporting the conservative efforts to deny marriage to same-sex couples, reality is more complex. Many religious groups, and religious people, have stood up for DOMA and opposed same-sex marriage but many others have argued in support of homosexual marriages either on the basis of human rights or by supporting the idea that the Kingdom of God is brought about through the Church and not through governmental institutions like the Supreme Court. Despite conflicting opinion, the debates over the legality of DOMA has shown the power and potential of religious groups and has also raised an issue that many Christians should start paying attention to, such as how Christianity as a whole is viewed by the secular world.

The way in which Christianity interacts with society as a whole affects the way in which the Church and individual Christians are viewed in everyday life. Although many Christians will correctly argue that their role is not to appease the world but to stand by what they think is correct, the way in which the world views Christianity is a valuable tool for introspection and for evaluating the work the Church is doing in this world. A study conducted by American-based think tank Barna Group uncovered some very disturbing findings regarding the way in which the secular world views Christianity. In a phone survey conducted in 2010, the Barna Group found that 35% of respondents believed Christianity’s largest negative contribution was violence and hatred in the name of Jesus Christ and 13% found the biggest contribution was opposition to gay marriage.
The negative views associated with Christianity are arguably an important factor in the recent “rise of the nones.” Statisticians have found that, especially amongst young people, there has been a rise in levels of spirituality but a decline in the number of individuals associated with a specific religion (No Religion on the Rise, Pew Forum). This finding should be of special importance to Christians as they begin to see their sphere of influence become smaller due to certain attitudes and behaviors. Mark Sandlin, a Presbyterian Church minister, found that after taking two months away from the Church he had no desire to return to it (paragraph 5). He claimed that after this hiatus he found his spiritual life and relationship with Christ to be better than ever before and found himself reluctant to return to what he believes has become a dogmatic, hypocritical institution. Although Rev. Sandlin’s experience is anecdotal is provides a snapshot of what many other people in the U.S. and the U.K. are struggling through and presents a very interesting problem that Christians should stop trying to overlook.

**Christianity in the U.S.**

The breadth of the Christian faith in the U.S. is undeniable. It can be seen not only in the approximately 41,000 denominations found on American soil but also in the ongoing disagreements and conversations that occur within these denominations and Christianity as a whole. This presents a unique challenge for the purpose of this paper as it becomes extremely difficult to make any generalizations regarding Christianity and its role in politics. Due to the scope of the project I will focus on the most prominent and recent conservative Christian movement which will provide an interesting point of comparison to what is seen in the intersection of religion and politics in the U.K. The Christian Left in the U.S. has had an irrefutable influence on U.S. politics as it has supported movements such as civil rights, women’s suffrage and others. Yet, in recent decades the prominence of the Christian left has
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seemed to be in decline and although some important movements, such as those led by Jim Wallis, are still influential and will be mentioned, they do not seem to have the same mainstream following as the movements begun by the Christian right.

The Difference Amongst Minority Groups

The conversation is not only nuanced by political preference but also by more basic differences such as race. As the American demography continues to rapidly change, the way in which people’s private beliefs interact with political tendencies are also changing. Research on the interactions between African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and religion show a very different picture of religion and politics than when looking at White Evangelicals. As these minority groups continue to grow in the United States, the implications for the place that religion will hold is also bound to be different.

Although most polls and research data point towards a strong association between Christianity and the Republican Party, these results are, in large part, due to the omission of African Americans from the equation. In this past election President Obama won over ninety percent of the African American vote -- many of whom are considered ‘religious.’ In her research on how religion has affected African American political life Jacqueline Mattis found that religion has not led to an apolitical stance among African Americans. According to Mattis, much of the misperception on this topic is due to the fact that African Americans have different venues of political expression, which may lead pollsters to categorize them in the apolitical category. She concludes that for African American “religion provides a framework in which political actors are answerable not only, or even primarily, to the citizens of a state or to temporal and corporeal power, but to a higher and final authority— God” (Mattis, p. 275).
Furthermore, research has found that religion is not only a framework for the way in which African Americans view the political realm, it is also a direct motivator for political action. In “Something Within: Religion as a Mobilizer of African American Political Activism,” Frederick C. Harris argues that religion has served as an important mobilizer in the black community as opposed to the popular opinion that it is an “opiate of the people.” Harris found that religion serves to mobilize African Americans in two ways. Internal religion provides psychological resources (e.g. a sense of efficaciousness) for African Americans and church activism provides organizational resources (Harris, 1994, p. 63). This clear link between religion and politics has already begun to transform the discourse in the Democrat party.

African Americans are not the only growing demographic that differs from White Evangelicals in the link between religiosity and political tendencies. Hispanics have become an increasingly larger part of the political discourse and as research shows, the growth in their number may prove to be a boost for the religious quarter within the Democratic Party. In their research on religious traditionalism and Latino politics, Nathan Kelly and Jana Morgan found that religious traditionalism does affect Latino political choices but the link between traditionalism and conservative politics does not exist. The researchers found that although a link between religious traditionalism and conservatism does exist amongst Latinos, this does not necessarily translate into support for the Republican Party. The “results are more in line with predictions generated by a theory of Latino religion that views religious traditionalism as a factor that mobilizes group identity and discourages immigrant adaptation rather than as a strong social psychological force that produces conservative sentiment and support for Republicans” (Kelly, p. 257).
Finally, the third ethnic voting bloc, Asian-Americans, also tells a very different story than that of White Evangelicals. Asian-American voting patterns are usually difficult to discuss since they are not as clear of a voting bloc as African-Americans or Hispanic-Americans and because they tend to be less politically involved than the former two groups. Yet, when looking at Asian-American voting behavior in the 2008 elections, some subgroup patterns do still emerge. In line with the behavior of African Americans and Hispanic-American, Protestant and Catholic Asian-Americans who were more conservative also tended to support President Obama (Handrich, 2012). Although the significance of this finding may not be as important, due to size and level of political engagement of Asian-Americans, they still add to the shifting demographics the U.S. is currently facing.

