



Religion & ETHICS  
NEWS WEEKLY

# Viewer's Guide

With essays, discussion questions and resources on our changing religious and ethical landscape. A production of Thirteen/WNET New York.

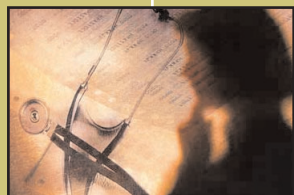
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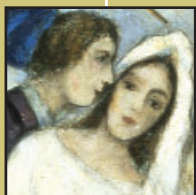
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# Dear Reader and Viewer,

It seems these days that many of the issues confronting American society have important roots in the religious values, theological themes and moral and ethical principles that *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* regularly explores. From Iraq to Washington to communities across the United States, important questions about justice, faith, freedom, equality, liberty, human dignity, social responsibility, security, and trust all seem to be on the national agenda at once in all sorts of ways.



Bob Abernethy, Host and Executive Editor of *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*

The 2004 presidential campaign raises our awareness of many of these issues, and this edition of the Viewer's Guide includes an essay on God and politics in an election year. It also features a range of commentary about Islam and democracy, drawing on some of the interviews done for *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* by our reporters and correspondents, and excerpts from conversations with three scholars about the role of evangelicals in American life — part of *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly's* recent national survey and four-part series examining aspects of evangelical Protestantism.

Two additional pieces in the guide cover religion and human sexuality and the connection between spirituality, religion and the arts. And finally, since it seems that few things illuminate the human condition better than illness, the guide also includes a piece on the revival of the practice of storytelling in medicine.

We hope that *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, together with the variety of essays in this companion Viewer's Guide, will continue to bring you compelling reporting, thoughtful reading and useful resources for the religion and ethics stories that are at the heart of the news each week. Please stay tuned.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Abernethy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Bob Abernethy  
Executive Editor

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arnold Labaton". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a prominent loop at the end.

Arnold Labaton  
Executive Producer

## ABOUT THE TELEVISION SERIES

Hailed as “one of the most thoughtful and satisfying magazine series on the air” (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*), *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* has been breaking ground in news reporting since its national debut on PBS in September 1997. Hosted by veteran journalist Bob Abernethy, the acclaimed series, winner of the prestigious Sigma Delta Chi Award, covers top stories in religion and ethics news, focusing on significant events, controversies, people and practices of all religions, all denominations, and all expressions of faith.

## FUNDING

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# Islam and DEMOCRACY



An Afghan woman gets her voter identification card at a registration center in Kabul, Afghanistan, 2004

The events of September 11 and the subsequent war on terrorism have provoked widespread discussion about the compatibility of democratic values and the teachings of Islam. In comments excerpted from interviews with *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, experts and scholars respond to the question of democracy, modernity and reform in contemporary Islam.



he Muslim people do not like freedom and democracy any less than anybody else. It is in the nature of human beings to like freedom. The

problem is sometimes these terms are defined exclusively upon the basis of the Western experience, which is culturally bound and has taken many historical transformations to become what it is. There is no reason there couldn't be a democracy in Iraq. But you cannot do it from the outside. You can always help the conditions, but you have to have the transformations from within. It needs time.

The question isn't whether Islam can live with modernism. There's a much more profound battle afoot. It isn't that modernism has won the day, and now everybody has to conform to it. Modernism itself is floundering. Islam as a value system, not only as a religion, has to be thought about as a contending way of looking at the universe. Islam can live with modernism on a practical level. But there has to be an intellectual exchange. The idea that modernism is reality and everything else has to conform to it — that has to be challenged.

— Seyyed Hossein Nasr is professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University.



uslims have to modernize their societies, and they've only just begun. It's a long, painful, difficult process. They are having to do it far too quickly, and

they are experiencing many of the same traumas we did in Europe: wars of religion, revolutions, reigns of terror, exploitation of women and children, despotisms, basic alienation and anomie as conditions change and nothing new takes their place. We are watching people in some parts of the Islamic world going through a process that we went through ourselves but have forgotten. We think that anybody can just create a democracy in no time at all, forgetting that it took us hundreds of years to develop our secular and democratic institutions.

