

## **The American Socio-Political Spider Web and the Rise of Global Christianity**

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### **Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to articulate four of the primary features of the relationship between American Christianity and the major current socio-political worldviews popular within the American context. The four features are—1) our historically unique secular polarization in America, 2) the division in American religion reflecting that polarization, 3) the place of Adventism within this complex socio-political web, and 4) the role of America within the rising importance of globo-Christianity, or a Christianity that is explicitly focusing on global concerns. To sum up this article in brief, I will establish that there is a unique relationship between religion and politics in America with potentially philosophically significant implications for the corporate identity of Seventh-day Adventism that continually place us at risk of becoming “entangled” within the spider web of socio-political ideologies. Before proceeding, a few prefatory remarks may be helpful to explain just why avoiding the socio-political spider web is at times quite difficult.

### **Background**

Why does an individual identify with and maintain membership in a particular Christian (or other) denomination? Indeed, why should I belong to a larger group or church denomination at all, rather than just walk the Christian life alone (me, my Bible, and my Lord), or with a few local friends in a study group that splits every time it grows too large (house church)? It certainly would be easier to avoid many unpleasant disagreements this way; when the going gets tough we part ways. Or, to be

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realistic, surely just fitting myself into a local church's identity in the community (congregationalism) would be enough, wouldn't it? At smaller and more local levels, the average individual can still exert some personal influence (express their "individuality" and be noticed) and have at least a real democratic voice in the church's activities. Many younger people I talk to these days seem to only want to experience religion or church at this level, primarily because they want church to feel "meaningful." Perhaps this has always been true of the younger generation, although in today's complex, globalized, multi-cultural and pluralistic society this manifests itself in fresh ways.

But after everything has been said on the complex realities of today's world, the logically inevitable conclusion remains the same—unity is power and influence, and even most young people soon realize this as they mature through college and beyond. So what most individual Christians have chosen to do historically and continue to do today is to join faith communities that are larger than their personal influence. They submit to the possibility that the *corporate* identity to which they belong may not noticeably or meaningfully include and reflect their *personal* identity or contributions to the larger group. Seventh-day Adventism is one such "larger group." Yet, they still nevertheless submit to identification with the larger group's corporate identity because they have *enough* of a *shared worldview*, or way of looking at the world as a whole.<sup>1</sup> A shared identity always implies the existence of a correspondingly shared corporate worldview. So what does a worldview really mean within this context?

Although one could imagine many possible approaches to answering the above question (we Adventists traditionally have based our corporate

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<sup>1</sup> Our worldview affects everything we think, say, and do, including affecting our theological reflection (of course, one could also say our theological reflection affects our worldview). One's worldview reflects a collection of beliefs, some of which may be unconscious to us, about nature, animals, history, the meaning or purpose of life, concepts such as good and evil, as well as God and the nature of humanity as both individuals and as a collective, which introduces the concept of a *corporate worldview*. For some overviews discussing the concept of a worldview from different perspectives, see Philip Graham Ryken, *Christian Worldview* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); James P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); and David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

identity, and thus worldview, upon a biblically grounded doctrinal<sup>2</sup> and lifestyle distinctiveness which developed during a specific historical situation,<sup>3</sup> and directly anticipates an eschatological context,<sup>4</sup> which, interestingly, highlights America), philosophically and sociologically one of the primary purposes of most religious groups, churches, or ecclesiastical bodies, is to foster a *public witness* through their corporate identity that testifies to their internal spiritual moorings. As such, although spirituality may be discussed more frequently as an individual or personal matter in today's postmodern culture (and salvation is surely personal, whatever one may say of corporate salvation), when people of similar beliefs band together, there is the hope that together they can more effectively witness to their understanding of authentic spirituality for the individual. The refrain becomes, "Witness our love for each other! Don't you wish to believe and behave as we do?" Such persons strive for a specific public witness *through* their corporate identity, believing that God is more fully and clearly revealed through such a broader witness to people outside their group. Of course, such a corporate witness allows for the possibility of articulating a *corporate worldview* (which we assume successfully meshes the many nuanced individual worldviews of the members), meaning a group's beliefs and behaviors can be contrasted with

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<sup>2</sup> For excellent treatments on the traditional distinctive doctrinal aspects of the Seventh-day Adventist corporate identity, see Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ed., *Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009). Note especially, Johannes Kovar, "The Remnant and God's Commandments: Revelation 12:17," 113-126; Mathilde Frey, "Sabbath Theology in the Book of Revelation," 127-138; Gerhard Pfandl, "Identifying Marks of the End-Time Remnant in the Book of Revelation," 139-158; and Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, "Concluding Essay: God's End-Time Remnant and the Christian Church," 201-226. See also, George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 2004); George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Berrien Springs, MI: LithoTech, Andrews University, 1993); and P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1995, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> I have previously addressed a few of the complexities relating to socio-political worldviews and Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. See Michael F. Younker, "Adventist Eschatology in Relation to the Religious Left and the Religious Right," in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* Vol. 23, #2 (2012), 190-242.

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alternative corporate witnesses, identities, and worldviews, to observe the “end-result” of those who have chosen to live their lives together in a certain way.

There is a very natural consequence of the above situation within a modern pluralistic democratic society. After some time, elements of differing worldviews, whether purportedly religious or not, begin to compete with each other at a socio-political level, meaning they begin to engage society in such a way that all mainstream social, political, and economic issues are engaged and affected.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, every issue eventually becomes “political.” So it is not possible for anyone to ultimately hide from socio-political leanings or preferences. A worldview’s engagement or lack thereof (intentionally or not) on the issues of slavery, women’s suffrage, prohibition, civil rights, abortion, homosexual marriage, equitable economic policies, vaccinations for children, environmentalism, the teaching of Creationism in public schools, etc., are unavoidable, and also, always, in some manner or another, political. In other words, the intertwining of one’s religious convictions and politics is inevitable at a foundational level.

This should not surprise us. When religious groups become large enough, the logical consequence is that the varying religious worldviews will begin to compete with each other as well as compete with any secular worldviews. Put simply, and this remains very much true for Christians, “a worldview ultimately determines a person’s ideology in politics, religion,

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<sup>5</sup> There is, of course, a reciprocal, even paradoxical, relationship between one’s theology and one’s *worldview*. Which comes first, our theology or our worldview, is something akin to a chicken or egg argument. If, for example, one were to believe the world was mostly a good place making gradual progress, then one’s overall theology would reflect this; the same would be true in the reverse, of course. As such, appeals by some that “Christians need to reconstruct their theology in terms of the world in which we *actually* live” (emphasis supplied) will be made by many scholars. They claim that “theology takes place *within* a context, a worldview, of who we are and where we fit. Theology is not about ‘God and the world,’ but about God and a particular world, some concrete interpretation of the world, Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 64, 71.

and ethics,”<sup>6</sup> as well as economics.<sup>7</sup> Naturally, one primary concern of this broadened conception of a worldview is that “when a common philosophy of religion and politics coalesce into joined purpose and function, the character of government may become theocratic, that is, subjected to theological ideology as hurtful as secular despotism, for politicized religious belief seeks the enforcement of secular authority,”<sup>8</sup> keeping the importance of individual and religious liberty highlighted. This is true not only globally or nationally, but also in more localized contexts.

With all of the above in mind, I believe it is critical that the members of any healthy and dynamic group need to know who they are for their identity and worldview to thrive and be persuasive to others, and this is especially true of Adventists.<sup>9</sup> As such, below I will address, as noted above, 1) our unique secular socio-political polarization in America, 2) the growing divide in religion reflecting that polarization in America, 3) the place of Adventism within this complex socio-political web, and 4) the role of America within the rising importance of globo-Christianity.

### **1. The Contours of the Contemporary American Socio-Political Landscape**

As the past is quickly enough receding from our present generation, a brief review on U.S. history may prove helpful. It so happens that following World War I, from 1916-1980, political fluidity reigned in the United States, meaning none of the major political parties entrenched themselves within a large number of polarized positions on major issues for an enduring period of time. There were very few clearly established “party platforms” that lasted from one decade to the next. The positions of a given party, at least on many issues, could flow back and forth as the years went

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Johnston, *Tea Party Culture War: A Clash of Worldviews* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress Publishing, 2011), xiii.

<sup>7</sup> Jordan J. Ballor, *Ecumenical Babel: Confusing Economic Ideology and the Church’s Social Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press, 2010), 18. According to some, “Religion in large part now consists in an economic worldview, with ethics as the middle term,” Ibid. In other words, economics is an issue of concern for social ethics, which is related to one’s view of religion.

<sup>8</sup> Sylvester L. Steffen, *Religion and Civility: The Primacy of Conscience* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011), 250.

<sup>9</sup> Although not shared with socio-politics explicitly in mind, nevertheless see Reinder Bruinsma, “Identity: Being Sure about Who We Are,” in *Ministry* (February 2015), 6-9.

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by, with a given voting demographic (men, women, age, ethnicity) favoring alternating parties and respective presidential candidates as the decades passed. Presidential candidates from either party were capable of winning “landslide” elections, wherein the winner won a strong majority of voters in an overwhelming number of the States.<sup>10</sup> This was because no region of the country was overwhelmingly bound to a large political framework with clear positions on a wide range of issues for an enduring period of time. However, this fluidity is no longer the case. An increasingly rigid polarization is the current trend, and it is unprecedented in American history for such a lengthy period of time, one now spanning over 35 years.

Coinciding with the recognition of the rise of the American “culture war” around 1991 with sociologist James Davison Hunter’s classic book, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*,<sup>11</sup> and its use by Patrick J. Buchanan in a speech at the Republican National Convention in 1992 explicitly uniting religion and politics,<sup>12</sup> political polarization in the U.S. House of Representatives, Senate, and White House is currently cresting, in 2015, at the highest level since shortly after the end of the South’s Reconstruction in 1877 following the American Civil War.<sup>13</sup> This is seen clearly with more votes on significant bills in Congress aligning almost strictly alongside a politician’s party affiliation, presently Republicans (conservative-right) and Democrats (liberal-left, although I prefer the term

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<sup>10</sup> All website sources were checked as of April 27, 2015. See, for example, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_United\\_States\\_presidential\\_elections\\_by\\_Electoral\\_College\\_margin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_presidential_elections_by_Electoral_College_margin). See also, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/>. For example, in the 1950’s and 60’s, alternating Republicans, like Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, and Democrats, like Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, could each win “landslide” elections with over 86% of the electoral college votes. This was typical during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but no candidate has reached over 80% since Ronald Reagan in 1984, and it appears unlikely that another will any time soon.

<sup>11</sup> James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America: Making Sense of the Battles over the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics* (Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Patrick J. Buchanan stated, “there is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war,” as cited in George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (Yale University Press, 2007), 346.

<sup>13</sup> Ross Pomeroy, “Political Partisanship: In Three Stunning Charts,” at [http://www.realclearscience.com/journal\\_club/2015/04/24/political\\_partisanship\\_in\\_three\\_stunning\\_charts\\_109196.html](http://www.realclearscience.com/journal_club/2015/04/24/political_partisanship_in_three_stunning_charts_109196.html). See also [http://voteview.com/political\\_polarization.asp](http://voteview.com/political_polarization.asp); and Francis Wilkinson, “American is Coming Apart at the Seams,” <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-12-05/the-us-is-coming-apart-at-the-seams>.

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progressive-left as “classical liberalism” is similar to moderate conservatism today), than ever before in history,<sup>14</sup> on both domestic and foreign policy issues.<sup>15</sup> The most expensive and important domestic bill in U.S. history, the healthcare bill known as the American Affordable Care Act (also known as Obamacare) which was passed in March 2010 well illustrates this division.<sup>16</sup> Virtually all Democrats at every level supported it, while virtually all Republicans opposed it, with many even believing it unconstitutional. This type of polarization, on many types of bills and policies, is unprecedented for this long a duration of time. Two different “socio-political worldviews” have developed, and they are competing with each other. Importantly, unlike in some other democratic countries around the world that may have more than two major parties, the United States essentially has only two significant political parties today, creating a sharper and more unique *di*-polarization than is found in most other countries.

Although genuine “moderates” or “issue-based independents” (notably, frustration with the polarization has led some to declare as independents who are actually representatives of the most extreme positions of the major parties) are still alive and breathing amongst the more indifferent or

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<sup>14</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polarization\\_%28politics%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polarization_%28politics%29); <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-10-18/political-polarization-its-worse-than-you-think>; <http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/17/look-how-far-weve-come-apart/>; <http://www.livescience.com/8878-rising-rancor-nation-divisible-politics.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2013/10/24/congress-polarization-issues/>; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2013/06/05/it-wasnt-always-this-bad-the-growth-of-political-polarization-in-1-chart/>; <http://www.nationaljournal.com/against-the-grain/time-for-truth-in-labeling-obama-is-not-centrist-20140311>; [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/are-the-democrats-getting-too-liberal/2014/02/28/c0d42d7c-8d26-11e3-95dd-36ff657a4dae\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/are-the-democrats-getting-too-liberal/2014/02/28/c0d42d7c-8d26-11e3-95dd-36ff657a4dae_story.html); <http://today.duke.edu/2013/05/us-political-polarization-charted-new-study#video>.

<sup>16</sup> For example, <http://obamacarefacts.com/obamacare-poll/>; <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/news-and-events/quinnipiac-university-poll/search-releases/search-results/release-detail?What=&strArea=6;&strTime=3&ReleaseID=2056#Question021>; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2014/03/31/democrats-support-for-obamacare-surges/>. The healthcare law has been described as the “most partisan issue of the decade,” [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/obamacare-threatens-to-end-john-robertss-dream-of-a-nonpartisan-supreme-court/2015/02/27/325cd0cc-bcb3-11e4-8668-4e7ba8439ca6\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/obamacare-threatens-to-end-john-robertss-dream-of-a-nonpartisan-supreme-court/2015/02/27/325cd0cc-bcb3-11e4-8668-4e7ba8439ca6_story.html).

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uninformed general population<sup>17</sup> (although, note that “young adults like to think of themselves as independent . . . , [but] when it comes to politics, they’re more likely than not to lean to the left”<sup>18</sup>), self-identifying conservatives and liberals are at an all-time high,<sup>19</sup> and this is reflected clearly within those who do identify with one of the two major parties, Republicans or Democrats. There are now fewer “liberal Republicans” or “conservative Democrats” than ever before,<sup>20</sup> even as the number of “independents” has also reached historic highs, at 42%, for some of the complex reasons mentioned above promoting extreme groups.<sup>21</sup> This implies, however, that the other 58% surveyed through some polls are still true partisans.

Furthermore, if you happen to follow national and world news regularly (especially obsessively) through the media, the chances are higher you also have a more polarized view of the socio-political picture of America; in other words, the more informed you are through the news sources you *trust* most, the more one-sided and polarized your socio-political perspectives tend to become.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the mass popularity of so-called extreme

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.livescience.com/18177-americans-political-polarization-exaggerated.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Jesse J. Holland, “Many Millennials are Skipping Church, Marriage and Political Affiliations,” <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/run-down/millennials-skipping-church-marriage-political-affiliations-study-finds/>.

<sup>19</sup> Note <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166787/liberal-self-identification-edges-new-high-2013.aspx>. See also, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/24/the-two-key-factors-behind-our-polarized-politics/>.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/122672/Conservative-Democrats-Liberal-Republicans-Hard-to-Find.aspx>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166763/record-high-americans-identify-independents.aspx>.