These demographic shifts may have a significant impact in the future, as religious people in these minority groups are more likely to associate themselves with the Democratic Party. Yet, for the time being, these shifts are not large enough to realign the public image of Christians and the current discussion is still dominated by a strong religious right. Therefore, for the purpose of this analysis I will focus on White Evangelicals as the basis for analysis and comparison.

*Why are Christians in the U.S. Assumed to be Republican?*

As is clear in the election data, white evangelicals make up a large part of the existing politically active religious movements and can be deemed responsible for the commonly accepted axiom that Christians must be conservative. In the analysis presented by Indiana University’s David Knoke, white Protestant respondents with higher rates of church attendance were more likely to have non-Democratic preferences. He found that “present analysis show that
church attendance is significantly related to political party identification and the presidential vote,” which is further nuanced by religion and geographical region (Knoke, 1974, p. 63).

The relationship between church attendance and more conservative political preferences is part of the reason Christianity has begun to be associated with the Republican Party but this is, arguably, the smaller of the two main reasons. The primary reason for this association is the increasingly vocal and prominent role that certain religious movements have played in the political realm. In “Christian Conservatives Go to Court,” Dennis R. Hoover and Kevin R. Den Dulk study the litigious involvement of the Christian right in the United States and Canada. They find that the Christian right in the U.S. has adopted the American exceptionalism thesis, which states America is different than the rest of the nations and has been charged with spreading the ideals of liberty and democracy. This belief has led Christians to storm the courts in search for a defense of their agenda (p.10). Furthermore, the increasing willingness of the Christian right to go to court has also served as a focal point for mobilization. As these high profile cases bring certain issues to light, the Christian right is able to agitate its base and drum up much needed support.

Not only has the Christian right been involved in litigation as a whole, it has also focused on specific domestic issues its supporters can rally around; one of the more prominent issues being gay marriage. In his book The Anti-Gay Agenda, Didi Herman dissects the Christian right’s legal battle to repeal and prevent same sex marriage. Looking at this book, it is clear that the debate on homosexual marriage has a very strong religious component and, in many ways, has increased the visibility of the conservative religious movements.

Furthermore, not only has the conservative religious movements made a name for itself at home, it has begun to spread outside of the U.S. and affect the nation’s foreign policy. One of the
ways in which these conservative movements have been able to expand beyond the American borders is through missionaries who leave the U.S. to serve in other countries. In *The World their Parish*, David Martin discusses this phenomenon and explains how the expansion of the American church to other nations has also led to the growth of politically conservative correlations with Christianity in the host countries. This strategy, though, has not been the only way in which the Christian right has gone global.

In “The Christian Right and American Foreign Policy,” William Martin discusses the ways in which the Christian right has used its masses to affect American foreign policy and effectively push their political agenda beyond the U.S. borders. Martin has found that Christians have been “increasingly involved in efforts [that] influence a wide range of U.S. policies including support for Israel, arms control and defense, and funding for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations” (p.67). This increasingly active attitude in the international spectrum mirrors American exceptionalism as the Christian right believes it is America’s duty to be a light unto the world and promote Christian values.

The role that conservative religious political movements play is undeniable. Whether within the U.S. or abroad, the religious right has become a force to reckon with, but how has this happened? Although everyone born after 1980 may be accustomed to the idea of the religious right as a driving force, things have not always been this way. It has only been through a mix of charismatic leaders and governmental decisions on certain issues that the religious right gained momentum and became what it is today.
The rise of the Christian right can be traced back to two Supreme Court decisions – Roe vs. Wade and the Scopes trial -- that completely changed the social norms many Americans had taken for granted. Both of these trials ended with unfavorable outcomes for religious conservatives and created a sense of impending doom that galvanized many Christians and planted the seeds for the re-birth of the conservative religious movements. These trials became a rallying cry for many Christians as they saw the tide turn against their socially conservative views.

Roe vs. Wade was the landmark Supreme Court decision that stated that women had the right to decide whether or not to have an abortion. Despite the fact that this decision was nuanced by the states’ rights to regulate abortion, it was an earth-shattering decision that very few people on either side of the argument would have ever dreamed of. This decision brought about salient social and political consequences as it helped solidify the pro-life movement and contributed to party re-alignment.

Socially, Roe vs. Wade became a hallmark decision because it made a practice, which many morally opposed, legally acceptable. In writing about the effects of Roe vs. Wade, David J. Garrow points out that the Supreme Court’s ruling led to a significant mobilization of the right-to-life movement. Before the 1973 decision, pro-choice movements had faced little, if any, organized opposition, but once the decision was made, the backlash was so strong that the right-to-life movement came extremely close to reversing the ruling (p.840-841). The aftermath of Roe vs. Wade did not only have social consequences, it also brought about political ones.

In “Before (and After) Roe v. Wade: New Questions About Backlash,” Linda Greenhouse and Reva Siegel argue that Roe vs. Wade led to a new strategy to draw Catholics and social conservatives away from the Democratic Party during the 1972 Richard Nixon
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Based on recommendations from Nixon strategist Kevin Phillips, the authors argue, Republicans began to use abortion to garner votes from specific blocs that had been clearly Democrat since the New Deal coalition (p. 2052). This decision by party leaders had a crucial effect as it later on transformed the views of party members on the issue of abortion.