— Karen Armstrong is the author of *Islam: A Short History*.



he Qur'an is clearly not a political constitution as we understand the term today. Nonetheless, it envisions a society devoted to justice for all and to

aiding the oppressed in light of a collective responsibility before God. Historically, Muslims have relied on monarchies (whether in secular sultanates or religious caliphates)

that have been open to abuses of power. Today Muslims are seeking newer models of government that offer the greatest possibility of self-determination and living a life free from injustice.

The question for any society trying to reconcile religion and liberal democracy is whether it will ensure for women and religious minorities the same civil liberties it would mandate for its own male members. This is not an abstract, theoretical question for Muslims. It is timely and urgent, and it will need to be answered in the affirmative.

— Omid Safi is assistant professor of philosophy and religion at Colgate University.



ome of the grand ayatollahs are straightforward exponents of democracy, and they are extraordinarily tolerant. When it comes to their points

of view, they do seem to be democrats. If Iraq succeeds, it could help pull the Arab world out of a great dismal swamp it's been stuck in for the last 50 years. It could be getting away from the millstone of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It could remove the greatest impediment for the Arab-Muslim world to join the modern world. We will help to reconcile not just Iraq but Islam to the modern world.

As a Presbyterian elder, I am interested in Islam. This is our sister religion; why is it not performing better? For me, it has been one of the most liberating and uplifting experiences finally to talk to Muslim thinkers who had arrived at the same destination I had in entirely different ways. We had parted in the Middle Ages. They had gone in one direction, we had gone in another, and yet on faith and morals and politics we found ourselves at pretty much the same place today.

There should be a raging debate in the United States and the United Nations about the great challenge to religious freedom and individual rights posed by Islamic extremism, and there hasn't been. The universality of human rights is being eroded by Islamic regimes in Iran and Saudi Arabia and Sudan and northern Nigeria without any debate at all. Their religious rights end where they start limiting other people's religious rights. They don't have a right to kill people, torture people, imprison them. They can't use the instruments of the state to impose their version of Islam on the rest of the community.

— Hume Horan served as a former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia and senior Coalition Provisional Authority adviser on religious affairs in Iraq.



What is the place of Islam in the travails the world is going through? Sometimes I'm inclined to agree with a sentence Mary McCarthy wrote in her *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*, that religion makes good people better and bad people worse. Perhaps religion has added intensity to many of the struggles that are going on, but I don't believe the actual struggles are primarily caused by religion. They have all almost naturally attained a religious flavor because the majority of the world's peoples are now engaging in some way in politics, and their identity is more religious than nationalistic.

It is popular to say that the Muslim world has not had a reformation, which is not quite correct. Some forms of Islam are very Protestant in character. Some are more Catholic in character. But Islam has not seen the elements of Enlightenment that passed from the West into the Muslim world fully absorbed into religious learning. That's a revolution that is taking place now. It's a gradual revolution, but I have no doubt that 25 years from now it will be a revolution that is largely accomplished.

— Roy Mottahedeh is professor of history and Middle Eastern studies at Harvard University.



There is an ongoing struggle in the modern age for the soul and definition of Islam. Muslim ideologies are competing and clashing for what Islam is going to stand for. There is a Sufi trend in Islam that tends toward mysticism. You never hear of a terrorist coming from the Sufi ranks, although Sufism is a huge Muslim reality. There is a liberal trend, and you never hear of a terrorist who comes from a liberal background. There is, however, a very strong puritan trend in Islam. Not all puritans are terrorists, but all terrorists are puritans.

Muslims have gotten into the habit of engaging in very simple-minded apologetics. They talk in lofty terms about the moral supremacy of Islam, but they will not engage in the necessary self-critical analysis that supports liberal values. It has become so easy intellectually to blame the West

for every failure within Muslim countries. Muslims do condemn terrorism, but you need more than that. You need to go into the Islamic tradition and honestly see what contributes to a radicalized discourse. If you say, "Here are our problems. Here is our tradition, and we are struggling to redefine it and cleanse it of elements that might contribute to oppression and terrorism and repression," I believe the vast majority of non-Muslims will respect you more.