<sup>22</sup> For readers not familiar with contemporary American culture, my intent here is to highlight the distinct differences existing today in news reporting by major media companies based in the United States, which are in fact protected by a number of free press laws. As Natalie Stroud’s recent work, *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice* (Oxford University Press, 2011) illustrates, even though the U.S. press is indeed *free* from any overbearing government control, this does not even remotely mean that media organizations are *unbiased*. The extent to which this is the case is irrelevant to this study, although for illustrative purposes *MSNBC* is widely and openly considered sympathetic to the more (progressive-left) liberal Democratic Party, while *Fox News* is widely considered to be more sympathetic to the more (conservative-right) Republican Party. Rather, that there are genuinely competing news sources that offer selectively different versions of daily news and



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groups are seen readily with the rise of names like the progressive Occupy Wall Street movement and the conservative Tea Party,<sup>23</sup> which have “secularized” the older strictly “moral-religious” side of the culture war with an especial focus on economics. Importantly, and this mustn’t be forgotten, the broad contours of this “culture war” are not going away anytime soon. This is because a large scale historic migration is underway from the countryside to urban centers and new megacities,<sup>24</sup> meaning the culture war will continue to grow in ever deepening ways. As Laura Meckler and Dante Chinni concur with David Wasserman, sometimes “politics hangs on culture and lifestyle more than policy,” and most rural or countryside multi-generational Americans vote Republican, while the growing and heavily recent immigrant populated cities vote Democrat.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, despite some current trends supporting the growth of leftism,

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events is what matters. (Incidentally, that various U.S. media sources give such differing accounts of the news testifies to their relative autonomy from government interference). “In *Niche News*, Natalie Stroud investigates how people navigate these choices and the political implications that their choice ultimately entails. By combining an analysis of the various news formats that citizens rely on with innovative surveys and experiments, she offers the most comprehensive look to date at the extent to which partisanship influences our media selections. At the heart of *Niche News* is the concept of ‘partisan selective exposure,’ a behavior that leads individuals to select news sources that match their own views. This phenomenon helps explain the political forces at work behind media consumption. Just as importantly, she finds that selective exposure also influences how average citizens engage with politics in general. On one hand, citizens may become increasingly divided as a result of using media that coheres with their political beliefs; on the other hand, partisan selective exposure may encourage participation. Ultimately, Stroud reveals just how intimately connected the mainstream media and the world of politics really are, a conclusion with significant implications for the practice of American democracy,” back cover.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ritholtz.com/blog/2011/11/occupy-wall-street-vs-tea-party/>; [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/post/occupy-wall-street-vs-tea-party/2011/10/13/gIQA3YrViL\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/post/occupy-wall-street-vs-tea-party/2011/10/13/gIQA3YrViL_blog.html); <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2011/11/11/the-occupy-vs-tea-party-scorecard>; <http://thehill.com/opinion/mark-mellman/198157-mark-mellman-tea-party-vs-occupy-wall-street>.

<sup>24</sup> Note <http://www.cnn.com/id/101469042>.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/02/09/1274795/-Democrats-are-from-cities-Republicans-are-from-exurbs#>; and <http://thinkprogress.org/politics/2014/02/21/3315681/demographic-secrets-internet/>.

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it appears that our country is destined for a stalemate in the intermediate future; I have no reason to predict that either side will win.<sup>26</sup>

There are some interesting consequences of the above situation that relate to our ability to promote unity as Americans that may be reflected in religious ways, as will be discussed below. For example, as county-level voting maps of the past few U.S. Presidential elections indicate, especially since 1992, smaller more populated zones (“liberal-blue” coasts and cities) are increasingly at odds with the geographically larger but less populated (“conservative-red” heartland) rural areas. There truly is a cultural divide. Naturally, a strong political polarization has emerged between these regions that is very real among both the general populace and the politicians, who naturally must cater to their constituents who elected them.<sup>27</sup> It really is remarkable to see a 2008 U.S. presidential *county-level* political map that is *geographically* 80% “red-Republican” and realize the 20% “blue-Democrat” side won the presidency fairly easily with 67% of the electoral votes, reflecting the population density of where the majority live, namely, a few major cities. In fact, in recent presidential elections, geographically, the political campaigns have often been simplified to a few consistent “battleground states,” and even more intriguingly, a mere handful of “battleground counties” to determine the winner of the U.S. presidential election.<sup>28</sup> Again, it must be pointed out that the enduring and very sharply defined polarization described above has never before occurred in our country’s history in a way quite like the past 35+ years. Especially prior to 1992, there were not enduring “battleground states” quite like what the U.S. has seen since 1992. America has become more divided socio-politically in recent decades than it has ever been before.

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<sup>26</sup> [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2014/02/11/do\\_demographics\\_really\\_work\\_against\\_the\\_gop\\_121538.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2014/02/11/do_demographics_really_work_against_the_gop_121538.html).

<sup>27</sup> See <http://freedomslighthouse.net/2012-presidential-election-electoral-vote-map/>; <http://www.city-data.com/forum/elections/549854-2008-presidential-election-county-map.html>; <http://politicalmaps.org/maps-of-the-2008-us-presidential-election/>; <http://politicalmaps.org/>; [http://dsl.richmond.edu/voting/congressional\\_elections.html](http://dsl.richmond.edu/voting/congressional_elections.html); <http://dsl.richmond.edu/voting/statelevel.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Kelli Shiroma, “Swing States: Who are the Voters Deciding America’s Next President?”, in <http://www.neontommy.com/news/2012/11/battleground-counties-in-swing-states-presidential-election-special-report>.

## 2. Religion within the Socio-Political Polarization

While there is surely some socio-political identity mobility amongst the members of most major religious groups, the recent trend of all major religious groups and denominations, including Christianity since 1980, has been to combine their religious identities with a *single* socio-political identity in order to gain greater influence and power. This was a logical result (though which came first is an obvious question) of the greater polarization of America's developing political reality, and combined various religious identity's convictions and emphases on any number of moral/social issues with secular or mainstream political positions and emphases. Note clearly that many churches still officially espouse political neutrality, but despite such professed neutrality, a survey of their members that do participate in politics often reveals a clear bias toward either the Right or the Left. Below I will outline some of the basic features of the "religious right" and the "religious left."

### 2.1 The Religious Right

The rise of the so-called Religious Right<sup>29</sup> (also identified with labels like the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition) in the 1980's and 1990's matches the profile of religious people seeking a socio-political identity to increase their influence over society. The Religious Right has been pointed out and strongly emphasized by several prominent Adventists of differing theological persuasions during the past 25 years, almost unanimously predicting a central role for the Religious Right in the creation of a Sunday law, which I have critiqued.<sup>30</sup> In brief, the Religious Right represents a coalition of several conservative or traditional Christian groups and

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<sup>29</sup> For what the "Religious Right" is as a movement, see Patrick Hynes, *In Defense of the Religious Right: Why Conservative Christians Are the Lifeblood of the Republican Party and Why that Terrifies the Democrats* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Current Books, 2006); Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Glenn H. Utter and John W. Storey, *The Religious Right* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> I believe this is possible, but not necessarily what will happen, specifically, it may not come solely from the Right. Note my own efforts to chart the significance of our attention to this issue in Younker, "Adventist Eschatology in Relation to the Religious Left and the Religious Right;" see n.4. See also, Marvin Moore, *Could It Really Happen?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007), 117-136; and G. Edward Reid, *Sunday's Coming!* (Fulton, MD: Omega Productions, 2005), 94-106.

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denominations (in particular the so-called traditional evangelicals) that *share enough of a worldview* to combine into a single socio-political identity; in their case, the Republican Party in the United States. That worldview, in Christianized language, could be loosely described as the “capitalistic legal/moral gospel” perspective. It is important to note that while some Religious Right advocates do desire to create a union of church and state, the Religious Right also has many advocates of religious liberty and sympathizers to what could be described as a more libertarian approach to church and state issues concerning morality.<sup>31</sup>

What matters most for the Religious Right is the individual’s morality, which is to be “guided” legislatively to varying degrees (especially on matters of marriage and abortion), while the individual is to be on their own to increase their socio-economic standing and wealth, which is surely sanctified wealth if they are moral and following the guidelines. Obedience to the moral (10 Commandments, with Sunday substituted for Sabbath) side of the law, namely a biblical marriage and honesty in business dealings, etc., is what is of paramount significance. That the wealth generated by this view will reach the poor or less fortunate is assumed as a given (and is often true, contra popular perception, as conservatives are far more generous in giving their wealth away than progressives/liberals<sup>32</sup>), and is to

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<sup>31</sup> For some adherents to this view, see Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Ronald H. Nash, *Poverty and Wealth: The Christian Debate Over Capitalism* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1986); and James P. Gills and Ronald H. Nash, *A Biblical Economics Manifesto* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House Press, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> As Richard Land notes, “In his book, *Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth About Compassionate Conservatism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), [Arthur] Brooks discovered that approximately equal percentages of liberals and conservatives give to private charitable causes. However, conservatives gave about 30 percent more money per year to private charitable causes, even though his study found liberal families earned an average of 6 percent more per year in income than did conservative families. This greater generosity among conservative families proved to be true in Brooks’ research for every income group, ‘from poor to middle class to rich,’” [http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/casting\\_stones/2008/04/conservatives-give-more-to-cha.html#CWrdiZVGRBSKyQ6p.99](http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/casting_stones/2008/04/conservatives-give-more-to-cha.html#CWrdiZVGRBSKyQ6p.99). See also, Arthur C. Brooks, *Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth About Compassionate Conservatism: America’s Charity Divide: Who Gives, Who Doesn’t, and Why It Matters* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006); and [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/21/opinion/21kristof.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/21/opinion/21kristof.html?_r=0). Interestingly, demonstrating the tension at differing levels of the

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be done outside of the federal government, so far as possible, through voluntary private institutions like churches, local charities, and on occasion local governments.

Of course, some members of the Religious Right also pursue their agenda through a postmillennial “kingdom on earth” eschatological lense, meaning, they hope to create a heaven on earth before Christ’s second coming, which comes *after* the millennium in Rev 20:1-10. This is evident in much of the thinking behind Christian Reconstructionism.<sup>33</sup> However, it must be noted, not all members of the Religious Right are united on a single view of the “millennium”<sup>34</sup> or the ideals of Reconstructionism; both conservative Protestants and Catholics hold differing views among themselves, with the Catholic Church favoring an Augustinian amillennialism, “equating the Christian Church with the realized Millennium and postponing the Second Coming of Christ into the nonimminent future.”<sup>35</sup>

Historically, it is critical to point out that conservative Christians had a respectable place in higher education prior to World War I, and as such also had a corresponding socio-political presence by default. The radical impact that World War I had on society shifted public opinion greatly concerning God and religion in ways that would require Christianity to react. American fundamentalism was one such related response, wherein conservatives retreated from the public sphere from the 1920’s to 1970’s, especially after defeats in the eyes of the public following battles over

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debate, many liberals incorrectly believe that liberals are more charitable. For example, Timothy R. Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 68-69.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen E. Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 163-176; and Adam C. English, “Christian Reconstruction after Y2K: Gary North, the New Millennium, and Religious Freedom,” in *New Religious Movements and Religious Liberty in America* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 107-118.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben, ed., *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Baylor University Press, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Catherine Wessinger, “Millennialism in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in Wessinger, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16.

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evolution in public schools.<sup>36</sup> The current iteration of conservative Christianity through the Religious Right has been almost completely shut out of higher education since the 1920's, and it is highly unlikely they will be able to return in any strength in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for a variety of reasons, leaving the mainstream academy first to the Religious Left from the 1930's through 1969, and then finally the secular left,<sup>37</sup> where the situation remains today. Most secular university faculty lean left in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With the above in mind, if a year were to be given for the official birth date for the contemporary Religious Right, it would be 1980, when the Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan ran for president and won, and Reagan's Republican Party adopted a few of the concerns promoted by the Christian Right expressed by individuals like popular evangelist Jerry Falwell, who founded the Moral Majority.<sup>38</sup> Although it must be noted that the conservative impulses of more fundamentalist leaning or conservative Protestant Christians had intersected with politics earlier in the century, they had never quite crystalized together in the way the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition would do so with the Republican Party after 1980.

In particular, prior to 1980, Catholics were mostly Democrats, as illustrated by Catholic politicians like presidential hopeful Al Smith in

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<sup>36</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York, NY: Random House, 2000), 176-177. In particular, note the Scopes Trial in 1920, "a clash between two utterly incompatible points of view," *Ibid.*, 176. Creationists won this particular battle on legal grounds, but the consensus of the world of public opinion concluded that "fundamentalists belonged to the past; they were the enemies of science and intellectual liberty, and could take no legitimate part in the modern world. . . . [T]he secularists won the battle and, by pouring scorn on the fundamentalists, seemed to have vanquished them by showing that they could not and should not be taken seriously. The fundamentalists went quiet after the Scopes trial, the liberals gained control of the denominations, and there seemed to be a *détente*," *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), vii.

<sup>38</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_right](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_right). However, it must be noted that a primary issue for Falwell, namely, repealing *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. bill legalizing abortion that was passed in 1973, never made much progress during Reagan's two terms in office. "Ronald Reagan's successful bid for the presidency certainly drew heavily on conservative Protestant and more specifically, fundamentalist support," Eugene F. Provenzo, *Religious Fundamentalism and American Education: The Battle for the Public Schools* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1990), 3.

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1928 and John F. Kennedy in 1960. However, after 1980, over the following decade a number of Catholics joined with conservative Republican Christians on the Right, a relationship made attractive because they shared similar positions against abortion and gay marriage. Hence, the modern picture of the Religious Right can't be said to truly begin until 1980, when conservative Catholics began slowly joining conservative Protestants around a single socio-political rallying flag, the Republican Party, and its candidate, a somewhat unwilling Ronald Reagan.

I would be remiss at this point to neglect to mention one of the primary motives that actually ignited the Religious Right in the first place, and that would be the politically liberal evangelical Democratic president Jimmy Carter's involvement (although he didn't initiate it) in using the IRS (Internal Revenue Service of the U.S. government) to desegregate some conservative Christian schools like Bob Jones University in the 1970's.<sup>39</sup> Yet, despite this very poor choice upon which to initiate their political activism in the eye of public opinion, the Religious Right also emphasized a number of other touchy and more controversial issues, such as the government's involvement in issues like abortion and gay marriage, alongside prayer and the teaching of Creationism vs evolutionism in public schools. Collectively, these latter issues are the real reason the evolving Religious Right became influential politically, and indeed, for most of the movement's eventual members, these latter issues constitute the real reason the Religious Right grew amongst Christianity generally. Interestingly, it may be accurate to assert that the Religious Right only gains socio-political strength relative to the proactive nature of the secular and Religious Left. When the Left is quiescent, the Right is seldom able to muster up support amongst the general populace.

The future of the Religious Right is difficult to predict. Given what will be shared below about the Religious Left, in combination with what

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Wolraich, *Blowing Smoke: Why the Right Keeps Serving Up Whack-job Fantasies about the Plot to Euthanize Grandma, Outlaw Christmas, and Turn Junior into a Raging Homosexual* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2010), 33-35; Randall Herbert Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America* (Philadelphia, PA: Basic Books, 2006), 13-15; and Kenneth J. Collins, *Power, Politics and the Fragmentation of Evangelicalism: From the Scopes Trial to the Obama Administration* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 97-105.