On the eve of Roe v. Wade, 68% of Republicans supported the notion that abortion should be a decision made solely by a woman and her physician (Greenhouse, 2011, p. 2067) yet now it is, clearly, the Republican Party that staunchly opposes this stance. This shift is of significance as it also delineates the importance of Roe vs. Wade to party realignment, but before we are able to discuss this, it is imperative to address the momentous Supreme Court ruling at the Scopes Trial.

The Scopes Trial, which dealt with the teaching of evolution in public schools, had a similar social impact as Roe vs. Wade although its consequences in regards to political realignment are less direct. Yet, this trial represented one of the first large media events and left religious conservatives with a feeling that the media had turned against them (Smith, 2010, p. 1). Although the decision was based on a technicality, William Jennings Bryan was correct when he commented “It is not the decision but the discussion that will follow that I consider important. It will bring the issue before the attention of the world” (Moore, 1998, p. 573). Forty-eight years later Roe vs. Wade cemented the feelings many Christians had after the Scope Trial and led to the important party realignments that finally gave way to the emergence of the contemporary Christian right.

As previously mentioned, Roe vs. Wade marked a transition for the Republican Party as they tried to use the Supreme Court decision to their political advantage. Greenhouse and Siegel point out that Roe vs. Wade is commonly credited for being one of the important factors in the
push for realignment. As Southern Democrats began to feel “increasingly estranged from the Democratic party’s civil rights agenda” they turned towards the new socially conservative Republican Party platform (Greenhouse, 2011, p. 2053).

Therefore, it is safe to assume that party realignment was a result of an attempt to win a larger portion of voter shares and undermine the Democratic coalition that had been forged under the New Deal. Understanding the coalition that was formed under the New Deal is of utmost importance to understanding the true meaning of the realigning of the Southern Democrats. The party divide that had been forged under the New Deal was a strictly economic one. The Democrat party feverishly avoided racial issues in order to be able to appeal to more racially accepting northerners and segregationist southerners at the same time (Miller, 2003, p. 248). Yet, this began to change when President Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and party lines began to shift from economic divisions to racial ones (Miller, 2003, p. 246).

As race became increasingly important in defining political divides and Democratic leaders continued to become more racially liberal, Southern Democrats were increasingly out of place (Valentino, 2005, p. 673). This change, although gradual, was stark as the Democrat party left behind its support for Jim Crow laws and took on racially relevant issues (e.g. affirmative action, busing, welfare etc.) while increasing the African American participation in the party (Valentino, 2005, p. 673). This shift in ideology coupled with the Republican strategy to attract social conservatives post-Roe vs. Wade cemented the Republican voting block we have grown accustomed to and set the stage for the evolution of the Christian Right.

Due to the scope of the project, it is impossible to even begin to address all of the conservative religious movements that began from the factors addressed before. Therefore, this
paper will focus on those that carried the most political clout and became the torchbearers for the Christian right.2

The first, and arguably most influential, movement in the Christian right was the Moral Majority. This movement was founded in 1979 by Jerry Fallwell and Paul Weyrich in an attempt to mobilize Christian conservatives on the political issues that were important to them. Although the Moral Majority only existed as such for about a decade, it was a largely successful movement as it quickly became the voice for the Christian right. This was mainly due to Falwell’s popularity before founding the organization and his readily-available sources of money for disseminating their message.

Although the Moral Majority had supporters in both the Republican and Democrat parties, they were clearly more closely associated with the Republican Party and marked the beginning of the strong relationship between White Evangelicals and Republicans. Much of the support for this organization was based on nationalistic and fundamentalist appeals it made. In researching why people supported the Moral Majority, Joseph Tamney and Stephen Johnson found “culture fundamentalism” to be the best model for predicting support for the Moral Majority. They argue that the more traditionalist a person’s religious beliefs, the more likely they are to support this organization (p. 252-253). The predisposition towards traditionalist views, Tamney and Johnson say is, in large part based on the idea that the long-term success of America is based on the ability of its citizens to protect traditional values.

A similar study was also performed by Clyde Wilcox. Wilcox found that even when focusing his study on White Evangelicals, religious variables still played an important role in explaining support for the Moral Majority. Furthermore, he found that political variables, such as

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2 The obvious missing part in this discussion will be the individuals who led the Christian right. Although many of these individuals will be introduced in the context of the movements that they led they will not be focused on.
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stance on women issues and foreign policy, were also important predictors for support of the Moral Majority (p.410). This study, executed in 1989, points towards the convergence of religion and politics; although organizations such as the Moral Majority were clearly religiously motivated at first, they have evolved. Now, religious variables are not the only way to predict support for this kind of movement, as people with certain political ideologies may also be drawn to organizations such as the Moral Majority and adopt the religious views because of their political views.

As the previous study shows the Moral Majority was able to draw support mainly from religious people, yet its sphere of influence went much further. Gary Griffith points out that one of the Moral Majority’s most important contributions was its impact on religious reporting (p. 33). Griffith cites several credible news sources as recognizing that the ascension of Falwell and the Moral Majority was no longer something that could be ignored and had brought the religious conversation to the forefront. This movement was successful in reviving the debate about fundamentalist evangelical politics and by doing so, was able to impact the political agenda.

Specifically, the Moral Majority was able to change the way in which the general public viewed religion and politics. When Falwell disbanded the Moral Majority in 1989 he stated “our mission is accomplished.” By this he clearly did not mean that the issues the Moral Majority stood for had been resolved but that, as a study published by Pew Research shows, his goal to bring politics into the church had been accomplished (Taylor, 2007).