— Khaled Abou El Fadl is professor of law at UCLA School of Law.



Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, while Europe was torn apart by bloody conflict and religious upheaval, Muslims enjoyed relative peace and harmony. Although the world of Islam fought wars on its frontiers, those conflicts were not comparable to the devastation that rocked Europe. In the Islamic world, autonomous local institutions produced messy, unstructured but nevertheless successful societies. They created a peaceful social order in which people of different religions and ethnicities knew who they were and where they belonged.

The genius of the West lies in sustaining an open society with constitutional checks and balances that protect individual rights, freedoms and obligations. But the Enlightenment was not a coincidence. It occurred as a result of trade and cross-fertilization of cultures, particularly with the world of Islam.

History shows that Islam's decentralized institutions carry within them the seeds of democracy. The challenge

is to rejuvenate Islam's previous forms of local autonomy and decentralized authority — to limit the reach of the tyrannical state, empower the individual and free the creative spirit. This ambitious project requires cross-cultural fertilization and receptiveness to universal currents.

— Fawaz A. Gerges is professor of international affairs and Middle Eastern studies at Sarah Lawrence College.



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The Philosopher, from "The Better Sentences and Most Precious Dictations" by Al-Moubacchir, Turkish School, 13th century

## Discussion Questions

- 1 Is there a foundation for democracy and self-government in Islam?
- 2 Can Islam and democracy coexist? Under what conditions do they thrive together? What have you observed about the experience of Islam in the modern democracies of America and Europe?
- 3 Do you think the Muslim world is ready for the development of democratic institutions?
- 4 Should spreading democracy in Islamic countries and societies be a U.S. foreign policy goal?

*The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* by Abdulaziz Sachedina (Oxford University Press, 2000)

*The Jihadists: Unholy Warriors* by Fawaz A. Gerges (forthcoming from Harcourt, Inc., 2005)

*Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam* by Anthony Shadid (Westview Press, 2002)

*The Place of Tolerance in Islam* by Khaled Abou El Fadl et al. (Beacon Press, 2002)

*The Political Language of Islam* by Bernard Lewis (University of Chicago Press, 1991)

*Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* edited by Omid Safi (Oneworld Publications, 2003)

*What's Right with Islam: A New Vision for Muslims and the West* by Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf (HarperSanFrancisco, 2004)

Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy  
[www.islam-democracy.org](http://www.islam-democracy.org)

United States Institute of Peace: Special Report on Islam and Democracy  
[www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr93.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr93.html)

## Readings and Resources

*After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy* by Noah Feldman (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2003)

*The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (HarperSanFrancisco, 2002)

*Islam and the Challenge of Democracy* by Khaled Abou El Fadl (Princeton University Press, 2004)

*Islam and Democracy* by John Esposito and John Voll (Oxford University Press, 1996)

*Islamic Political Ethics* edited by Sohail Hashmi (Princeton University Press, 2002)

# Narrative Medicine and Ethics

by Missy Daniel

IN THE SPRING OF 2004, hundreds of doctors, nurses, patients, poets and scholars met at Duke University's Center for the Study of Medical Ethics and Humanities for a conference on "the connections among illness, health, suffering, recovery and the reading and writing of poetry."

The presentations and discussions at Duke were part of a growing movement in hospitals and at medical schools around the country called narrative medicine. It seeks to use stories, literature and writing to teach professional caregivers how to be better listeners, writers and storytellers themselves — to understand their patients, to share in the suffering of others, to practice medicine more humanely and to recognize that illness is a moral realm in which ethical questions and obligations are central to each person's experience, patient and doctor alike.

At the heart of narrative medicine is the understanding that every doctor-patient relationship starts with a story. Illnesses can be expressed and interpreted just like any tale with character, metaphor, point of view, plot and narrative structure. The practice of medicine relies on hearing and interpreting a patient's story or illness narrative.