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has been noted above about the increasing fragmentation geo-socially<sup>40</sup> in America, it appears the Religious Right will remain, and endure, but in an ever increasing and contentious co-existence and dialogue with the secular left and Religious Left.<sup>41</sup> Simply put, the Religious Right will not likely penetrate very deeply into the heavily populated cities where the secular left and Religious Left are dominant in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>42</sup>

### 2.2 *The Religious Left*

On the flip side from the Religious Right, as indicated above, there now exists a still rising Religious Left,<sup>43</sup> which aligns very closely with the Democratic Party in the U.S. in 2015.<sup>44</sup> As Steven Shiffrin recently

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<sup>40</sup> Note also the views of those in the Religious Right, like Patrick J. Buchanan, *Suicide of a Superpower: Will America Survive to 2025?* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2011), 123-161. White Americans, predominantly Republican and heartland dwellers, are on the decline. "According to the 2010 Census white Americans will be a minority in 2041.... If the end of white America is a cultural and demographic inevitability, 'What will the new mainstream of America look like—and what ideas or values might it rally around?'" Ibid., 125. See also, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2015/03/daily-chart-5>.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, the uncertainty expressed in D. G. Hart, "Left Turn? Evangelicals and the Future of the Religious Right," in *The Future of Religion in American Politics*, ed. Charles W. Dunn (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 129-152. As Hart concludes, "faith-based politics in the United States might be much less Republican in the future than it is now. . . . In fact, the similarities between the emerging evangelical Left and [William Jennings] Bryan's progressive populism suggest that the religious Right is actually an aberration within the history of evangelical politics," Ibid., 144. Similarly, note that following the declining influence of Religious Right leaders Ted Haggard, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson, "the lions of the movement were passing from the scene, but a passing of the baton to a new generation of national [Religious Right] leaders was nowhere in sight," Stephen Mansfield, *The Faith of Barack Obama: Revised and Updated* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011), xxii.

<sup>42</sup> See n.25.

<sup>43</sup> For a primer on the views of the Religious Left, see, see Rebecca T. Alpert, ed., *Voices of the Religious Left: A Contemporary Sourcebook* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000); Jan Linn, *Big Christianity: What's Right With the Religious Left* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); and Frederick Clarkson, ed., *Dispatches from the Religious Left* (Ig Pub, 2008). For a critical assessment of their movement, see Ronald H. Nash, *Why the Left is Not Right: The Religious Left: Who They Are and What They Believe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

<sup>44</sup> Amy Sullivan, *The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats Are Closing the God Gap* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2008). Sullivan is explicit on her reading of the socio-politics: "The 1980 election had forged a strong and enduring bond between right-leaning



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observed, “Although the mass media tend to ignore it, there is a strong religious Left in the United States.”<sup>45</sup> As such, although the Religious Left is a more complex movement,<sup>46</sup> and has been less organized in some ways than the Right and thus often ignored, I would suggest alongside Daniel Flynn that it actually has historical roots as deep as the Right that directly contribute to the shape of the contemporary political polarization in America.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to the “capitalistic legal/moral gospel” of the Right (free enterprise, legal opposition to gay marriage, anti-abortion, support for Creationism and prayer in schools), the Left’s gospel can be encapsulated in the phrase, “economic-prosperity/social gospel,” which it pursues for the sake of the “common good” of society.<sup>48</sup> It is primarily concerned with

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Christians and the Republican Party. From the 1990’s onward, evangelicals would become a key Republican constituency, accounting for more than a third of the total GOP vote in presidential elections. Conservative broadcasters such as Falwell, Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson, and Focus on the Family’s James Dobson would gain increasing recognition in the media and in Washington as the dominant political voice of American evangelicalism and as fierce Republican partisans,” *Ibid.*, 44. As the title of her book indicates, however, she anticipates a reaction to the above from the Democratic side of the political spectrum.

<sup>45</sup> Steven H. Shiffrin, *The Religious Left and Church-State Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1. “In sharp contrast to the wealth of studies on the Christian Right, there is a paucity of studies on the religious Left,” Corwin Smidt, Lyman Kellstedt, and James Guth, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 279.

<sup>46</sup> Chris Han, “Where is the Religious Left?” at <http://augustinecollective.org/augustine/where-is-the-religious-left>. See also, Robert Anthony Wilkens-Iafolla, *What Religious Left? The Role of Religion in Progressive Politics* (MA Thesis at the University of Southern California, May 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Daniel J. Flynn, *A Conservative History of the American Left* (New York, NY: Random House, 2008), 11-18.

<sup>48</sup> “The Religious Left is a world-view based on Judeo-Christian values which emphasizes social justice rather than personal morality. The Religious Left is also called religious humanism, where the purpose of morality is the benefit of humans and discipleship consists of justice for the oppressed rather than a stand for personal righteousness,” Michael Bindner, [http://xianleft.blogspot.com/2004\\_06\\_01\\_archive.html](http://xianleft.blogspot.com/2004_06_01_archive.html). See also, Deal W. Hudson, *Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States* (New York, NY: Threshold Editions, 2008), 152-153. The “common good” is a very popular theme with Catholics and the Religious Left, with a wide number of books appearing recently emphasizing the theme. See Charles Gutenson with Jim Wallis, *Christians and the Common Good: How Faith Intersects with Public Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011); David Hollenback, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*

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decreasing poverty, improving social inequalities of various sorts, and resolving various other social ills and illnesses,<sup>49</sup> in addition to other contemporary globalist concerns like climate change<sup>50</sup> and broad-based (multi-faith) ecumenism.<sup>51</sup> Its key figures in recent years have been Jim Wallis<sup>52</sup> and Ron Sider. Other names would include Mark Noll,<sup>53</sup> Randall Balmer,<sup>54</sup> Brian McLaren, and David Gushee.<sup>55</sup>

Following the fundamentalist Right's retreat from the public sphere and declining influence during the 1920's-1970's, the more liberal mainline Protestant churches during this period constituted what would be called the Religious Left in the United States. They exercised a significant influence throughout higher education, while outside America the Religious Left manifested itself in an even more radical form of direct social engagement

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(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Peter J. Casarella, ed., *Jesus Christ: The New Face of Social Progress* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> For a sample of how the Christian Left views a wide range of contemporary issues in the public socio-economic sphere, see Brantley W. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> "It is fair to say that few contemporary moral/policy issues offer a more trenchant demarcation of the left/center vs. right boundary line in American evangelical Christianity . . . [than] climate change [with] other creation care issues." "And the right appears deeply uncomfortable with this fact," David P. Gushee, *In the Fray: Contesting Christian Public Ethics, 1994-2013* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 128.

<sup>51</sup> See for example, Jan G. Linn, *Big Christianity: What's Right with the Religious Left* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2006); and Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> For example, see Jim Wallis, *Who Speaks for God?: An Alternative to the Religious Right—A New Politics of Compassion, Community and Civility* (Random House, 1996); Jim Wallis, *Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It: God's Politics—A New Vision for Faith and Politics in America* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2005); and Jim Wallis, *On God's Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned about Serving the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>54</sup> Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts Faith and Threatens America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Incidentally, Gushee would describe himself as a "centrist." He has also written a very good introduction to religion and American politics, David P. Gushee, *The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008).

through liberation theology.<sup>56</sup> While it is often true that the Religious Left is more theologically liberal in recent times owing to its relationship to more liberal mainline churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that embraced theistic evolution, etc., this is not necessarily the case historically, nor in the present. It is possible for an adherent of the Religious Left to be theologically conservative (holding Right leaning views on moral and theological issues), but socio-politically very Leftist concerning economic matters, so much so that their overall Leftist leanings dominate their political affiliations.<sup>57</sup> It should be noted, however, that such dipolar perspectives within Leftists are becoming harder to maintain as the secular Left entrenches itself more firmly within views more naturally compatible with liberal theology and moral values. Additionally, although there are also libertarian leanings in some Leftists, the same as with the Right, such libertarians typically apply their views exclusively to so-called personal morality and not to socio-economic theories.

It is important to emphasize that in many ways, the Religious Left and Right were at times the same groups and people prior to 1980 and the development of our contemporary socio-political identities, prior to when the culture wars began, and that both sides have voices that encourage religious liberty, even if slightly differing definitions of it.<sup>58</sup> The complex nature of this history is part of the reason why many today remain confused, and mistake previous generations of Christian activists (such as William Jennings Bryan and U.S. president Woodrow Wilson) as

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<sup>56</sup> See Humberto Belli and Ronald Nash, *Beyond Liberation Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 15, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Technically, “the term *religious left* normally refers to religious people who hold liberal or progressive political views regardless of theological orientation. Many of the more vocal proponents of the religious left today hold distinctly nonliberal theologies,” Paul Razor, “Identity, Covenant and Commitment,” 9-16, in *A People So Bold*, ed. John Gibb Millspaugh (Boston, MA: Skinner House Books, 2010), 15. While this may be true, the majority of the religious left also have somewhere between moderate to liberal (by the common use of these terms) theological views. Razor certainly sounds an optimistic ecumenical note that “recently some encouraging signs suggest that a revitalized religious left is emerging,” and that “overcoming our suspicion of public religious discourse . . . may put us in conversation with those speaking prophetically from other faith perspectives, creating possibilities for collaborative justice work,” *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> For example, from the Right, see Ronald H. Nash, *Freedom, Justice and the State* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980).

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precursors to the Religious Right,<sup>59</sup> when they may have been just as much extreme Leftists by the present use of the term.<sup>60</sup> To aid in clarifying this point, generally, it appears true that most Leftists prior to 1980 more readily identified with postmillennialism, the idea that Christ would return after we had perfected things for a thousand years here on earth. This idea permeated the origins of American political progressivism,<sup>61</sup> which was later translated easily enough into a form that today's secular science-driven liberals can embrace. Both are committed to improving the here and now as their primary focus.

Notwithstanding religious liberty as an ideal that moderates of both the Right and Left can espouse, it is also very true that totalitarian tendencies represent the extremes of both the stereotypical Right *and* Left, who in many ways often *think* the same way, they just apply their similar *way of thinking* (psycho-philosophical) towards different moral, social, and

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<sup>59</sup> Glenn H. Utter and John Woodrow Storey, *The Religious Right: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 78. For example, the well known champion of Creationism in schools, William Jennings Bryan, undoubtedly had an influence "on the development of the religious right" in the 1920's. However, "despite his association with fundamentalist opposition to evolution theory, Bryan's political life involved the pursuit of objectives that cannot readily be associated with a religious right ideology, then or now," *Ibid.* The same holds true for the then future Democratic president Woodrow Wilson, a Leftist icon of progressivism today. It was none other than Wilson who once said in 1905, "There is a mighty task before us and its welds us together. It is to make the United States a mighty Christian nation, and to christianize the world," J. W. Schulte Nordholt, *Woodrow Wilson: A Life for World Peace*, tr. Herbert H. Rowen (Las Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 47. Noteworthy is that Ellen White singled out Bryan's economic vision as deeply flawed. See Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (1923), 331.

<sup>60</sup> "Most religiopolitical activism in the United States originated from the left until at least the late 1970's. This fact makes the absence of the religious left from discussions of contemporary religion all the more curious," Laura R. Olson, "Whither the Religious Left? Religiopolitical Progressivism in Twenty-First-Century America," in *From Pews to Polling Places: Faith and Politics in the American Religious Mosaic*, ed. J. Matthew Wilson (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 56. For a detailed study on the ambiguities of the Left and Right in mainstream American culture and society, see Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York, NY: Random House, 2007); and Jonah Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés: How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2012), 76-83.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew S. Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5.

theological ends at different times and in differing contexts.<sup>62</sup> Accordingly,

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<sup>62</sup> The issue is a *philosophical* one of a quite technical nature, which is why many historians and theologians continue to fail in understanding it and thus misconstrue its nature to the general public. Both the far Religious Right and far Left are, stereotypically, equally Platonic and idealistic, they just focus their parallel methods and energies on different cultural objects (e.g., “Scripture” and “Nature/Science”) in a scientific, Platonic, and Cartesian (dualistic) way, leading to a clash at the level of applied and societal ethics. For the pervasiveness of platonic-cartesian dualism in modern Western thought, see, for example, Louis S. Berger, *Humanity’s Madness: Consequences of Becoming Literate* (Forsyth, GA: Forsyth Books, 2011). In general, both the Right and the Left are equally avoiding the actual philosophical questions raised by the clash of the “two cultures” of the *sciences* and the *humanities*, a mostly cloistered academic debate at present. The *real* issue of these two cultures is poignantly raised by Gary Madison: “the greatest problem we face is . . . that of reconciling . . . the demands of science with other, more traditional values. This has been labeled the problem of the ‘Two Cultures.’ What is the relation between so-called scientific facts on the one hand and humanistic, religious, and other, nonscientific values on the other hand?” Gary Brent Madison, *Understanding: A Phenomenological-Pragmatic Analysis* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 10. The only way to understand the embeddedness of the paradoxical dualisms the Right and Left both contain is to more deeply examine their philosophical presuppositions at the ontological and epistemological levels of their ideologies. This study cannot penetrate into these issues in detail, but for some works engaging such issues from differing perspectives from a theological background, see David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communion Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996); David L. Schindler, *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); David C. Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013); Peter Jones, *One or Two: Seeing a World of Difference* (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 2010); Fernando Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005); Fernando Canale, *Secular Adventism: Exploring the Link Between Lifestyle and Salvation* (Peruvian Union University, 2013); Milton Scarborough, *Comparative Theories of Nonduality: The Search for a Middle Way* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009); and Douglas Sloan, *Insight-Imagination: The Emancipation of Thought and the Modern World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983). From more philosophical and political perspectives, see Michael Polanyi, *The Logic of Liberty* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Gary Brent Madison, *The Logic of Liberty* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986); Pauli Pylkkö, *The Aconceptual Mind: Heideggerian Themes in Holistic Naturalism* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 1998); Louis S. Berger, *The Unboundaried Self: Putting the Person Back Into the View from Nowhere* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2005); Tere Vadén, *Heidegger, Žižek, and Revolution* (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2014); Clark Coogan, *Escape from Planet Lame: Finding Wisdom and Happiness in the Age of Information* (Jacksonville, FL: Plain Thinking, 2005); Floyd Merrell, *Sensing Semiosis: Toward the Possibility of Complementary Cultural ‘Logics’* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1998); Floyd Merrell, *Processing Cultural*

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as Mark Edwards correctly perceives, even within purportedly conservative (Right leaning) evangelicalism itself, “evidence . . . shows that the evangelical left and right cannot be segmented so easily. Historically, both [religious] parties have sought to save their souls by gaining the whole world.”<sup>63</sup> Again, this time beyond only evangelicalism, Michael Horton similarly observes, “in many ways mirroring the Religious Right’s confusion of Christ’s kingdom of grace with his coming kingdom in glory and the latter with the triumph of a particular agenda already defined by a political party, the emerging Religious Left seems just as prone to enlist Jesus as a mascot for our own programs of national and global redemption.”<sup>64</sup>

In its contemporary manifestation and stage of development, the tell-tale sign of the Religious Left (which is closely related to the Emerging Church phenomena as well as liberation theology<sup>65</sup>) is its abandonment of an especial focus on the moral part of the law, or the 10 commandments, which is now often literally dissolved into Jesus’ simplification of the law, namely, love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.

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*Meaning* (Brooklyn, NY: LEGAS, 2007); Floyd Merrell, *Learning Living, Living Learning: Signs, Between East and West* (Brooklyn, NY: LEGAS, 2002); David Bohm, *Thought as a System* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994); and Steven M. Rosen, *Dimensions of Apeiron: A Topological Phenomenology of Space, Time, and Individuation* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Rodopi, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Mark Thomas Edwards, *The Right of the Protestant Left: God’s Totalitarianism* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 114. For the religious left “the frame of reference is global warming, poverty, AIDS, and capitalist greed,” *Ibid.*, 114. As Stephen Carter similarly observes, “the Religious Right’s hopeless efforts to fiddle with the law pale beside the Religious Left’s successful efforts to fiddle with the culture. The Religious Left is not necessarily better than the Religious Right, only smarter . . . and it has cooperated with elite efforts to fix the rules so that nobody else can win,” Stephen Carter, *God’s Name in Vain* (Basic Books, 2009), np.

<sup>65</sup> “The emerging church’s vocabulary displays a remarkably high correspondence to the terminology of liberation theology, a correspondence which may reflect direct derivation of thought,” Matt Jenson and David Wilhite, *The Church: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2010), 100. Jenson and Wilhite connect this similarity to “the notion that the emerging church is best understood as part of a global ecclesiological groundswell, even if the ‘emerging’ language is predominantly championed in the United States,” *Ibid.*, 100. As such, it could be suggested that Leftism is a worldwide phenomena manifested in the United States through Christianity’s emerging movement.