For example, while 53% of Americans in 1968 believed the church should stay out of politics, in 2006 about 51% of Americans stated that the church had a role to play in politics. This same 2006 survey found that 63% of all White churchgoing Evangelicals say their preacher speaks out against abortion from the pulpit, 39% believe it is appropriate for their clergy to
discuss political candidates or issues from the pulpit and 61% believe there has been too little expression of faith by political leaders (Taylor, 2007). Although it was disbanded in 1989, its legacy lives on and it becomes an important explanation for the way the political world is set up today, especially when viewed alongside another one of the prominent organizations within the Christian right -- the Family Research Council.

The Family Research Council (FRC) was founded in 1983 by James Dobson and has gone beyond the work of the Moral Majority to serve as a lobbying group for specific issues. Its mission is to advance “faith, family and freedom in public policy and the culture from a Christian worldview” through “policy research, public education on Capitol Hill and in the media, and grassroots mobilization.” Although ideologically very similar to the Moral Majority, the FRC has become more than a voice for the conservative Christian perspective; it has become a lobbying group for specific policies which are in large part aligned with Christian Republican perspective.

Focused on the main areas of marriage, family and sexuality, life and bioethics and religious liberty, the FRC is currently one of the most prominent and effective Christian organizations working with public policy. One example of the effectiveness of the FRC was its opposition to the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This example is of particular importance because it highlights the importance of organizations, such as the FRC, in shaping not only domestic policy but also international policy.

In “The Religious Right and the Opposition to the U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,” T. Jeremy Gunn argues that the Family Research Council was a successful driving force in the opposition to this proposal. Despite the overwhelming

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3 The mission statement was retrieved from the Family Research Council website: [http://www.frc.org/about-frc](http://www.frc.org/about-frc)
international support for this legislation, the FRC and the Heritage Foundation have been successful in blocking its ratification (Gunn, 2006, p. 112). As a result of viewing the CRC as an attack on traditional family values and paternal rights, the FRC launched a grassroots movement that successfully turned the tide against the CRC. Although the FRC’s position on the issue may not be surprising, what is shocking is the ability of an American-based lobbying group to block international legislation that is both well-received and strongly supported outside of the U.S. This example serves to underline the true power of the Christian right and the political prominence of its organizations.

*What about the Christian Left?*

The prominence of the Christian right is impressive on its own but it becomes even more conspicuous when comparing it to the decline of the Christian left. Naturally, many who look at these religious movements may be fooled into thinking that the Christian right has always overshadowed progressive religious movements and beliefs as a key player in politics, but this is not completely true. Although in the latter part of the 20th Century the link between religion and the politics of the right has been much more pronounced, there have historically been important religious movements, opinions and organizations that identified themselves as politically progressive. Furthermore, research has shown that religion can be a catalyst for politically progressive causes just as it has been for conservatives.

In “*Spirituality, Religion and Progressive Social Movements: Resource and Motivation for Social Change,*” Elizabeth D. Hutchinson found that religion can be a great mobilizer and trigger for progressive political involvement. Although Americans have largely ignored the importance of religion and spirituality in mobilizing progressive social movements, historically the two have been very closely connected. She identifies religion, along with
colleges/universities, stable residential neighborhoods and formal social movement
organizations, as one of the four seedbeds for future social movements (p. 123). The reason for
this is that religion has been extremely effective in pooling resources and mobilizing them
towards a specific cause. Of course, the same can be -- and is -- said of the conservative social
movement. In this way, both progressive and conservatives are similar but, although religions is
a rallying point to both sides of the aisle, the way in which the religious preferences manifest
themselves politically are very different.

Writing about the differences between the Christian Right and Left, Charles F. Hall found
that although both groups are equally intense in their political behavior and share a common
view of abortion, there are distinct differences between the two sides, especially on the issues of
women’s roles, sexual behavior, poverty, the role of government and the environment. Hall
found that 78% of the Christian Left support women’s ordination while only 21% of the
Christian Right does so (Hall, 1997, p. 34). People belonging to the Christian Left are also much
more likely to see socio-political factors as the cause of poverty as opposed to Christians on the
Right who are more likely to see poverty as a result of the actions of the poor. Christians on the
Left are also more likely to support the availability of condoms in schools (57% to 16% for those
on the right), be more open towards gay rights (61% vs. 19%) and to believe that more
environmental protection is needed (91% vs. 38%) (Hall, 1997, p. 34). These significant
differences make it clear that depending on which side of the religious debate is able to dominate
the public sphere, the “Christian perspective” can look very different.

Even more fascinating was Hall’s insight as to why this gap exists. He asserts that the
reason for the discrepancies is religious attitude instead of the commonly accepted socio-
economic factors. The discrepancies among Christians on the Left and Right in the areas of
income, education, age, gender and occupation were statistically negligible and did not account for the discrepancies in beliefs. This, coupled with the statistically significant differences in religious variables, provides strong support for religion as the deciding variable (Hall, 1997, p. 41). This finding not only highlights religion’s importance as a whole, it also shows that the differences amongst Christians cannot be attributed to external factors. Religious beliefs have created a clear distinction among both groups and have led them to express themselves through different organization.

One of the most renowned organizations on the Christian Left is Sojourners. Founded by Jim Wallis in 1971, Sojourners catered to the more radical evangelical Christians and provided a strong alternative to movements such as the Moral Majority (Hall, 1997, p. 28). The movement, according to Wallis, first began with the foundation of Post-American in an attempt to address the issues Wallis and his friend felt the church had neglected for too long. The purpose of this movement was to challenge the commonly accepted notions of civil religion and bring to the forefront issues such as racism, poverty and war (Hall, 1997, p. 28).