"Stories are our currency in clinical medicine," says Dr. Maren Bataldan, who teaches in the residency program at Cambridge Hospital in Massachusetts. Incorporating poetry and narrative into clinical practice invites conversation, she explains, "about the spiritual subtexts of the work we do."

Once a month health care professionals in more than 20 Maine hospitals gather to discuss the lessons of literature for their medical work. Among the readings are the poetry and essays of Veneta Masson, a former nurse-practitioner in Washington, D.C.

*"Stories are our currency in clinical medicine."* "We are in many ways our stories,"



Masson says. "It just makes sense that when it comes to health care, if you are going to be wise, you have to realize that illness is so much more than pathology, and healing is so much more than cure. In fact, healing can occur in spite of no cure. That has to inform your approach to any person."

The interest nurses and doctors take in narrative and the human condition

can enlarge their understanding of what information is medically important when it comes to their patients, says Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, a professor of English at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. Medical writer Oliver Sacks's provocative stories about clinical encounters, for example, have helped restore narrative to a central place in the practice of medicine, and they reflect the kind of curiosity about patients that can lead to a more compassionate vision, according to McEntyre. "The core of it seems to be: What is it like to be you? If you ask those larger questions, you will find out things about patients that are very much to your purpose, and clinical medicine has defined its purposes way too narrowly."



Some see in storytelling an antidote to the technical complexities of contemporary health care. In *A Measure of My Days*, his journal about being a country doctor in Maine, David Loxterkamp describes himself as “moored to my patients’ predicament . . . and the unflinching fact

that we are interchangeable.” Such empathy for others and a capacity to be moved by their stories of illness and healing are ultimately the goals of narrative medicine.

— Missy Daniel is information editor at Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly.

## Discussion Questions

- 1 Does understanding stories necessarily make someone a better nurse or doctor?
- 2 What connections do you see between storytelling, medicine, illness and ethics? How is narrative medicine different from a mainstream understanding of the practice of medicine?
- 3 How might literature be relevant to clinical practice, patient care and medical training? Can an appreciation of narrative benefit both patients and physicians?
- 4 What responsibility do you think doctors and nurses have to help patients and their loved ones find meaning in illness and death?

*The Measure of Our Days* by Jerome Gropman (Viking, 1997)

*Medicine as Ministry: Reflections on Suffering, Ethics and Hope* by Margaret E. Mohrmann (Pilgrim Press, 1995)

*Rehab at the Florida Avenue Grill* by Veneta Masson (Sage Femme Press, 1999)

*The Renewal of Generosity: Illness, Medicine and How to Live* by Arthur W. Frank (University of Chicago Press, 2004)

*Stories Matter: The Role of Narrative in Medical Ethics* edited by Rita Charon and Martha Montello (Routledge, 2002)

*Stories of Sickness* by Howard Brody (Oxford University Press, 2002)

*The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* by Arthur W. Frank (University of Chicago Press, 1997)

*Being Human: Readings from the President’s Council on Bioethics*  
[www.bioethics.gov](http://www.bioethics.gov)

Bellevue Literary Review  
[www.blreview.org](http://www.blreview.org)

Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics,  
University of Texas Health Science Center  
[www.texashumanities.org](http://www.texashumanities.org)

Duke Center for the Study of Medical Ethics  
and Humanities  
[csmeh.mc.duke.edu](http://csmeh.mc.duke.edu)

NYU Literature, Arts and Medicine Database  
[endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med/lit-med-db](http://endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med/lit-med-db)

## Readings and Resources

*At the Will of the Body: Reflections on Illness* by Arthur Frank (Mariner Books, 2002)

*Between the Heartbeats: Poetry and Prose by Nurses* edited by Cortney Davis and Judy Schaefer (University of Iowa Press, 1995)

*Caring Well: Religion, Narrative and Health Care Ethics* edited by David H. Smith (Westminster John Knox Press, 2000)

*Doctors’ Stories: The Narrative Structure of Medical Knowledge* by Kathryn Montgomery Hunter (Princeton University Press, 1993)

*The Exact Location of the Soul* by Richard Selzer (Picador USA, 2002)

*A Life in Medicine: A Literary Anthology* edited by Robert Coles and Randy Testa (The New Press, 2003)

*A Measure of My Days: The Journal of a Country Doctor* by David Loxterkamp (University Press of New England, 1997)

# AMERICA'S

In excerpts from interviews with *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, three scholars take the measure of evangelical Protestants in America.