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Rather, it is precisely Jesus' counsel to the rich young ruler to "sell all, and give it to the poor" (Mark 10:21) becomes in itself a *moral imperative*, to be imposed *coercively* on society if necessary through various means, including taxation, to implement equitable wealth distribution.<sup>66</sup> The free-willed attitude of the widow who gave her last mite to the Lord (Luke 21:1-4) is neglected by this new economic imperative targeting the wealthy, no matter how they acquired their wealth. "Social justice" is a key rallying concept for the Religious Left, as well as the secular left.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, as mentioned above, besides a greater focus on socio-economic issues in contrast to the moral part of the law, other issues that are connected to the moral dimension of the 10 commandments are often (not always) reinterpreted in a "liberal" way by the Religious Left. For example, not only is support offered for homosexual civil unions for the sake of religious liberty, but even insistence upon homosexual marriage and the encouragement of a *culture* of pro-choice concerning abortion are sometimes encouraged. Insightfully, many in the Religious Left have long complained that "were it not for such issues as abortion and same-sex marriage, which tended to galvanize conservative Christians . . .

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<sup>66</sup> Amy L. Sherman, "Christians and Economic Development," in *On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in Economic Life*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 932-933. Conservatives are concerned with an "emphasis on redistribution of wealth as the answer to poverty and deprivation without recognizing the value of incentive, opportunity, creativity, and economic and political freedom. . . . [Without maintaining a wariness of such concerns], the attraction to centrally controlled economics and coercive solutions despite the failures of such economies and their consistent violation of the rights of the poor [are inevitably a threat]," Ibid., 932. Unfortunately for such conservatives, however, "the religious left views private property rights with suspicion, believing that they lead to the massive and unjust accumulation of wealth by the wealthy," Ibid., 932-933. See also, <http://politicsofthecrossresurrected.blogspot.com/2011/04/socialist-exegesis-and-cheap-grace.html>; and <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/398133/brute-force-left-kevin-d-williamson>.

<sup>67</sup> For how the concept is used, compare the works of Right leaning Ronald H. Nash, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1983); and Left leaning Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Thomas Nelson, 2005).

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evangelicals ‘would not be a strong constituency of the Republican Party. There would be many more Democrats among them.’”<sup>68</sup>

The rising importance of socio-economic issues in the world, which has been picked up in the mainstream media recently, has invigorated the Religious Left.<sup>69</sup> However, as also touched on above, Leftist Christianity, understood primarily as corporate socio-economic transformation (Christianized socialism) which is seen by Leftists as a more theoretically concrete public goal than private moral transformation, has existed since the earliest European settlement of America with the Pilgrims, who underwent a transition from collectivism to individualism.<sup>70</sup>

With the above in mind, although the *secular* Left has risen to prominence during recent decades, notably since the 1950’s after WW2, in many ways politically and socio-economically the secular left’s agenda is simply a repackaging of the Religious Left’s original agenda.<sup>71</sup> This

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<sup>68</sup> John Green, cited in Sullivan, *The Party Faithful*, 44. See also, Jeffery L. Sheler, *Believers: A Journey into Evangelical America* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006), 235.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-religious-left-is-struggling-can-the-cause-of-economic-justice-help-it-rise-again/2014/04/24/b9fa0708-cb5e-11e3-93eb-6c0037dde2adstory.html>; <http://dallasmorningviewsblog.dallasnews.com/2014/04/after-years-of-religious-right-will-the-religious-left-reassert-itself-with-focus-on-economic-justice.html/>.

<sup>70</sup> “Before the religious Right, there was a religious Left,” Flynn, *A Conservative History of the American Left*, 4. “Utopian and collectivist ideas are as American as Plymouth Rock. The Pilgrims, like American’s secular communists of the nineteenth century, hoped to build a city upon a hill. And like other sectarian groups that later found refuge in America, the Pilgrims attempted to build their utopia upon communist principles. In contrast to nineteenth-century American communists, sectarian and secular, and akin to most twentieth-century Europeans living under communists, the Pilgrims’ system was imposed on them from without. The edict to abolish private property and pool resources came from an unlikely source: Plymouth colony’s capitalist investors, who unwisely, and ironically, feared that the colonists’ private greed would eat away at investment profits. Under communism, which reigned in Plymouth colony from 1620-1623, Pilgrim bellies and investor wallets starved.

“[William] Bradford concluded: ‘The experience that was had in this common course and condition, tried sundry years and that amongst godly and sober men, may well evince the vanity of that conceit of Plato’s and other ancients applauded by some of later times; that the taking away of property and bringing in community into a commonwealth would make them happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God,’” Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>71</sup> “The hostility to religion often associated with the Left was not always so pronounced. Indeed, Christianity once served as the primary influence upon American leftists. Its influence on early American leftists was so profound that it put its stamp on their



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implies that the Left has, in many ways, been as equally influential as the Right, if not more so, on the development of American culture and American Christianity. As Christian Smith claims, “liberal Protestantism’s organizational decline has been accompanied by and is in part arguably the consequence of the fact that liberal Protestantism has won a decisive, larger cultural victory.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, “liberal Protestants may have ultimately lost the battle for membership [versus the Religious Right during the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century], but they won the larger cultural struggle.”<sup>73</sup> This may appear paradoxical, but that is precisely the point, suggests sociologist of religion N. Jay Demerath. Liberal churches were so effective at promoting their liberal values and injecting them into mainstream culture that actual church membership declined, because secular society came to reflect some of the central values of the liberal churches.<sup>74</sup> Smith, concurring with Demerath, observes, “Liberal Protestantism’s core values—individualism, pluralism, emancipation, tolerance, free critical inquiry, and the authority of human experience—have come to so permeate broader American culture that its own churches as organizations have difficulty surviving. . . . Having won the larger battle to shape mainstream culture, it becomes difficult to sustain a strong rationale for maintaining distinctively liberal church organizations to continue to promote those now omnipresent values.”<sup>75</sup>

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decidedly irreligious offspring. Secular reformers admired the sacrifice and the communal unity of the early religious fanatics but not, generally, the religious beliefs. Religion and politics mixed in the Social Gospel, whose enthusiasts ultimately reached for more social, less gospel. What emerged was a political religion, or, perhaps more accurately, a religious politics. The secular kept the forms without the function. They promised salvation, exalted saints, pursued heretics, revered holy books, enforced dogma, viewed history teleologically, and acted with a self-righteousness generally confined to the elect and an ends-justified-the-means mentality characteristic of millennial deliverers. They lost faith in God, but not faith itself,” Flynn, *A Conservative History of the American Left*, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 287.

<sup>73</sup> John Turner, <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2013/03/how-mainline-christianity-lost-its-institutions-but-won-the-culture>.

<sup>74</sup> N. Jay Demerath, “Cultural Victory and Organizational Defeat in the Paradoxical Decline of Liberal Protestantism,” in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol. 34, #4 (1995), 458-469.

<sup>75</sup> Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 288.

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So what of the near future of the Religious Left? Well, it appears it may indeed grow into a full-fledged competitor to the Religious Right, especially if it can learn to navigate through its own complex relationship with the secular left. It's worthwhile to observe that just as the early religious and secular Left helped create the Right by interfering in society on issues such as abortion, the contemporary Religious Left came to more fully organize its ideas, if not yet structure (it is more dominant in the academy, however, where it has inherited a preexisting structure), during the presidency of George W. Bush,<sup>76</sup> a figure much disliked by the Left for the Iraq War, and as one representing everything wrong with conservatives and, by implication, conservative Christianity.<sup>77</sup> In other words, the advancement of more extreme positions from each side serve to effectually motivate the creation of their opposite. To highlight the contrast, it's no accident that after George W. Bush, it has recently been stated favorably that "the person who symbolized the religious left more than anyone else was Barack Obama,"<sup>78</sup> our current U.S. president in 2015. The zig and zag of American culture appears to be settling in for the long haul.

In summary, it appears unlikely that the Left and Right, *on their own* as American socio-political philosophies and ideologies, will readily find harmony in the near future.<sup>79</sup> Something external to them must trigger a

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<sup>76</sup> "A religious left . . . gathered strength under Bush," John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2009), 128.

<sup>77</sup> You are part of the religious left, or emerging church, "if you don't like George W. Bush," Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2008), 21.

<sup>78</sup> Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *God is Back*, 129. Correspondingly, in his time, "President [William] Clinton expected the Left, and particularly the religious Left, to support his agenda," Andrew D. Walsh, *Religion, Economics, and Public Policy: Ironies, Tragedies, and Absurdities of the Contemporary Culture Wars* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 111.

<sup>79</sup> Some may claim that "political pundits have reinforced the division between Christian conservative and secular perspectives regardless of the fact that not all progressives are non-Christian and not all religious persons are Christian or conservative. This erroneous media-framed binary opposition between the right and the left continues to inform many citizens' viewpoints," Karin Fry, *Beyond Religious Right and Secular Left Rhetoric: The Road to Compromise* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 123. Although this may be partially true, it ignores the deeper philosophical issues that I alluded to in n.62. See also, William V. D'Antonio, Steven A. Tuch, and Josiah R. Baker, *Religion, Politics, and*

change for unity to be possible. This is the case for many reasons, but primary among them is their perceived attitude toward the concept and function of *science*, a distinctly philosophical problem. Although opinions may differ amongst individuals, Republicans as a collective are known to be more questioning toward the scientific consensus on a number of major issues, not least among them economic policies and philosophy, a key point of contention between the secular Right and Left.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, overall, “Republican voters are united by their economic [classical liberal] conservatism, divided by their cultural values. Just as Democratic voters are united by their economic [progressive] liberalism, divided by *their* cultural values.”<sup>81</sup> But within the even broader picture, the apparent or relative disdain for science by the Right has not been neglected for ridicule by Leftist secularists, and as the issues that science is applied to multiply, it appears harmony may be elusive.<sup>82</sup>

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*Polarization: How Religiopolitical Conflict is Changing Congress and American Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

<sup>80</sup> Note especially the Austrian theory of economics, favored by the Right, which dislikes associating predictive (“scientific”) mathematical models with economics, which the Left favors. For some background, see Karen I. Vaughn, *Austrian Economics in America: The Migration of a Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Eric Crouse explains, “By linking free enterprise to the demands of the biblical ethic . . . Christian conservatives provided some of the stronger arguments for Reaganomics [and the Austrian school of economics],” Eric R. Crouse, *The Cross and Reaganomics: Conservative Christians Defending Ronald Reagan* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 110. Similarly, most conservatives note “[the Left favored] the Keynesian model as primarily a redistribution model,” *Ibid.*, 23. See also, “To be sure, the ideas of John Maynard Keynes were crucial in legitimizing and pointing the way to a new form of capitalism,” Jean Hardisty and Deepak Bhargava, “Wrong about the Right,” in *Dispatches from the Religious Left*, ed. Frederick Clarkson, 134. Interestingly, although Catholics differ on how they view economic issues, nevertheless note that, “[Economic] Austrians reject the mathematization of the discipline that other paradigms have encouraged, and dismiss artificial models that reduce man to a mere atom,” Thomas E. Woods, *The Church and the Market: A Catholic Defense of the Free Economy* (Oxford, UK: Lexington Books, 2005), 217. Again, as Gene Callahan explains, “Austrians . . . emphasize the freedom and unpredictability of human action,” Gene Callahan, *Economics for Real People: An Introduction to the Austrian School*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2004), 316.

<sup>81</sup> Byron E. Shafer and Richard H. Spady, *The American Political Landscape* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 171.

<sup>82</sup> See n.62 above. For explicit treatments of the public and liberal perception of politics and science, see Joel Achenbach, “The Age of Disbelief,” in *National Geographic* (March 2015), 30-47; Chris Mooney, *The Republican War on Science* (New York, NY:

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Below I will turn toward charting the significance of more specific denominational socio-political identities in their relationship to the broader Religious Right and Religious Left.

### *2.3 The Significance of the Religious Left and Religious Right Today*

The significance of the Religious Left and Religious Right in America is simple in their relationship to socio-political identities. Few other countries have such a simplistic reduction into just two major political parties, making America uniquely accessible for philosophical analogies and illustrations. Basically, as has been noted, the Left and Right have come to align with the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively, in 2015. Thus, more than a century of development in religious political philosophy in America has “simplified/reduced” things down into two major positions or stances. Of course, reality is always much more complex than such simplifications, as I trust is clear to all. Nevertheless, simplifications are also useful, even when reality is acknowledged to be more complex. Thus, although the labels of Religious Right and Religious Left align all too easily with their political counterparts, what is important to establish at this point is that actual Christian (protestant) denominations and major movements beneath the labels Right and Left do actually follow alongside the present secular or mainstream socio-political split at statistically significant percentages. In other words, most major denominations and religious groups *do* also have a *single* socio-political identity. This is because they were forced to choose one or lose relevance amid the confusion in the eyes of their members and the public.

For example, sociologists of American religion know that Mormons and Southern Baptist Evangelicals are overwhelmingly Republican and conservative in their socio-political leanings, as are many other

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Basic Books, 2005); Chris Mooney, *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality* (Honoken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012); Tanya Melich, *The Republican War Against Women: An Insider’s Report from Behind the Lines* (Random House, 2009); and John Holbo, *Looking for a Fight: Is There a Republican War on Science?* (Parlor Press, 2006). Naturally, of course, some Republicans and Christians have responded. For example, Alex B. Berezow and Hank Campbell, *Science Left Behind: Feel-Good Fallacies and the Rise of the Anti-Scientific Left* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2012); and James Wanliss, *Resisting the Green Dragon: Dominion, Not Death* (Burke, VA: Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, 2010).

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“evangelical” churches that are at least surviving the difficult climate today, culturally. Conversely, mainline Protestant churches lean strongly Democrat, especially with their leaders, as do all historically Black Pentecostal and charismatic churches despite being socio-religiously conservative on some issues, and similarly any number of other churches that have identified with the Emerging movement also lean strongly Left. Most other demographically smaller religious faith groups in America likewise lean strongly Democrat, like Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews, who collectively perhaps have a disproportionate influence in today’s “special interests” oriented society.<sup>83</sup> An especially noteworthy development from the above data concerns the fact that the so-called broader evangelical movement, associated so strongly with the Religious Right in the 1980’s and 90’s, has begun to fracture, with the new ecumenically oriented Emergent/Emerging church movement its rebellious offspring, which includes many younger evangelicals, leaning strongly leftward to the Democrats.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, I’m not aware of any prominent Emerging Christians who vote Republican.

Overall, *religious* voters in America are split almost 50/50, Republican and Democrat, with explicit Christians only slightly leaning to the Right. As some pollsters recently noted, the latest data “puts to rest the question of whether there is a ‘God gap’ between Republicans and Democrats: ‘Clearly, from this data, it’s not only closing. It’s closed.’”<sup>85</sup> Thus, the God-gap that many pundits made headlines with during the height of the Religious Right’s influence no longer exists in a strong form,<sup>86</sup> and the

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<sup>83</sup> See <http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits#>; <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/table-party-affiliation-by-protestant-denomination.pdf>; and <http://tobingrant.religionnews.com/2014/08/27/politics-american-churches-religions-one-graph/>. See also, Shafer and Richard H. Spady, *The American Political Landscape* and Glenn H. Utter and James L. True, *Conservative Christians and Political Participation: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004).

<sup>84</sup> Note <http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2007/07/left-leaning-politics-and-emerging.html>; <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>.

<sup>85</sup> David Gibson, “The ‘God Gap’ Between Republicans and Democrats Closed: Values Voters on the Left,” at <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/2343313/posts>.