The magazine specifically, and the Sojourners movement in general, was very successful at “exposing and addressing oppression in America and critiquing the principalities and powers driving the American economy, lifestyle and agenda” (Jantz, 2005, p. 17). Throughout its history, the magazine has addressed a large number of different issues, all relating to the areas that Wallis believed the mainstream Christian movement has failed to address. This has given Sojourners a unique voice in the Christian debate and allowed it to serve the Christian Left in a way that was very similar to how the Moral Majority served the Christian Right.

This connection can be clearly seen in the way in which Sojourners addressed two of the most important and controversial issues surrounding the church: racism and sexuality. In
discussing some of the major issues *Sojourners* has addressed throughout the years, Anita Jantz claims that racism has been amongst the most important. Wallis and *Sojourners* have focused on presenting and exploring the “culturally entrenched prejudices of white racism” and to show how these lead to other social ills (Jantz, 2005, p. 21). In this specific area *Sojourners* success was based not on solely bringing a new perspective to the issue at hand but also connecting the dots and showing how the effects of racism can be seen throughout society in regard to issues such as healthcare, poverty and violence.

Another issue which *Sojourners* successfully addressed was that of sexuality. Although many have been critical of this magazine for not providing more consistent coverage on the issue of homosexuality, *Sojourners* has been successful in recasting the issue of sexuality for Christians in a different light. By providing a consistent space where these issues could be discussed, the magazine introduced new ideas about sexuality and encouraged viewing sex as a gift from God (Jantz, 2005, p. 28). This view may seem mainstream now but this was not necessarily true back when the issue was first brought up, and it is because of organizations such as *Sojourners* that these ideas have become more mainstream.

The examples of the way *Sojourners* addressed the issues of racism and sexuality show that the Christian Left has had, and can continue to have, an influence on society. Yet, it is painfully clear that the voice of the Christian Left has been muted by the roar of the Right. Much has been written about the reasons for this phenomenon and many academics have come to the conclusion that political progressives are simply less likely to be religious. They believe that the muted Christian voice in the Democratic Party is a result of a lack of interest in religion. Although this view may be popular, it is not necessarily true.
In “Flouting Faith? Religious Hostility and the American Left: 1977-200,” Andrew Piper found that the left has become increasingly antagonistic towards religion but this is not necessarily due to a lack of religious fervor in progressive movements (p.756). The reason for this shift does not fall in line with the commonly stated view that religious people moved from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party because they were unsatisfied. According to Piper, the opposite is actually true. He argues that the religious shift towards the right occurred at a time when the left was not hostile towards religion and the antagonistic relationship between religion and the left only started after 1992 as a result of the increasing use of religion to support Republican goals (Piper, 2011, p. 769). The results of this study are encouraging for Christians on the left since it points to a reactionary reason for the Democratic parties divorce from religion.

*Current Status of Christianity in the U.S.*

The data from the 2012 election shows that the link between religion and political views is still very strong today. Not only did white evangelicals turn out in larger numbers than in the 2008 elections, they also strongly supported Romney, as did Catholics who attended church more than once a week (Schulzke, 2012). This data supports the hypothesis that religion still plays an influential role in religion and demonstrates the strength of the bond between white evangelicals and the Republican Party.

This connection is even further supported by other studies. In studying the effects of the Christian-Catholic dichotomy on presidential approval, Laura R. Olson and Adam L. Warber found that the strongest contributor to presidential approval was actually religious commitment and orthodoxy. Olson and Warber argue that in the period between 1992 and 2004 religion played a significant role as presidents continuously appealed to religious values in an attempt to
win votes -- and the citizens’ approval of the president were highly contingent on their religious affiliations, commitment and beliefs (p. 201).

The connection between Christianity and conservative politics has left many people feeling out of touch with the perceived goals and beliefs of the Church and without anywhere to turn. As supported by the Barna study and the account of Rev. Sandlin, the perception of Christianity is not one of openness and acceptance but one of unmoving dogma which leaves people who disagree with the Church feeling out of place and unwelcome. Despite the existence of the religious left, its current role in society seems to pale in comparison to that of the religious right although its sphere of influence seems to be growing through people like Jim Wallis and can be seen by the increasing religious talk of the Democratic Party and President Obama himself. The growth of influence in the religious left is an important and positive development but as the pendulum begins to swing there is a cautionary tale on the other side of the “pond.”

**Christianity in the UK**

Just like in the U.S. it is difficult to make any sort of accurate generalizations about religion and politics in the U.K. There have been a host of religious movements throughout British history that fall on both sides of the isle yet the whole of history seems to point towards a stronger connection between the Christian left and political movements. The aforementioned Conover, Crewe and Searing study found that although people in the U.K. and the U.S. use the same basic reasoning to justify their conception of rights, what these rights actually look like is very different in both countries. This finding is echoed by a recent study conducted by the British think-tank Demos. In a 2012 study on the effects of religious people on society they found that religious people in the U.K. were more likely to support politically progressive movements
They tend to associate with left-wing politics as they are more likely to value equality over freedom and have, historically, had a penchant for supporting progressive movements.

This does not mean that the Christian right in the U.K. has had no effect on society. More conservative religious movements and sentiments have been prominent in the Church of England which has had a strong influence. Yet, just as in the U.S. the effects of the Christian right seems to be larger, the historical influence of the left of center movements in the U.K. can arguably be felt more strongly in the present day than that exerted by more conservative religious movements.

The Historical Relationship between the Church and the Left

Much of the reason behind the influence of the Christian left on politics in the U.K. can be attributed to the historical relationship between several denominations in Britain and politically progressive movements. Going back as far as the latter part of the 18th Century, the Unitarian Church in the U.K. was being attacked and its members persecuted due to its opposition to the State Church and its support for the principles of the French Revolution (Ruston, paragraph 5). Still the relationship between the Unitarian Church and left of center movements did not end there as throughout the 19th and 20th Century the Church and its leaders played a large role in movements such as the abolition of slavery, women’s rights and the penal reform (Provost, paragraph 12).

A microcosm of the larger influence of the Unitarian Church in the U.K. as a whole can be found in the history of the Newington Green Unitarian Church. This church, built over 300 years ago and found in North London, is one of England’s oldest serving Unitarian churches.
This church has had historical ties to political radicalism and continues to be an influential leader in different civil rights movements. These ties can be traced back to its energetic beginnings with influential thinkers and reformers such as Richard Price and feminist Emily Wollstonecraft. The activeness of the Church continued to increase as the Industrial Revolution took hold and the city of London expanded beyond the area in which the Church had been founded. Seeing the poverty and misery surrounding the congregation, the church took action. Although self-reliance had been the norm up until this time, Newington Green Unitarian Church (N.G.U.C) saw the need for social responsibility and responded accordingly. The Church set up a charity school and a monitorial school and continuously revamped its efforts to provide education and help to the poor people in its vicinity (Absolute Astronomy, paragraph 20).

Recently, N.G.U.C has shown that its history of support for progressive movements is not a thing of the past as it took a stance on same-sex marriage. In 2008, N.G.U.C became the first Church in Great Britain to cease all wedding ceremonies until all couples attain equal marriage rights. Although they continue to hold blessings for both heterosexual and homosexual couples they decided to stop formal weddings. This earned them the title of “gay rights church” although they are not technically considered a “gay church.” Still, this proclivity towards progressive movements is not an attribute solely of the Unitarian Church (Absolute Astronomy, paragraph 30).

Another now world-renown religious progressive social movement that began in the U.K. can be found in the Salvation Army. This Church denomination was founded in 1865 by William and Catherine Booth. The purpose of the organization was to meet the spiritual and physical needs of the poor and it quickly grew into a transnational organization. Now a household name, the Salvation Army has become a prominent organization that is associated with help to the poor
all over the world. Despite some recent controversies on its stance on issues such as gay marriage, the origins of the movement are rooted in progressive thinking as they sought to help the individuals who needed help the most and are in line with the way in which most Churches in the U.K. acted around the time.

The U.K. does not only have mainstream Church movements who were created with the purpose of bringing about social change. The most prominent of these movements is, arguably, the Labour Church movement. The Labour Church movement was born out of the erratic economy consisting of high unemployment and inequality found in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries and was very closely tied to the Independent Labour Party (ILP). The Labour Church attempted to address these social ills brought about by the industrial and technological revolutions (Jones, p. 32-33).

The movement was inspired by former Unitarian minister John Trevor and served as a place where many highly religious people found a way to put their faith into action. Although many people argue that those that joined the Labour Church did so as a step in the way to secularism, a look into the leaders of the Church shows quite the opposite. Most of the people who joined this Church movement had Nonconformists backgrounds, which makes sense as independent churches were well respected within the Nonconformist movement and had very few other outlets when experiencing a crisis of faith (Bevir, p.3).

Yet, this aforementioned crisis of faith does not refer to a loss of faith among the leaders of the Labour Church but a difficulty in reconciling the Biblical literalism upheld at the time with the increasingly accepted Darwinism, historical criticisms of the Bible and their personal doubts. The solution the Labour Church found was in adopting an immanentist theology (Jones, p. 3-4). This ideology allowed them to reconcile Biblical truth with evolutionary theology as they were
able to claim that God is present in everything and had used natural means in order to accomplish his goals.

The immanentist theology was also important from the political perspective as it upheld to very important social viewpoints. First, it supported the idea that there was no sacred-secular distinction. God is in everything, they would argue, therefore everything is sacred. Secondly, and more important to the political goals of the movement, the immanentist theology meant that everyone has the divine in them (Jones, p.3). This latter tenant is of extreme importance as it affected the way in which the leaders organized the Church and also informed their understanding of socialism and the purpose of the Labour Church in society.

In regards to the organization of the Church, the idea that everyone has the divine with them was important as it led to a strong anti-clerical and democratic system within the Church. This led to a very unique way of conducting service and set the Labour Church apart from any other movement occurring at the time. Although there was no required way of running services Trevor did suggest an ideal which many other Churches within the movement accepted (Jones, p. 5). The unique aspect of these services is that although followers of the Labour Church believed in the Bible and were Christians, the teachings on Sunday did not always come out solely out of the Bible. Many times, social leaders would be invited to speak on Sundays and gave a message focused more on social issues than on biblical teachings. This was in large part due to the fact that those in the Labour Church believed that the instrument for bringing Gods Kingdom was not the Church itself but, actually, the Labour movement (Jones, p. 4).

The Labour Church’s purpose was not solely to educate its congregation on theology but also to encourage social action and forge a connection with the ILP. This was, in large part, due to the way in which members of the Labour Church party understood socialism and religion. For
the Labour Church, socialism was defined in terms of inner spirituality and a sense of brotherhood (Jones, p. 4). Although they did borrow from Marxist and Fabian tradition, they understood socialism in a more religious way.