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/nov/07/us-elections-2008-barack-obama1>; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/10/AR2006111001694.html>; <http://nationwideweb.com/Community/DisplayStory.asp?id=3>; <http://www.missionamerica.com/articletext.php?artnum=114>.

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prevailing demographic changes anticipated for America indicate the traditional Religious Right's influence will remain moderated. More and more Americans are moving to the cities and represent various cultural/ethnic minorities, neither of which has been a strong suit for traditional conservative evangelicals or Republicans. Unless there are some unexpected demographic changes waiting for America,<sup>87</sup> the Religious Right will indeed enter a permanent and uneasy co-existence with the Religious Left during the next 25 years, and remain very much prone to ceding its dominance entirely as the more influential religious socio-political identity, even without superior drive and organization.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, primarily secular independent groups on the Right like the Tea Party are writing their own epithet with the demographic groups they have been neglecting, such as recent immigrants and various non-white minorities.<sup>89</sup>

The takeaway point of the above situation, however, is not simply that most notable denominations align, overall, with a single socio-political identity. They *must* do so to remain relevant in the eyes of the public. All denominations or otherwise closely affiliated churches have fractured or are experiencing severe fragmentation affecting their missional outreach that do not maintain a super-majority preference by their ministers and members with a *single* socio-political identity.<sup>90</sup> Those that are divided socio-politically are fragmenting and declining the fastest. For example, in some instances, like with the mainline denomination United Church of Christ (UCC), one can easily understand how they are struggling with

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<sup>87</sup> See, for example, William H. Frey, *Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics are Remaking America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015); Marisa Abrajano and Zoltan L. Hajnal, *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); [http://www.realclearpolicy.com/blog/2015/04/27/has\\_immigration\\_sparked\\_a\\_white\\_backlash.html](http://www.realclearpolicy.com/blog/2015/04/27/has_immigration_sparked_a_white_backlash.html); and <http://washingtonexaminer.com/pew-next-generation-will-be-over-50-non-white/article/2546219>.

<sup>88</sup> Jonathan Merritt, "The Rise of the Christian Left in America," <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/07/the-rise-of-the-christian-left-in-america/278086/>.

<sup>89</sup> Kevin MacDonald, "The Tea Party and the GOP: Heading for Divorce," at <http://www.theoccidentobserver.net/2013/10/the-tea-party-and-the-gop-heading-for-divorce/>.

<sup>90</sup> <http://spectator.org/articles/40041/political-gaps-strain-churches>. In particular, in older/mainline Protestant denominations, like with Presbyterians for example, the pastors leaned very heavily to the Democratic side, even while their members in the pews remained someone more evenly divided. See also, <http://publicreligion.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/2008-Mainline-Protestant-Clergy-Voices-Survey-Report.pdf>.

identity, growth, and outreach in today's polarized American climate, when 77% of their ministers identify as Democrats, but only 51% of their members identify as Democrats.<sup>91</sup> People don't know the "identity" of such a church, rendering them mostly irrelevant to the "big picture." So it is no surprise that the numbers show over the past decade their membership is nosediving.

Conversely, Mormons, with a much stronger ideological symbiosis between their leaders, ministers and members, in their case toward the Republican party, are maintaining moderate growth and success.<sup>92</sup> Of course, Mormonism's somewhat limited regionally focused demographic successes must be evaluated as such—they reach certain groups effectively, and others quite poorly. It's hard for them to convert Democrats, for example. Similarly, the Emerging Church movement, although it is now realizing its own expected growing pains, has nevertheless made quite the splash in growth over the past two decades in part owing to its shared, unified, and clear socio-political identity with Democrats.

Overall, then, the fastest growing and significant church movements in America have a united socio-political identity. Churches that are divided socio-politically are either fracturing or shrinking. There are, however, a couple of notable exceptions which I will now turn to below.

### **3. The Socio-Political Spider Web**

What is the relevance of all of the above for Seventh-day Adventists? There are several possible ways of answering this question. Foremost among such responses is that American Adventists and Catholics closely share an important corporate identity marker that is somewhat unusual in the religious world for *large ecclesially united* religious groups that are prospering overall, which is noteworthy as Adventism emerges into a major world religious identity, becoming the 8<sup>th</sup> largest international religious identity. American Adventist and American Catholic individual members

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<sup>91</sup> See <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC-Statistical-Profile-2012lr.pdf>; and <http://spectator.org/articles/40041/political-gaps-strain-churches>.

<sup>92</sup> Kevin Eckstrom, "Study: Mormonism is Fastest-growing Faith in Half of USA," at <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/story/2012-05-02/religion-census-mormon/54701198/1>; <http://religiondispatches.org/mormon-numbers-not-adding-up/>; <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/6-reasons-why-mormons-are-beating-evangelicals-in-church-growth>.

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are equally *divided* on their secular socio-political worldview identification or leaning (I wish to emphasize that most Adventists, as do most Christians, claim an independence from politics; nevertheless, even in articles where such independence is claimed, it is not difficult to identify *leanings*<sup>93</sup>). American Adventist and Catholic members are split roughly 50/50 (this is a broad but accurate enough generalization) between favoring Republican and Democrat policies and emphases over the past 10 years.<sup>94</sup>

In fact, of all major American *religious* (denominational) identities that are not in significant decline, only Adventism and Catholicism have been able to weather the storm while maintaining such socio-political polarization. Despite individual members being divided equally in their leanings to the Right or Left, Adventism and Catholicism have been able to maintain a relatively strong ecclesial identity and growth in America (even though American Adventism is struggling relatively like all churches<sup>95</sup>). The only other American religious identities doing anywhere near as well as Adventism and Catholicism have succumbed to the pressures of embracing only *one* socio-political identity, either the Right or the Left. Even major ecumenical movements must embrace only one or the other, with conservative churches coalescing together, and liberal churches doing the same! Of course, this means that Catholics are uniquely well positioned to adapt to either Right or Left leaning ecumenical movements.<sup>96</sup>

Although no precise numbers exist for American Catholics or American Adventists and their socio-political leanings, as one sample survey indicates (alongside my own observations during the past 15 years

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<sup>93</sup> For example, see Loren Seibold, "Should Seventh-day Adventists be Republicans?" at *Spectrum* (May 17, 2012), available online at <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/column/2012/05/17/should-seventh-day-adventists-be-republicans>.

<sup>94</sup> See the study at <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/11/the-catholic-swing-vote/>.

<sup>95</sup> David Beckworth and S. Joseph Kidder, "Reflections on the future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America: Trends and Challenges," in *Ministry* (December, 2010), available online at: <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2010/12/reflections-on-the-future-of-north-american-seventh-day-adventism.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Here I must make reference to those who see the Religious Right joining with Catholics. According to some, precisely the opposite is occurring—the Emerging Religious Left is drawing believers into Catholicism! For example, see Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone: The Emerging Church. . . A New Reformation or an End-time Deception* (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2008), 73-80; 160-162.



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at the very diverse Adventist school of Andrews University), Adventists vote roughly in line with the general population,<sup>97</sup> including following the population's widespread stereotypes (i.e., if you weren't an Adventist, how you would vote depends simply on the rest of your demographic background. If you match the profile of a Republican or Democrat, respectively, chances are high that's how you'll vote as an Adventist). To be clear, being or *becoming* an Adventist apparently makes *no difference* in how you see the socio-political world. Adventist theology does not create a unified American Adventist socio-cultural-economic-political worldview; rather, our increasing diversity has left us fragmented in an *ever more* polarized secular political climate. A very curious phenomena, and sadly one that keeps many Adventists intellectually divided from one another at the socio-economic level of our worldview, if not also on some theological issues, as inevitably they eventually interrelate (I must hasten to add that some theological conservatives are politically Leftist, although few theological liberals lean politically Right. With this in mind, I do agree that "there is no easy correlation between theology and [one's] political position,"<sup>98</sup> even if statistics reveal interesting patterns and trends).

The above situation and "facts" are, I believe, some of the more complex reasons for the present polarization and fragmentation of American Adventism theologically; we have developed no systematic way

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<sup>97</sup> <http://www.atoday.org/article/1472/news/2012/october-headlines/survey-explores-how-adventists-will-vote-in-the-2012-elections-in-the-united-states>. This matches my personal and casual surveys over the past 15 years. See also, John T. Gavin, William W. Ellis, and Curtis J. Vanderwall, "Checking the Political Pulse of the University: Findings from the 2012 SDA Religion and Social Issues Survey," [https://www.andrews.edu/services/ipa/documents-faisebasedpub/political\\_pulse\\_of\\_university\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.andrews.edu/services/ipa/documents-faisebasedpub/political_pulse_of_university_-_final.pdf).

<sup>98</sup> That some theological conservatives lean Left politically is primarily because of our understanding of Church and State issues, again, see n.30. Whether they have correctly evaluated the situation is another question. Concerning the notion of being theologically "liberal" while politically and economically conservative, especially in relation to church-state issues, see the interesting piece by Steven H. Shiffrin, "The Religious Left and Church-State Relations: A Response to Kent Greenawalt and Bernie Meyler," in the *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* Vol. 19, #761 (2010). He acknowledges that "there is no easy correlation between theology and political position," *Ibid.*, 762. Interestingly, however, he also notes that "it would be possible to believe in liberal theology and conservative politics, but that combination is not much alive on the American political scene," *Ibid.* This is unfortunate, and I would recommend that the reasons for this should be explored in line with the issues raised in n.62 concerning platonism. See also, n.129.

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of connecting how our theology informs our overall worldview at the level of socio-economic engagement and theory. This is not necessarily, in itself, a bad thing!<sup>99</sup> Yet, it also raises the question of how carefully Adventists actually think about the relationship between theology, philosophy, and society. Are we thinkers, or mere reflectors, of other men's ideas?<sup>100</sup> If we are not meant, as Adventists, to have a socio-economic worldview, then there must be reasons for this that we have not yet formally explored. Thus far it appears we are reflectors, not thinkers, succumbing to the influence of whichever news sources we prefer, and therefore sliding, or stepping, onto the socio-political spider web, making ourselves easy prey for the spider to ensnare us.

However, as noted clearly above, we are not alone in our fragmentation. The above division holds true for self-identifying American Catholics, who have also, interestingly, *always* supported the winner of the past several U.S. Presidential elections, no matter the Party he represented (except in 2000, when Catholics supported the popular majority vote winner Al Gore, but George W. Bush still won a second term owing to the electoral college), from Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush (first term), to Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.<sup>101</sup> The Catholics know, and make, a winner. As George Neumayr observed, "Barack Obama rose to power not in spite of the Catholic Church but in part because of it."<sup>102</sup>

Importantly, on this note, it is worthwhile to mention that although American Catholic leaders have had a "conservative-Republican"

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<sup>99</sup> Adventists were frequently cautioned to avoid "political questions" by Ellen White. See, for example, Ellen White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (1923), 475-484.

<sup>100</sup> "It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought. Instead of confining their study to that which men have said or written, let students be directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research in nature and revelation," Ellen White, *Education* (1903), 17.

<sup>101</sup> See <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/08/us-usa-campaign-religion-idUSBR E8A71 M420121108>. Note also, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2013/02/11/what-the-catholic-vote-tells-us-about-presidential-elections/>; [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/the-catholic-vote-is-the-2012-bellwether/2012/05/03/gIQAXkJhyT\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/the-catholic-vote-is-the-2012-bellwether/2012/05/03/gIQAXkJhyT_blog.html). Some view the numbers slightly differently, but the point remains that they are historically split almost 50/50. For example, <http://cara.georgetown.edu/presidential%20vote%20only.pdf>.

<sup>102</sup> See Hal Mayer, "President Obama's Catholic Political Formation," <http://ktfnews.com/president-obamas-catholic-political-formation/>; and [http://www.realclearreligion.org/articles/2012/09/12/catholic\\_left\\_created\\_obama.html](http://www.realclearreligion.org/articles/2012/09/12/catholic_left_created_obama.html).

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stereotype by most American Adventists over the past few decades because of two hot-button “culture war” issues, gay marriage and abortion, which aligned well enough with Pope Benedict XVI’s agenda, the current Pope, Francis, is much more left-leaning, and has also been hailed as above such culture wars, a Pope that can bring Catholics together, from more left-leaning and right-leaning Catholic perspectives. Pope Francis has followed through on his apparent initiative to unite, interestingly becoming the first modern pope to explicitly downplay the *political* importance of culture war issues like gay marriage and abortion, while yet still maintaining theological orthodoxy.<sup>103</sup> Such moves have launched him into tremendous popularity after just two years as the Pontiff.<sup>104</sup>

However, it must also be noted that, for the first time in modern history, a few “Religious Right” affiliated Catholic conservatives from Patrick Buchanan’s era are unhappy with their new Pope, Francis.<sup>105</sup> Many have openly expressed their disappointment and criticisms<sup>106</sup> of the Pope’s “leftist” economic sentiments, as well as his apparently theologically leftist leanings. Francis appears to be far more “socialist”<sup>107</sup> than they are

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<sup>103</sup> Dan Merica, “American Catholics Agree with Pope about Culture Wars,” at <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/10/04/american-catholics-back-popes-downplaying-of-contentious-social-issues/>; <http://www.religionnews.com/2013/10/04/poll-catholics-agree-church-focused-issues-support-gay-marriage/>.

<sup>104</sup> See <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/pope-francis-popularity-in-the-united-states-hits-an-all-time-high/>.

<sup>105</sup> Ross Douthat, “Will Pope Francis Break the Church?” at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/05/will-pope-francis-break-the-church/389516/>. See also <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/us/conservative-us-catholics-feel-left-out-of-the-popes-embrace.html>; and <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/12/yuletide-gift-for-pope-francis-vast-popularity-among-catholics/>. “Political conservatives, Benedict’s best ideological group, are Francis’ weakest, by dint of his sharply lower popularity among “very” conservative Americans; a comparatively low 59 percent in this group see Francis favorably. And fewer still among strong conservatives, just 49 percent, approve of the direction in which Francis is leading the church,” Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Michelle Boorstein and Elizabeth Tenety, “Conservative Catholics Question Pope Francis’s Approach,” at <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2013/10/14/conservative-catholics-question-pope-franciss-approach/21082>; <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2013/10/14/conservative-catholics-question-pope-franciss-approach/21082>.

<sup>107</sup> As Pope Francis put it, “some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those

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comfortable with, which has also been noted by several popular secular right-wing media commentators like Rush Limbaugh, who has claimed that “pure Marxism” is “coming out of the mouth of the pope.”<sup>108</sup>

Indeed, some view Pope Francis as the single greatest threat to emerge that could challenge the existence of the traditional Religious Right.<sup>109</sup> When Francis removed one of the more outspoken critics of abortion and gay marriage in America, the conservative Raymond Burke, from the Congregation for Bishops, it signaled a change in the Catholic approach to the American situation, a turn toward those that are less “heavily invested in culture wars.”<sup>110</sup> As such, it seems that despite some uncertainty, the

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wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system,” *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican Press, 2013), 46. Later on he shares, “A financial reform open to such ethical considerations would require a vigorous change of approach on the part of political leaders. . . . The Pope loves everyone, rich and poor alike, but he is obliged in the name of Christ to remind all that the rich *must* help, respect and promote the poor, *Ibid.*, 49 (emphasis added). Also, “When a society – whether local, national or global – is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programmes or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility. This is not the case simply because inequality provokes a violent reaction from those excluded from the system, but because the socioeconomic system is unjust at its root. Just as goodness tends to spread, the toleration of evil, which is injustice, tends to expand its baneful influence and quietly to undermine any political and social system, no matter how solid it may appear. If every action has its consequences, an evil embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death. It is evil crystallized in unjust social structures, which cannot be the basis of hope for a better future. We are far from the so-called “end of history,” since the conditions for a sustainable and peaceful development have not yet been adequately articulated and realized. . . . Today’s economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric,” *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>108</sup> Rush Limbaugh, “It’s Sad How Wrong Pope Francis Is (Unless It’s a Deliberate Mistranslation By Leftists),” [http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2013/11/27/it\\_s\\_sad\\_how\\_wrong\\_pope\\_francis\\_is\\_unless\\_it\\_s\\_a\\_deliberate\\_mistranslation\\_by\\_leftists](http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2013/11/27/it_s_sad_how_wrong_pope_francis_is_unless_it_s_a_deliberate_mistranslation_by_leftists); <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/12/02/rush-limbaugh-vs-the-pope/>.