Unfortunately, this understanding led to problems within the congregation and the leaders of the Labour Church. Specifically, the Church had a difficulty reconciling its claims of religious purity and political effectiveness (Jones, p. 6). As the movement began to grow, the leaders became divided as to whether the Church should focus on maintaining a unique religious identity and a strong theology or focus on growing the movement by welcoming everyone—religious and non-religious. This ultimately led to a decline in the religious language of the Labour Church and it began to lose its distinctiveness.

The religious nature of the movement continued to decline and it reached a point where people did not see the difference between attending a Labour Church service and an ILP meeting. The loss of religious overtones led to a decline in Church attendance and almost no Labour Churches were left post-WWII (Jones, p. 7). Yet, despite the decline and eventual disappearance of the Labour Church, its legacy lives on as much of its ideology and belief that Christians should be called to social action can be found in political thinkers in the later decades.

Richard Henry Tawney

Arguably the most influential thinker on the British left from the early to the mid-20th Century Richard Henry (R.H.) Tawney was born in Calcutta, India in 1880. He attended the Rugby School and furthered his education by studying modern history in Balliol College, Oxford. This decision proved to be very important as the school’s strong ethic of social service
combined with Tawney’s Anglicanism served to set the basis for his life work and thought. Upon his graduation from Oxford, Tawney moved to Toynbee Hall which served as the home for the Workers Educational Association. It was there that he realized that a structural change was required in order to effectively bring social justice to the poor and that charity was not enough (Graham, p. 91).

Tawney’s thought followed in the tradition of the Labour Church as it was based in a strong Christian-based ethical rhetoric (Clift, p. 315-316). Although Tawney believed his religious beliefs to be private and rarely talked about them in public, his beliefs informed all of his work and can be seen clearly in his writings. The Christian, ethical beliefs he espoused led to a strong egalitarian rhetoric which was very attractive to socialists and led to Tawney’s position of prominence among socialist thinkers in the U.K (Clift, p. 315).

He did not believe that capitalism was inherently evil or incorrect but rejected the 20th Century form of capitalism that existed in Great Britain. Tawney believed the increasing secularization of society in the U.K. had led to the creation of a toxic form of capitalism which he referred to as the “acquisitive society” (Chambers, p. 356). He defines the acquisitive society as one which is mainly characterized by selfish individualism. Capitalism in this form, Tawney argues, promotes the economic self-interest of individuals which leads to production in response to greed and insatiable acquisitiveness leading to a perversion of industrialism. This is the specific form of capitalism that he denounces as it tears apart the social fabric and creates demand for demand’s sake.

Tawney went as far as rejecting this form of capitalism in his personal life as he lived very simply and believed this should be made into public policy (Chambers, p. 357). Tawney believed that capitalism could be beneficial in raising the standard of living of nations as a whole
but only when it is controlled. When it is allowed to run rampant, and coupled with the secular culture which was emerging during his time, capitalism becomes corrupt and leads to high inequality which is negative for society. Tawney believed equality was a moral imperative and not simply a good goal to strive for. This was another reason for his simple lifestyle as he rejected the luxurious life that many capitalists admired.

Much of Tawney’s rhetoric was based on his rejection of the importance of individualism. His view of life was much more communitarian and this informed the way in which he thought about capitalism, rights and everything in between. Tawney would have agreed with economic libertarians in that it is important to protect private property but his reasoning for this need is very different. Tawney believed that the criterion for the success of commerce and industry is how successful these are in discharging a social purpose (Clift, p. 319). Maximization of profit was not the most important thing businesses should strive for; rather they should look to maximize the social good. Therefore, it flows from this, that the defense of private property is important not because it is the right of the owner but because there is a moral imperative in protective private property for the good of the owner and the workers (Clift, p. 317). As both owners and workers would not be able to survive without private property this should be protected for the good of everyone.

In a similar fashion Tawney believed in the importance of incentives and efficiency but believed that these two pillars were not enough. In *Equality*, Tawney argues that:

“‘There is no more fatal obstacle to efficiency than the revelation that idleness has the same privileges as industry, and that for every additional blow with the pick or hammer an additional profit will be distributed among shareholders who wield neither.’” (p.78)

Tawney understood that the picture of human beings being solely motivated by economic factors was incomplete and believed that incentives should involve more than just economic
considerations (Clift, p. 322). He rejected Adam Smith’s conception of the invisible hand as he believed that the evolution of the economic structure had rendered this idea obsolete (Clift, p. 325).

Tawney passed away in London in 1962 but his ideas are still influential today. His brand of ethical socialism is still influential in political circles today and his criticism of capitalism is still part of the regular rhetoric. Furthermore, his work has influenced many political movements throughout his life and in the decades after his death. Specifically, his way of thinking has been essential for the political movement known as the “third way.”

The British Third Way

Traditionally, politics is, in its broadest form, divided into conservatives and liberals. The definition of these terms may differ from country to country but even in multi-party systems, these are the biggest distinction in politics. As a result of the Christian socialist movements and of thinkers such as R.H. Tawney, a different approach was proposed in Great Britain, popularly referred to as the “third way” of politics. Recently this has been understood as an attempt to transcend the divide between the old style social democratic form of government and the neoliberal approach. In a way, it was an attempt to create a free market that delivers social justice and takes into consideration non-economic factors. Still, the roots of this conception of the third way of politics can be traced back even further to what was originally understood as the third way.

In an essay for the magazine Policy and Politics, Chris Grover argues that the original third way of politics, which was referred to by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, was not a compromise between free market and socialist policies but rather an alternative between two warring factions on the Left, an alternative between Labor gradualism and Communism (p.4). In
other words, what this third way sought to tackle the issues of the time in a way that considered the realities of the British political tradition. It attempted to find a way to improve the lifestyle of those in the lower rungs of society without calling for a violent overthrow of the capitalist structure that existed at the time.

One of the most prominent proposals of the original British third way, and one which represents the spirit of the movement quite well was the living wage. The living wage program in the U.K. represented a movement made up of three components as opposed to the definition that many people in the U.S. may associate with it. The living wage program proposed a minimum wage, family allowances and social ownership of economic activity (Grover, p. 6). Through this three-pronged approach the program attempts to compel an anarchical market to respond to a law which was higher than scarcity. This follows in the same spirit as the previous Christian socialist movements that believe the market should respond to more than economic incentives.

Recently, there have been several international movements which have begun in the U.K. and point towards the fact that the Christian socialist perspective is still alive and well. Jubilee 2000 was an international coalition movement that expanded to over 40 countries and advocated for debt forgiveness in the developing world. The idea behind this program was inspired by the year of Jubilee in the Bible which referred to the way in which every 50 years every debtor would be forgiven.

This grassroots movement began in England as its citizens saw an opportunity to stage demonstrations in the G-8 summit which would be held on British soil. The movement quickly gained support and Tony Blair agreed to meet with leaders of the movement in order to discuss viable alternatives. The success of the program was mixed but it was able to garner international
support and brought the issue of debt in the developing world to the forefront of discussion in the international arena.

Still, the advocates of Jubilee 2000 were not the only ones to take advantage of Great Britain’s new found prominence as leader of the G-8. The Make Poverty History movement was started in a similar spirit as Jubilee 2000 but had a more thorough platform to advocate. They had three specific demands: trade justice, debt forgiveness, and more and better aid to developing nations. This program was also successful as it led to the launch of the Commission for Africa and Great Britain and, at least nominally, put poverty in Africa as a main issue to discuss during the G-8 summit.

These two movements point towards the fact that the tradition of Christian, or ethical, socialism is still alive and well in Great Britain. This way of approaching politics has been a constant in British history and although conservative Christian movements have also existed none have been as successful or influential as those found on the Left.

The Status of Christianity in Politics in the U.K.

Despite the fact that Christian socialism has been a rich part of the political history of Great Britain, Christianity’s influence on British politics today is arguably minute. Although studies such as the one conducted by Demos, which point towards the activeness of Christians in the political and social arenas, the weight of the activity is rarely felt in the political arena. Much of this is due to the rampant secularization occurring in the U.K. today. The British Social Attitudes Survey found that about 50% of people in the U.K. do not belong to any religion. This is a large increase from the 31% of people who did not belong to any religion in 1983 and can account for a loss of influence of the Christian religion in the U.K.
In many ways, what is occurring in the U.K. as a whole is very similar to the experience of the Labour Church as it declined. As the Church attempts to advocate for social policies and has an active role in politics it has been swallowed by secular voices that may advocate for similar policies but lack the religious reasoning behind their beliefs. In an attempt to garner wider support outside the religious community the Church seems to have lost itself and by doing so has given up much of its influence in the U.K.

Conclusion

The examples found in the U.S. and the U.K. seem to show us a cautionary tale of two extremes. In both cases, Christianity has played an important role in the making of public policy even though the religious movements have supported different political ideologies. In both cases, the decisions made by religious leaders have also affected the way in which Christianity is viewed in both countries and the way in which the Church interacts with society in general. By allowing a specific understanding of Christianity and its social role to eclipse other voices in the conversation, the Church has lost much of its sphere of influence and is at risk of becoming unimportant to the political sphere.

Currently, everyone seems to be talking about and encouraging diversity. Whether it is in colleges, workplaces and even neighborhoods, people seem to believe that diversity is a positive attribute for any environment. Yet when it comes to religious beliefs, diversity of belief is not widely sought after or accepted. Christians on both sides of the political spectrum deny the veracity of others’ claims about the role of Christianity when they do not align with their own. This has also contributed to the one-sided appearance of the Church and a misunderstanding of what Christians actually believe.
In the political arena, this has alienated many people who may resound with the Christian faith but disagree with the Church’s stance on certain political issues. As the Pew study shows, spirituality in the U.S. is growing but religiosity is on the decline. This points to the fact that Churches have ceased to be places where people feel welcome and they have begun to search elsewhere for that community one would assume exists in the Church. Furthermore, by allowing certain factions to overtake the conversation, the Church gives up the opportunity for its members to be challenged and to be able to grow to own their faith.

Fortunately, the trend has begun to change. In the U.S. Christianity is no longer solely associated with the Republican Party or with conservative politics as prominent members of the left have boldly shown the way in which their faith influences their politics. Yet, the Church has been slow to recognize the breadth of belief that exists within its congregations. It would be foolish to say that Christians don’t realize the existence of the religious Left but many still argue that these beliefs are inconsistent with religious teachings and, in some extreme cases, go as far as saying that people who hold certain convictions cannot be considered to be Christian.

Although it is naïve to expect Christians to openly accept any new idea thrown at them, it is not ignorant to ask members of the Church to recognize the disagreements that exist amongst Christians and validate the legitimacy of their beliefs regardless of whether they agree with them on a personal level. By doing this, the Church will not only expand its sphere of influence in politics and society but also create spaces of conversation and learning for its members. The example of the religious right in the U.S. and the left in the U.K. show us what can happen when one voice is predominant. Many leaders have already begun to recognize this and enact changes, and it is time for the Church to get behind this movement and bring about open dialogue that will be beneficial to all parties in the long run.
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A Cautionary Tale of Two Extremes

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