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.buzzfeed.com/mckaycoppins/how-the-pope-could-tear-apart-the-religious-right>.

<sup>110</sup> Eyder Peralta, “Pope Francis Shakes Up Important Congregation for Bishops,” at <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/12/17/251985254/pope-francis-shakes-up-important-congregation-for-bishops>; <http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2014/03/24/vatican-chief-justice-obamas-policies-have-become-progressively-more-hostile-toward-christian-civilization/>; [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/17/world/europe/pope-replaces-conservative-us-cardinal-on-influential-vatican-committee.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/17/world/europe/pope-replaces-conservative-us-cardinal-on-influential-vatican-committee.html?_r=0); and <http://www.jsonline.com/news/religion/pope-francis-removes-former-la-crosse>

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more popular sentiments that are winning the day point toward Pope Francis as a great *unifier*,<sup>111</sup> able to bring together the left and right, here meaning Catholic *and* non-Catholic Republicans and Democrats,<sup>112</sup> winning over an overwhelming majority (92% of American Catholics and 69% of non-Catholics) of people's approval,<sup>113</sup> and becoming *Time Magazine's* Person of the Year in 2013. It seems Catholicism's public image has recovered from its scandals with their Priests and their inappropriate behavior.

The above overall popularity is further evidenced by Pope Francis' recent invitation to speak before the U.S. Congress in a joint session for the first time ever, a political body where the Catholic representatives and senators are split almost 50/50, Republican and Democrat.<sup>114</sup> Of course, the invitation came from current Republican House of Representatives majority leader, John Boehner, a Catholic, and was supported by Democratic minority leader Nancy Pelosi, also Catholic.<sup>115</sup> In a time of incredible political polarization and rhetoric in our country, these two political opponents found common ground in their general approval of Pope Francis. If there is one group that is consistently skeptical or critical of the agenda of Pope Francis, it is the Republican-leaning Tea Party, the most conservative-libertarian American group of political activists.<sup>116</sup> Their

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-bishop-raymond-burke-b99165146z1-236134851.html.

<sup>111</sup> <http://poy.time.com/2013/12/11/person-of-the-year-pope-francis-the-peoples-pope/#>.

<sup>112</sup> "It is not a surprise that the left and the right are now seeking openly to affiliate with this Pope," Jeff Macke, <http://finance.yahoo.com/blogs/breakout/lawmakers-enlist-powerful-new-wage-and-wealth-gap-warrior--the-pope-181146316.html>.

<sup>113</sup> See Gary Langer, "Pope Francis, *Time Magazine's* Person of the Year, is Vastly Popular Among Catholics," <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/12/yuletide-gift-for-pope-francis-vast-popularity-among-catholics/>.

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/01/05/faith-on-the-hill/>.

<sup>115</sup> Note <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2014/03/pope-francis-invited-to-address-joint-session-of-congress/>; <http://time.com/23805/pope-francis-john-boehner-nancy-pelosi-congress/>.

<sup>116</sup> David Gibson, "Pope Francis has Conservatives Talking Schism: But a Split is Easier Said than Done," at <http://www.religionnews.com/2014/11/04/pope-francis-conservatives-talking-schism-split-easier-said-done/>; <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/wnd-jesus-christ-weeping-heaven-over-pope-francis-remarks-unfettered-capitalism/>; <http://time.com/2827866/why-tea-party-catholicism-is-a-no-go/>; <http://ncronline.org/news/politics/pope-or-tea-party/>; <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/12/pope-francis-catholic-church-republicans-gop-economics-101522.html>; <http://www.breitbart.com/>

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outspoken opposition to Francis, however, is being drowned out in the overall euphoria of such a popular Pope capable of uniting people. Although the future remains uncertain in its precise details, I remain skeptical that Francis can actually unite the American Right and Left presently as some speculate, even if, at least at a surface level, he does demonstrate that a single figure can be popular with some members of both sides.<sup>117</sup> But in the end, something must give between the Left and Right, and what that might be is the question.

The reason for a deeper look beneath the surface unity Francis appears to provide the American Left and Right lies in the fact that the Left-Right divide in American Catholicism itself is not a mere surface phenomena. It penetrates very deeply into their philosophy, *particularly* at the socio-economic level.<sup>118</sup> American Catholics are deeply divided between *economic* conservatives and *economic* liberals.<sup>119</sup> As such, some Catholic theologians hold “that the basic political division in America merely represents two iterations of [false] liberalism—the pursuit of individual autonomy in either the social/personal sphere (liberalism) or the economic realm (“conservatism”—better designated as market liberalism).”<sup>120</sup> Again, both are ultimately flawed in the view of some Catholic philosophers and

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national-security/2014/05/10/breitbart-news-saturday-is-pope-francis-a-tea-party-catholic-or-a-commie/; <http://www.theblaze.com/contributions/why-the-popes-visit-to-congress-should-terrify-conservatives/>. See also, Rachel Lu, “Don’t Pick Political Fights with Pope Francis,” <http://thefederalist.com/2015/01/20/dont-pick-political-fights-with-pope-francis/>.

<sup>117</sup> <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2015/03/10/can-a-radical-pope-change-american-culture-wars/36321>.

<sup>118</sup> <http://the-american-catholic.com/2010/09/07/thomas-woods-and-his-critics-the-austrian-vs-distributist-debate-among-catholics/>; <http://the-american-catholic.com/tag/austrian-economics/>. See also, within broader Christianity, Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler, ed., *Wealth, Poverty & Human Destiny* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003).

<sup>119</sup> Patrick J. Deneen, “A Catholic Showdown Worth Watching” at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/a-catholic-showdown-worth-watching/>; <http://catholiclane.com/a-catholic-third-way-pope-benedict-and-the-crisis-of-global-capitalism/>. This socio-economic division has split neo-Thomist American conservative Catholics like John Courtney Murray and Michael Novak from those in the *Communio* movement like Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), and the American David L. Schindler.

<sup>120</sup> Deneen, *Ibid.* Thomas Storck, “What’s Really at Stake in the Catholic Showdown?” at <http://ethikapolitika.org/2014/12/04/whats-really-stake-catholic-showdown/>.

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theologians, who are theologically orthodox but highly critical of the Religious Right.<sup>121</sup> Some Catholic theologians, such as David L. Schindler, claim that “an economic system itself already embeds, indeed *is* also, a theology and an anthropology and a culture.” Schindler’s understanding of the traditional American liberalism of even our founding fathers is that it is as such a false theology that denies freedom,<sup>122</sup> based as it is upon the faulty Enlightenment understanding of autonomous reason and the rise of classical deterministic science which predominates the modern world.

If a summary word may be offered, in light of the direction that Pope Francis has taken the Catholic church, it appears that Catholicism’s dualistic support for Republican and Democrat policies and emphases appears permanent. If anything, the Catholic church leans to the Left, not the Right!<sup>123</sup> Only on the issues of abortion, contraceptives, and homosexual marriage, does the Catholic church have any commitment to what are considered traditionally Republican positions during the era of the Religious Right. On issues of socio-economic interest, like poverty and government involvement in wealth redistribution,<sup>124</sup> universal health-care,<sup>125</sup> and global issues like purported anthropogenic climate change or global warming,<sup>126</sup> as well as other issues like long-ages evolution which

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<sup>121</sup> Jeremy Beer, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/philosopher-of-love-587/>.

<sup>122</sup> David L. Schindler, “‘Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism: Toward an Economic Culture of Gift and Gratitude,” in *Wealth, Poverty & Human Destiny*, ed. Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003), 349, 370.

<sup>123</sup> William D’Antonio, <http://ncronline.org/news/catholics-america/religion-and-political-affiliation>. See also, <http://xianlp.blogspot.com/2009/10/christian-libertarian-summary-geocities.html>.

<sup>124</sup> <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303281504579221933931268354>; <http://ncronline.org/blogs/making-difference/poverty-inequality-and-pope-francis>; <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2013/nov/27/pope-francis-inequality-biggest-issue-our-time>; [http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/pope-francis-denounces-trickle-down-economic-theories-in-critique-of-inequality/2013/11/26/e17ffe4e-56b6-11e3-8304-caf30787c0a9\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/pope-francis-denounces-trickle-down-economic-theories-in-critique-of-inequality/2013/11/26/e17ffe4e-56b6-11e3-8304-caf30787c0a9_story.html).

<sup>125</sup> John W. Robbins, *Ecclesiastical Megalomania: The Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2006), 94.

<sup>126</sup> See <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2015/01/20/3612158/catholic-climate-deniers/>; <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/27/pope-francis-edict-climate-change-us-rightwing>; [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/catholic-relief-services/pope-francis-and-climate\\_b\\_6595036.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/catholic-relief-services/pope-francis-and-climate_b_6595036.html); and <http://www.climatedepot.com/2015/04/24/climate-skeptics-descend-on-vatican-will-attempt-to-influence-pope-on-global-warming/>

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most fundamentalist Right-wingers oppose, the Catholic church has solidly placed itself behind a progressivist/liberal Democratic flag, and I highly doubt it will change on any of these issues, as supporting them grants Catholicism greater influence over society. When it comes to economic philosophy, namely, the best way to accomplish their above agendas, American Catholics are, as noted above, deeply divided, but lean, if anything, to the left globally, which is important because socio-economic leftism is more conducive to totalitarian control.<sup>127</sup> Such a reality should temper concerns by some, especially in Adventist circles, that the Catholics are about to unite with the Religious Right, or, more particularly, the religious members of the Tea Party, to create a Sunday law.<sup>128</sup> Put simply, it's just a whole lot more complicated than that, and sharing this simplistic narrative repeatedly in our outreach and evangelistic materials is not helpful or useful, nor penetrates into the much deeper and important philosophical and cultural issues at play.

It is the present author's wish that more Adventists would pursue the philosophical issues relating to libertarianism, which is a more complex and fruitful subject than many realize,<sup>129</sup> and, overall, focus less on politics and

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<sup>127</sup> See John W. Robbins, *Freedom and Capitalism: Essays on Christian Politics and Economics* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2006), 458-498.

<sup>128</sup> Some see the Tea Party as a continuation of the Religious Right. While most realistic estimates place only about half of the Tea Party adherents as religiously inclined and motivated, there is still a significant number of them that are not religious. In either case, as noted above, they represent a shrinking demographic, so the future is almost impossible to predict. For directly conflicting evaluations of the movement, See Amanda Marcotte, <http://www.alternet.org/belief/how-christian-right-and-tea-party-make-gop-unhinged>; Kerry Eleveld, [http://www.salon.com/2013/10/26/gop\\_civil\\_war\\_poll\\_shows\\_tea\\_party\\_disdains\\_religious\\_right/](http://www.salon.com/2013/10/26/gop_civil_war_poll_shows_tea_party_disdains_religious_right/); David Sessions, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/08/18/tea-party-is-it-the-christian-right-in-disguise.html>; Napp Nazworth, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/report-tea-party-more-christian-right-than-libertarian-107835/>; [http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/oct/12/tea-party-religious-right](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/oct/12/tea-party-religious-right;); and <http://publicreligion.org/2013/10/the-relationship-between-libertarians-the-tea-party-and-the-christian-right/#.VRhc1lPkLmg>.

<sup>129</sup> I appreciate the efforts of D. Eric Schansberg, "Common Ground Between the Philosophies of Christianity and Libertarianism," in the *Journal of Markets & Morality* Vol. 5, #2 (Fall 2002), 439-457. See also, D. Eric Schansberg, *Poor Policy: How Government Harms the Poor* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); and D. Eric Schansberg, *Turn Neither to the Right Nor to the Left: A Thinking Christian's Guide to Politics and Public Policy* (Greenville, SC: Alertness Ltd, 2003). Schansberg suggests that "the Political Left and Political Right—and their cousins, the 'Religious Left' and 'Religious Right'—do not



religious liberty issues as they are discussed within the mainstream socio-political spider-web. Note that I'm not offering an endorsement in itself of libertarianism, but rather suggesting we should endeavor more earnestly to *understand* it. The socio-economic issues our world faces are often more complicated than society might wish us to suppose.<sup>130</sup> Stepping into the spider web of socio-politics and economics, it is too easy for us to become entangled, and, eventually, even, prey for the spider. We must avoid such false dilemmas and situations. Rather, within a renewed and deeper philosophical discussion that is open to more nuanced realities than the simplistic worldviews found in the Right and the Left permit would, I believe, allow the central role of the gospel and personal spirituality within the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 to resound more clearly.

### *3.1 Adventism in the Spider Web*

As it pertains to Adventism, in particular, there are many consequences of the socio-political spider web, perhaps none more important than the extreme confusion that our younger generation is experiencing in understanding what it means to "think" and "see" both the world and the church within it as an Adventist, particularly living in America. What is the "Adventist worldview," in a wholistic sense? It is a mistake to assume that the Great Controversy<sup>131</sup> meta-narrative provides a clear, complete or wholistic worldview as philosophers are inclined to describe one; in other words, that it tells us how to view economic matters within and outside of the church: should we be Austrian or Keynesian? A worldview contains more than a theological meta-narrative like the Great Controversy as it is typically discussed. A worldview addresses issues that socio-political ideologies address: matters of economics, social justice, religious liberty, foreign policy, the nature of mathematics, etc. (numbers being Plato's ideal example inspiring his infamous "two worlds"). The question of how all these issues and disciplines should be approached from within the Great

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offer a coherent political philosophy and are deeply flawed in their approach to political activism," *Ibid.*, vi. For a similar, though distinct, approach, see Gary B. Madison, *The Political Economy of Civil Society and Human Rights* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>130</sup> Note especially, Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (1923), 331-333; and Ellen White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (1987), 1164.

<sup>131</sup> See Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1950).

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Controversy narrative has not yet been articulated, thus encouraging our present divisions on the above “secondary” issues.

Thus, further development and clarification of the profundity of the Great Controversy may prove helpful. If the Great Controversy were understood as a wholistic worldview, it *should* provide socio-political guidance (whatever form that guidance may take!). Maybe it does. But I find that *more and more* younger and older committed Adventists have either no definite answer to the above questions, or their answers directly conflict with each other as our sympathies slide into one of the narratives we’re being told through the mainstream media that favors the Right or the Left. So, at the moment, I can only share to my fellow Adventists, get used to it: your fellow Adventist friends that are, respectively, anti-Republican or anti-Democrat, aren’t going away. We’re going to have to learn to live together. We are firmly entrapped within the socio-political identity spider web. We should be cognizant of the fact we’re sharing our Adventist message within the context of two competing socio-political narratives concerning the condition and direction of America. Take an issue that is polarized politically, like abortion, and you’ll find Adventists, even of varying theological persuasions (it’s not simply a divide between theological conservatives and liberals), firmly planted on both sides of the question, with each seeking to expand the relevance of the given issue, including into religious liberty, etc., which is where secular politics enters the fray.<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, notwithstanding the above challenges and our inherited worldview sympathies which we bring with us into the church, we must never become known as the Seventh-day Republican or Seventh-day Democrat church.

The above leaves me to conclude this section with a few open questions that I hope Adventists will ponder: Why is it that Adventists and Catholics are uniquely capable of remaining vibrant within the prevalent tensions in the major American socio-political identities? If nothing else, this is interesting precisely because it is *not* the trend that has recently been occurring in several other sizable socio-religious groups in America. This

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<sup>132</sup> Compare Nic Samojluk, *From Pro-life to Pro-choice: The Dramatic Shift in Seventh-day Adventist’s Attitudes Towards Abortion* (Lulu Press, 2011); and Nic Samojluk, *Murder in Paradise: A Serious Warning to the United States & the Adventist Church* (Lulu Press, 2014), with John V. Stevens, *The Abortion Controversy: Will a Free America Survive? Will You?* (Sun City, AZ: Founders Freedom press, 2008).

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point cannot be emphasized clearly enough. I can't but wonder if this is because both sides are necessary to see the wholistic picture, even if both are incomplete? Perhaps Adventists have philosophical work yet remaining before them. Catholicism, as a philosophical system, understands the wholistic nature of reality very well, which is demonstrated in the high level discussions concerning their current divisions in America. All that remains is their final process of harmonization within the American context. Will Adventism keep pace with them, and finish developing our final response?<sup>133</sup>

If I may also offer another provocative question: The Catholics have a pope to insure unity, despite their American socio-political confusion. We do not have a pope. Can we continue to survive the political polarization that no other Protestant group has managed to survive with and thrive while maintaining the dual socio-political sympathies which run rampant throughout our members? Adventists often discuss our currently existing theological tensions and divisions. I would propose that at the level of our socio-political worldview we are also divided, and this one is in many ways more significant, because it penetrates into how we *do* theology and implement our evangelistic programs and develop the philosophical principles undergirding our educational and organizational structures, in other words, how the church works at the human level.

Given that Adventists believe the three angels' message of Rev 14:6-12, alongside Rev 12:17, and their call to all to know the testimony of Jesus and keep the commandments, are global in nature, it is probably a good thing that Adventists are somewhat divided on socio-political sympathies, in that it aids us in evangelizing to a world, and a country, America, that is very polarized. Adventists can express honest sympathies with aspects of the Right and Left, while hopefully not partaking of their philosophies in full.<sup>134</sup> But we can say "I recognize" your way of thinking to anyone. Not

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<sup>133</sup> In this regard, I would point toward the work of Fernando Canale, "Is There Room for Systematics in Adventist Theology?" in the *Journal for the Adventist Theological Society* Vol. 12, #2 (2001), 110-131; and Fernando Canale, "On Being the Remnant," in the *Journal for the Adventist Theological Society* Vol. 24, #1 (2013), 127-174. See also n.118 and n.119.

<sup>134</sup> I have touched on this in relationship to eschatology, see Michael F. Younker, "Twice Filled; The 'Cup of Iniquity' and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seventh-day Adventism," in *The Compass Magazine* (May 29, 2014). Available online at: <https://www.thecompassmagazine>

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all church denominations can do that. Catholicism, of course, is the other notable exception. That it is the two of us that can do this, of course, raises some interesting questions about the nature of the two churches that will both offer the most wholistic theological and philosophical worldview alternatives to the world at the end of time.

**4. The Future of Christian Socio-Politics and the Rise of GloboChristianity**

Upon reading the above, one might wonder what the future holds for American Christianity as we continue to struggle within our polarized socio-political climate. I do not believe, in itself, there is any reconciliation possible through continued dialogue. Were the Right and Left to remain true to their present purposes, they are incompatible philosophically, at least certainly in the secular world. Neither do I believe there is solid evidence that one will easily eclipse the other any time soon. Neither the Religious Right, nor the Emerging Left, will claim a victory over the other. Although elements of each of them share some philosophical common ground in Greek platonism, they are also antithetical to one another in critical ways in how they apply it; the Right additionally has non-platonic elements, and the nature of history in the intellectual and academic world appears to resurrect these differing points on a continual basis. Despite what efforts the leaders of the Religious Right and Religious Left may employ to unite, the secular right and the secular left will continue to motivate and inspire divisions amongst society. Libertarian anti-scientism and totalitarian scientism are incompatible. So with that in mind, in this section I'd like to offer a few suggestions on how I see things moving forward. Now is the time to briefly explore the philosophical consequences of our situation with the bigger global picture in mind.

Notwithstanding Pope Francis' unifying charisma, the status quo in America points toward continued division and polarization, even amongst Catholics. Thus, if the Right and Left can't unite themselves as Christians in this modern age within Christendom (nations strongly culturally influenced by Christianity), then something or someone may unite them from the outside, whether pleasantly or not. I believe any union between the two sides is only really possible by the initiation of outside events and

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[.com/blog/twice-filled-the-cup-of-iniquity-and-21st-century-seventh-day-adventism](http://www.youngker.com/blog/twice-filled-the-cup-of-iniquity-and-21st-century-seventh-day-adventism).

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ideologies that conflict with Christianity at large. We may need to look beyond America to see what is encountering Christianity from a global perspective. A number of provocative books have been written recently discussing the future of Christianity that are fully aware of the internal divisions within American and western Christianity, the Right and the Left. In particular, Christian philosopher and theologian Carl Raschke, acutely aware of the American Religious Right and Religious Left, offers a sage-like assessment while pointing towards the global picture. Quoting him at length:

From God's point of view the "abomination of desolation" in today's culture is not the level of sophistication, or purity, of one's supposed take on how we know what we know, or do not know what we know. That is theological arrogance and self-deception. It is the installation of a swinish and self-congratulatory intellectual faddism, found in both conservative and liberal religion, in the holy temple of the Christian faith. We need to turn over the tables and throw out not only the money changers—the growth gurus who both run and ruin the evangelical churches—but also the traders in conceptual currency who transform God's *ekklēsia* into a brothel of philosophical and cultural fashions rather than a genuine house of prayer; we need to open our hearts and minds into authentic relationship with the Lord.

The traders lamentably are not only legion on the right but are also increasingly found on the left. A postmodern Christian who wants to stay pure to the gospel needs to navigate carefully, not running off the road into the ditch on either side. In American Christianity much of the debate about modern and postmodern, conventional and emerging, has degenerated into just one more skirmish in the ongoing culture wars, with unmistakable political overtones mimicking familiar campaign bluster. The leadership of the emerging movement has increasingly pushed the discourse from what it might mean to follow Jesus to what it might mean to follow the policy agenda of the Democratic National Committee. If the criticism of the now-fading religious right was that one cannot make Jesus into a Republican, it is equally true that one cannot simply convert him into a Democrat. . . . In many respects the emerging religious left is just a fun-house mirror of the religious right; it is defined by its spirit of contrariness and a kind of passive-aggressive incredulity about what is lurking out there in the world at large. The culture wars are of no more

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consequence for the coming GloboChristianity than [a] . . . sectarian strife.<sup>135</sup>

Raschke realizes clearly that mainstream Christianity is at a point of crisis, both in America, and even more importantly, globally. It is struggling to define its identity. Yet, through this ongoing struggle, it is also encountering a new challenge, one that is unique in the history of Christianity, as it finally approaches its goal of sharing the Gospel message throughout the whole world (Matt 24:14). And it is not secularism, or atheism, that is Christianity's primary challenge on a global scale.

Raschke observes that throughout the history of Christianity, it has "flourished because it was able to absorb . . . rather than expel many elements from the rainbow continuum of world religions that predominated at the time. The staggering nature of this feat has often gone unappreciated by Christian scholarship of all stripes."<sup>136</sup> Without critiquing how this may have negatively affected the purity of Christian theology, Raschke's point is historical and sociological. Christianity frequently encountered religions that had developed independently of it, and Christianity was able to defeat or absorb them culturally and *philosophically*. Christianity proved more attractive and logical. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, controversial a topic as it may be, Christianity has found a culture, and religion, that is specifically resistant to it, that of Islam, which is the only major world religion that was formed in part as a response to Christianity.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Carl Raschke, *GloboChrist: The Great Commission Takes a Postmodern Turn* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 158-159.

<sup>136</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 78. While Raschke's observation may point toward a weakness in Christianity that led it to absorb false ideas, his present point is sociological. From the bigger picture, "the secret of Christianity's growth throughout the ages has always been its unstinting push to evangelize non-Christian peoples and cultures. Contrary to politically correct thinking prevalent nowadays throughout the secular West, this impulse does not emerge from some lingering imperial drive of one civilization to dominate the other or even of one religion to dominate over all the others. It originates in Jesus's explicit instructions to his followers, which tradition has named 'the Great Commission,'" Ibid., 47.

<sup>137</sup> Raschke is well aware that Westerners have suddenly seen "torrents of ink have been spilled lately, gathering steam since September 11, 2001, about the causes, prognoses, and sources of blame for" the hostilities between radical Islam and the West. In any case, "the unassailable fact is that historically those peoples who have been predominantly Christian and Islamic have never been capable of anything more than a short-lived shotgun marriage to each other," Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 96. For an historical, theological, and philosophical

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The consequences of the above are straightforward. The quest of mainstream Christianity to evangelize to the world, to become a GloboChristianity as Rashke put it, has found its first major stumbling block in the so-called 10/40 Window, representing North Africa, the Middle East, and parts of southeast Asia, where a significant portion of the world's population lives, and where projections by a recent Pew Research study indicate population growth will be the most rapid in the coming decades.<sup>138</sup> Adherents to Islam, primarily through reproductive rates, are expected to grow by 1 billion people over the next ~40 years, presenting “global Christianity” with a continuing and growing challenge as Muslims remain the most difficult to convert to Christianity.

Put simply, Christianity's evangelistic impulse through “missions—whether old-guard or postmodern. . . has been unable to come to grips with the challenge of Islam”<sup>139</sup> which predominates the 10/40 region of the world. Needless to say, violence serves no useful role as part of any solution to this challenge for Christianity *or* the West, however much secular powers may feel it to be necessary at times in the light of recent violence demonstrated by certain Islamic groups. (I note with

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introductions to Islam, see John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Interestingly, it is true that “Islam is the only major religion which is a reaction to Christianity,” Raul E. Lopez, Jr., *A City Set on a Hill* (Xulon Press, 2011), 136.

<sup>138</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 93. See <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/#projected-growth-map>. Note also, “Over the coming four decades, Christianity will remain the world's largest religious affiliation, but Islam will see a major increase that will make the two religions nearly equal in numbers by 2050. In 2010, Christianity was by far the world's largest religion, with 2.2 billion followers of the faith and composing nearly one-third (31 percent) of the Earth's 6.9 billion people. Islam was second, with 1.6 billion adherents, or 23 percent of the world's population.

“If current fertility rates and youth populations continue to grow at their current rate, Muslims will make up 10 percent of Europe's overall population by 2050. Islam is expected to nearly match Christianity in the coming four decades as a result of a “comparatively youthful” population with high fertility rates,” Benjamin Fearnow, “Study: Muslims to Outnumber Christians Worldwide at 2070,” <http://washington.cbslocal.com/2015/04/02/study-muslims-to-outnumber-christians-worldwide-at-2070/>. Also see Laurie Goodstein, “Muslims Projected to Outnumber Christians by 2100,” <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/03/us/report-sees-religions-growing-and-shifting-in-next-few-decades.html>.

<sup>139</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 95.

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interest that some Catholic leaders are beginning to advocate military action to prevent atrocities by Muslims against Christians,<sup>140</sup> perhaps not surprising considering the direct statements from the most radical of Muslims against Catholicism.<sup>141</sup>)

Raschke, and others, like the historian Philip Jenkins, are all too aware that the 10/40 Window, the “‘window of resistance’ to Christian missions and evangelism,” contains countries and cultures that are predominantly Muslim.<sup>142</sup> Following in the aftermath of the events on 9/11 in New York city and a tide of interest in Islam in the mainstream news in America and the West, Raschke writes that “the looming clash” that will define the future of Christianity will be “between the two historico-religious tectonic plates that comprise Christian and Islamic visions of justice and the end times. The die has been cast, and we ignore these forebodings at our own peril.” Thus, to “explore . . . what a global incarnational Christianity might look like, we need to examine the depth of the challenge it might be facing. We must address the challenge of what has come to be called the postmodern Islamic revival.”<sup>143</sup> Similarly, Jenkins observes that “at the turn of the third millennium, religious loyalties are at the root of many of the world’s ongoing civil wars and political violence, and in most cases, the critical division is the age-old battle between Christianity and Islam.”<sup>144</sup> Although such tensions are obviously not desirable, and while some may point toward a hopeful coexistence, it is impossible to avoid the long term potential for the fundamental transformation of our cultures stemming from this tension.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> John L. Allen, <http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2015/03/13/vatican-backs-military-force-to-stop-isis-genocide/>.

<sup>141</sup> Howard Koplowitz, “ISIS Rome Is Next: Now That Islamic State Is In Libya, Will Italy Become A Breeding Ground For Extremists?” (February 18, 2015), *International Business Times*. <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-rome-next-now-islamic-state-libya-will-italy-become-breeding-ground-extremists-1820674>.

<sup>142</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 94-95.

<sup>143</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 93.

<sup>144</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 163.

<sup>145</sup> Philip Jenkins, for one, tries to see a fruitful future for both Christianity and Islam in Europe, though he acknowledges the significant challenges such a future would bring prior to any realization of harmony. Note Philip Jenkins, *God’s Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe’s Religious Crisis* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).



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Raschke perceptively notes that historic “Christian fundamentalism [on the Right and Left] and jihadist Islam alike draw their energy from passionate moral and spiritual convictions inflamed by [postmodernism].”<sup>146</sup> Raschke believes that “the Western [secular Left leaning] intelligentsia’s familiar dismissal of these fundamentalisms as backward and ignorant reflects an equally ignorant and outdated bookish view regarding the sources of religious meaning and authority. In a not so-nuanced sense these fundamentalisms are the cutting edge of globalized, and globalizing, religiosity.”<sup>147</sup> Raschke is offering a subtle critique of the West’s historical responses to Islam, from that of engaging it militarily to ignoring it. Both are ultimately inadequate. Put more precisely, “Western secularists have not yet figured out that Islam has more allure among the perceived victims of globalization and Westernization than anything they might offer up because it provides a collectivist vision that is also deeply spiritual. Evangelicals, in contrast, have tended to hang on to the old colonial mentality, which regards Muslims as on the same level as tribal animists or folk religionists rather than acknowledging Islam as a redoubtable force that at one time almost completely overwhelmed—and in the right circumstances could still overwhelm—the Christian West.”<sup>148</sup>

Interestingly, Raschke, correctly, in my opinion, observes that “the only way Christianity can hope to succeed against Islam in today’s global context is to put aside the secularist project altogether. That is not to say that Christianity . . . must adopt some form of quasi-Marxist liberation theology in answer to Islam. . . . Christianity today must become far more radical than it has ever imagined.”<sup>149</sup> But he is not speaking in favor of Christianity’s past, unwise and un-Christian, efforts, nor of the secular right’s solution today to entrench the West within an openly antagonistic stance. Rather, indeed, “the fulfillment of the Great Commission will not be without struggle. The struggle is ultimately a spiritual one, but it is real, it is contemporary, and it will become more intense as the years wear on. Through dialogue, Muslims and Christians may come to agree on common points of their mutual Abrahamic faiths, but the differences will always

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<sup>146</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 120.

<sup>147</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 120.

<sup>148</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 114.

<sup>149</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 114.

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outweigh the similarities. The differences make the difference.”<sup>150</sup> And such differences will constitute the development and success of Christianity in the future, both globally, and, eventually, within America. Raschke concludes by noting that our global postmodern (what he calls “globopomo”) resurgence, which includes religion, “has set us on an inescapable collision of eschatologies”<sup>151</sup> with Islam.

As we advance upon the road toward this collision, our notions of a “liberal Christian, or even post-Christian, global civil society that allows a loose and mutually respectful—if not tolerant—recital of differences is looming as increasingly less possible in our globopomo environment.”<sup>152</sup> Thus, Christianity will itself face a crisis of a more severe type than what the Right and the Left offer us. “The challenge to the postmodern Christian sensibility will not be whether some evangelically flavored form of Western cultural pluralism and libertarianism can seriously compete with the moral and spiritual absolutes being propounded by the resurgence of religion throughout the developing world.”<sup>153</sup> Rather, “the challenge is to be able to frame the nonnegotiable truth of the Christian witness in terms that will have a genuine, planetary impact.”<sup>154</sup> Raschke realizes that the only solution for Christianity is “a new eschatological fervor on the part of Christians the world over, particularly in the senescent West, that will reactivate the summons of the Great Commission in these latter days.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 115. “Islam is founded on an absolutely objectivist revelation that we either accept or reject,” Ibid. Unfortunately, speaking of the contemporary moment, when extremist movements like ISIS (Islamic State in Syria) have risen to prominence, the context of the conflict is pushed into antagonism all too quickly. But whether it is rapid, or takes more time, the clash of the cultures is inevitable. For more on the contemporary context, see Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York, NY: Regan Arts, 2014); Jay Sekulow, *Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore* (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2014); Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (London, UK: Willam Collins, 2015); and Reza Aslan, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (New York, NY: Random House, 2011).

<sup>151</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 143.

<sup>152</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 144.

<sup>153</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 148.

<sup>154</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 148.

<sup>155</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 150.

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*4.1 Adventism Within the Future of GloboChristianity*

If the answer to the polarization in mainstream Christianity's future, including particularly in America, is not found in the Religious Right or Emerging Left, as Raschke contends,<sup>156</sup> then where may it be found? Although here I must part ways with Raschke's emphasis on global Christianity, which I believe should be understood generally as apostate Christianity, I nevertheless end on a note from James Smith's introduction to Raschke's book *GloboChrist*, in which Smith, while summarizing Raschke's book, invites him to "consider becoming a fervent devotee of 'remnant' theology—committed to the sense that God is present with the 'few' who remain faithful."<sup>157</sup> Such an invitation, if I may appropriate it, is one that Adventism has long welcomed with its emphasis on a remnant theme in our philosophical theology's eschatological focus.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> The fundamentalists [in the Religious Right], who "detest postmodernist thinking, which they dismiss as relativist thinking," "are really seeking to shut their eyes and magically wish away the challenge of giving a rational or theological account of their faith, while knowledge and the different strains of religious and ethical discourse proliferate in a global setting. Fundamentalism is . . . the idolatrous substitution of eighteenth-century propositional rationality for the biblical language of faith itself," Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 156. See also, Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Post-modernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004). In like manner, "unfortunately, the issues of the new, trendsetting [Left leaning] Emergent Village kind of postmodern Christianity are not really global issues. At the start of the new millennium, they are simply a replay of the modernist-fundamentalist debates of a century ago, with a few savory pinches of the culture wars thrown in for good measure. They are debates over how rigid or loose one is supposed to take classical Christian directives, how far one can accommodate to contemporary secular values and perspectives without diluting the meaning and motivating force of the faith itself. [However,] accommodating or not accommodating to the saeculum is no longer of any discernible consequence for global Christianity. It is the saeculum itself that is everywhere under siege and is crumbling. The saeculum originally was a classical theological notion. It referred not to the age 'to come,' or the age that we had all better become 'used to,' but the age that was 'passing away' as the kingdom of God established itself on earth and in resplendent majesty. If the saeculum is passing away, as [philosophers like Jacques] Derrida and others intimate, then it is not because of some temporary historical cycle that will eventually play itself out, comparable to Republicans or Democrats winning control of Congress. It is because the saeculum has now run right up against the eschaton, the latter of which happens to be the limit of the former. The question no longer is whether to have eschatology but which eschatology to have," Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 148.

<sup>157</sup> James Smith, "Foreword," in Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 10.

<sup>158</sup> Please see n.2 for further references to the prevalence of the concept of "remnant" in Seventh-day Adventist theology.

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I believe Adventism may look toward biblical prophecy with a renewed vigor for the answer to this question. Recently, Tim Roosenberg has advanced an interpretation, which has additional forthcoming scholarly support, that sees a prominent place for Islam in the global picture of Adventist eschatology.<sup>159</sup> Central to his view is that in Daniel 11:24-39, the king of the north represents various progressions of apostate Christianity, which is centered upon Catholicism's embrace of Sunday, while "the king of the south during that period was Islam."<sup>160</sup> Although my present purpose is not to examine the exegetical and historical issues that would help flesh out this interpretation, which is still necessary, I do believe it is essentially correct. Of course, Roosenberg also believes, and much more controversially (particularly in Adventist history), that in Daniel 11:40-45, there is no change from the previous geo-political-religious focus, and thus the king of the north remains apostate and false Christianity, and the king of the south remains Islam, and not atheism or some other philosophical perspective,<sup>161</sup> through to the end of time.<sup>162</sup>

I hope it is clear that Roosenberg, and myself, would obviously not wish to "pick sides" in this clash of cultures, religions, and nations, as would many "apostate" Christians.<sup>163</sup> The king of the north and south are both representatives of false religious and political powers and influences. Thus, we cannot support, as would most people living in the Christian West, the methods of the king of the north in opposing the king of the south. We are, as Sabbatarians, "caught in the middle" between Sunday worshiping Christians and Friday worshiping Muslims, and are thus a remnant seeking to influence the world by informing people of the true nature of present events while simultaneously awaiting our rescue from it. We are trapped in the middle of this global clash of cultures, which is both

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<sup>159</sup> Tim Roosenberg, *Islam & Christianity in Prophecy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2011).

<sup>160</sup> Roosenberg, *Islam & Christianity*, 95.

<sup>161</sup> For a review of the issues pertaining to Daniel 11, see Donn W. Leatherman, "Adventist Interpretation of Daniel 10-12: A Diagnosis and Prescription," in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* Vol. 7 #1 (1996), 120-140.

<sup>162</sup> Roosenberg, *Islam & Christianity*, 51.

<sup>163</sup> Roosenberg, *Islam & Christianity*, 13. "Please note: the prophecy [of Daniel 11] and its interpretation is neither anti-Muslim nor anti-Christian. Rather, it is a straightforward prediction of what will happen in the future," Ibid.

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philosophical (ideological) as well as manifesting itself in a geopolitical form that is recognizable to us.

Adventist evangelism takes place within the ideological fervor of the growing global geopolitical tensions between so-called Christian nations and Islam.<sup>164</sup> Adventism's greatest evangelistic challenge is navigating through the global context described above. As such, if viewed philosophically, traditional interpretations that place Adventism and spiritual issues at the center of Daniel 11:40-45 can still be regarded as true while simultaneously accepting the external global geopolitical context Roosenberg presents. To aid in explaining this, essentially, one common interpretation of the king of the south in Daniel 11:40-45, atheism, is not a viable philosophical counter to Catholicism. Atheism is, in a very philosophically technical sense, a phantom in the Western world,<sup>165</sup> a natural consequence of platonic/aristotelian Christianity taken to its logical

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<sup>164</sup> Tragically, recent events illustrate the presence of Adventists within the violent tensions in parts of the world where Islam and Christianity coexist. See "10 Adventists Killed in Kenyan University Massacre," in the *Adventist Review* online, April 8, 2015. <http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2520-10-adventists-killed-in-kenyan-university-massacre>.

<sup>165</sup> If the philosopher Martin Heidegger is correct, then atheism doesn't even exist in today's world so long as classical science is accepted as absolute, which for the vast majority of western society remains true. Writing on the 'father of atheism,' Friedrich Nietzsche, "as an *ontology*, even Nietzsche's metaphysics is *at the same time* theology, although it seems far removed from scholastic metaphysics. The ontology of beings as such thinks *essentia* as will to power. Such ontology thinks the *existentia* of beings as such and as a whole theologically as the eternal recurrence of the same. Such metaphysical theology is of course a negative theology of a peculiar kind. Its negativity is revealed in the expression 'God is dead.' That is an expression not of atheism but of ontotheology, in that metaphysics in which nihilism proper is fulfilled," Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four—Nihilism*, ed. David Farrell Krell, tr. Joan Stambaugh, et al. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1991), 210. See also, Ian D. Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 203. When "Heidegger asserts that 'technology is not grounded in physics, but rather the reverse; physics is grounded upon the essence of technology,' his point is thus that physics' guiding understanding of the being of physical entities is taken over from Nietzsche's 'technological' ontotheology, which has already preunderstood the being of all entities as intrinsically meaningless forces," Ibid. Note also, Joeri Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings?: The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011), 5. "Ontotheology's obsession with objects decides in advance how God will enter the philosophical discourse," if God enters at all, Ibid.

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secularized conclusion.<sup>166</sup> Islam, however, remains such a counter to Christianity, precisely because it mirrors Catholicism in utilizing a platonic/aristotelian philosophical framework. This provides Islam with a metaphysics comparable to Catholicism and places it within a religio-ethical context. As such, Islam provides the only genuine competitor to Catholicism at a philosophical level.<sup>167</sup> The only serious alternative to the platonic/aristotelian framework would be Eastern religions, which are not necessarily atheistic, often leaning pantheistic.<sup>168</sup>

Obviously, these issues are complex and worthy of more attention than I can give them at present. However, I believe they do warrant such attention, and offer a compelling reason to study contemporary events with a renewed and sharper focus. In other words, I believe Adventists have something to offer, both in sympathy, and critique, to the American Right and the American Left, as well as how they each currently relate to the global context.<sup>169</sup> I also believe Adventists have something to offer, both in

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<sup>166</sup> “[The classical fusion of platonic philosophy with] Christian theology is the precondition, according to Heidegger, for the ‘process of secularization,’” Carl A. Raschke, *The Alchemy of the Word: Language and the End of Theology* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 71.

<sup>167</sup> Compare in particular, Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, 10-11; with Edward T. Barrett, “Hermeneutics and Human Rights: Liberal Democracy, Catholicism, and Islam,” 237-266, in *Political Islam from Muhammad to Ahmadinejad: Defenders, Detractors, and Definitions*, ed. Joseph Morrison Skelly (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010); and Peter D. Beaulieu, *Beyond Secularism and Jihad?: A Triangular Inquiry into the Mosque, the Manger, and Modernity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012), 168, 218. For overviews explaining the common origins of Islam and Christianity philosophically, see Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, 2001); Hamid Naseem, *Muslim Philosophy: Science and Mysticism* (Darya Ganj, New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2001); Roy Jackson, *What is Islamic Philosophy?* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014); and Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 406-408.

<sup>168</sup> Val Waldeck, *Eastern Religions: What Do They Believe?* (Pilgrim Publications, 2005), 10.

<sup>169</sup> I also note, with interest, that America and Islam have had a very complex history prior to the events of 9/11, which is when for many in our current generation Islam dawned upon our consciousness quite suddenly. Such connections provide additional justification for linking the United States with papal Rome during the time of the end. See Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States & The Muslim World, 1776-1815* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995). Allison notes that the U.S. Navy was originally

sympathy, and critique, to the people from both of the broader global cultures of Christianity and Islam. We have a message to the entire world concerning its impending end and the second coming of Christ. Realizing how our message fits within the American and global context may invigorate our evangelistic message, particularly in relationship to the philosophical issues undergirding the Great Controversy, as well as aid in clarifying our prophetic and eschatological message for people living in the world today as the 21<sup>st</sup> century advances.

### **Summary and Concluding Thoughts**

This article has addressed the contemporary socio-political context in the United States, including how it may impact upon the nature of religion within a global context. In particular, a description was given of the unusual sharp polarization within recent American political society of the Republican and Democratic (conservative-right and progressive-left) parties over the past 35 years, which has been reflected both philosophically and geo-socially amongst various Christian denominations and other religious faiths. I refer not merely to politics, but to entire socio-economic identities which more naturally align with one of the two major American political parties. This polarization led to the development of two *competing* “ecumenical” trends within American Christianity, namely, the Religious Right and the Religious Left. Most denominations that have attempted to straddle the line through the rise of this polarization have suffered significant losses in membership, whereas denominations (be it their leadership or members) that have chosen or found themselves more naturally aligned with either the Right or Left have seen greater growth and their members feel a sense of greater identity.

There are two notable exceptions to the above pattern in America, namely, Catholicism and Seventh-day Adventism. Both of these denominations have weathered the storm of the socio-political polarization in America better than any other religious denominations, while still retaining fairly strong divided sympathies for aspects of both the Right and the Left. Why they have been able to do this likely reflects the deeper and

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created to combat the Islamic Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean. See also Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East—1776 to the Present* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2007).

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broader *philosophical* basis for their worldviews, which more fully and wholistically appreciate the many complexities and challenges facing our world at a socio-political level. They are natural sparring partners at a philosophical level, while likewise, in turn, remain sparing partners internally with themselves. They both have vibrant intellectual communities. This does not mean all is well, however, for either of them, as for now it appears the broader Right and Left appear destined to continue alongside their competing trajectories into the indefinite future. This is because their tensions are deeply rooted in philosophical tensions that remain very much unresolved for even professional philosophers.

The natural question, upon learning the above, is what should we expect from the future of our socio-politically polarized Christianity as it awaits the eschaton, trapped as it is within the socio-political spider web? This article then explored, following the lead of Carl Raschke and Adventist Tim Roosenberg, the rise of the idea of Global Christianity (GloboChrist) and what has been identified as its primary challenge: that of evangelizing the Islamic world. It was suggested that the prophecies of Daniel 11 point toward an upcoming renewal of the age-old tension between Christianity and Islam, which will, overall, unite apostate Christianity against a common challenger. Again, as with the Right and Left, there will be no ultimate philosophical victor between the clash of religions of Christianity and Islam, but, rather, collectively the philosophical tensions found within the Right and Left, between Christianity and Islam, will represent the context within which Adventists must spread our message to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ at the eschaton. The world will find it cannot resolve its philosophical tensions on its own, we must be active in spreading this news.

There are, therefore, a few lessons that I believe Adventists should learn from the above situation. First, the world wants to know, insofar as it is aware of us, now far more than even in Ellen White's lifetime, what we believe about the direction the world should go on major socio-political issues. An open invitation awaits us to become yet another "conservative" or "progressive" denomination and ally our identity respectively to one of the two false gospels, that of the legal/moral gospel or the economic/social gospel. *We must resist that invitation, while simultaneously understanding why it is offered to us*, so that we may learn and benefit intellectually from



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the philosophical challenges the world around us is facing, and press together in a renewed and strengthened identity as Seventh-day Adventists possessing a unique philosophy and theology. We may continue expressing our sympathies with some of the emphases that the Right and Left promote so far as is helpful in our evangelistic and missional endeavors, but we must never step within their web and entangle ourselves, so that we can prevent the spider from catching us. We must never become known as the Seventh-day Republican or Seventh-day Democrat church. We must remain fruitful as a church that can uniquely and properly evangelize to people groups that represent all socio-political sympathies, while simultaneously drawing them away from those identities into the true global Christian message, centered upon Revelation 14.

So far as time shall last, what, precisely, our corporate identity will become in the eyes of this world, beyond our doctrinal distinctives as we continue to remain true to our system of truth centered upon Christ's work in the most holy place, is only located in a yet unrealized and unknown future. However, as we move forward in time, conscious as we are of our remnant status, whatever the result, we must remain conscious of what precisely we are avoiding. We must cease unconsciously presenting a divided corporate socio-political witness to the world. Yes, we should remain aware of the issues that the world is expecting of any Christian socio-political and philosophical system. But this does not mean we must incorporate any elements from the world. It is imperative for our future success that we develop a consciousness of what things the world is expecting, so we can formulate our response with such an awareness built in to better address the concerns of the world as they arise, and to point them toward the logic that sustains the philosophy undergirding Adventist theology and its relevance to the broader concerns that the Christian corporate identities are addressing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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