**E**vangelicals stress the authority of the Bible as their chief religious authority. They are activists in trying to share the good news about Jesus, and they usually stress the death of Christ and his resurrection as the central Christian teaching.

Evangelicals are an American brand of Protestant Christianity strongly influenced by revival traditions, but they have moved in many different directions. One of the great difficulties for historians and sociologists is to define just what "evangelical" means. They think they have a category into which many different evangelical groups fit, but these groups don't always want to talk to each other and aren't always aware of each other's existence. "Evangelical" is a nominal category. It's not like Roman Catholic or Presbyterian or even Pentecostal. It's a category created by observers who say, "These different groups share such-and-such traits; therefore, we should treat them together."

Evangelicals tend not to be as political as they have often been portrayed. There is a strong pietist tradition in evangelical Christianity, which means that evangelicals often focus on their spiritual lives and the good they can do in a community rather than on political life.

By some definitions, the largest component of evangelicalism in the United States would be African-American Protestants. Usually, however, African Americans are not lumped in with Caucasian, Asian and Hispanic evangelicals when the general category is used.

The diversity of evangelical Christianity is extreme. Evangelicals include people with no time for higher education and a full roster of doctors, lawyers and PhDs. Evangelical Christians are at home in some urban areas. There are many concentrations of them in small towns, rural America and main-city America. The geographical concentration is in the South and the Midwest, but also on both coasts.

With all other Christians, evangelicals believe that God rules over history, and God's mandate for individual life has been communicated through the Scriptures and religious traditions.

Evangelicals might be a bit more prone than others to see forces of good and evil, God and evil, combating in public life. But it would be dangerous to think that evangelical conceptions of the world are radically different from those of other Americans.

Evangelical Christianity is adaptable. It began in the eighteenth century with people who were willing to preach out of doors at a time when that was a very radical step. It was promoted most dramatically in early nineteenth-century America by Methodist circuit riders and Baptist lay preachers. In the twentieth century, evangelicals were pioneers in the use of radio for religious purposes. Since World War II, evangelical churches have adjusted to current culture in ways that other groups have

Billy Graham preaching at Madison Square Garden.  
New York City, 1957

# ngelicals

been slower to embrace. That adaptability is one of the reasons evangelical Protestants do better in the modern world than some other types of Protestants.

What takes place in the United States is really only a small part of a broader evangelical history for the world. Tens of millions of Africans, Chinese and Latin Americans, both Catholic and Protestant, practice forms of the Christian faith that look pretty similar to what we define as evangelicalism in the United States. The way American evangelicals interact with evangelical groups around the world will be an important factor in the future of world Christianity as well as the future of evangelical Christianity.

— Mark Noll is a historian and professor of Christian thought at Wheaton College in Illinois.

**O**ne reason evangelicals are so important in American society is their enormous energy, and the source of that energy is a powerful tension within evangelicalism between feeling part of mainstream society and at the same time feeling estranged from it.

Many observers have noticed the relatively new political involvement of evangelicals, but they are also active in the arts, culture, publishing, broadcasting and the media, and their religious pursuits are characterized by a high level of volunteerism, charitable work and para-church activities. They are in many ways very comfortable in American society.

But in other ways, this is a group that stands apart, deeply ambivalent about its relationship to the wider world and feeling that it must struggle to be heard. Three-





quarters of white evangelicals say they are part of the mainstream, but three-quarters also say they have to fight to get their message out. On one hand, they believe they have influence with political leaders. On the other hand, they continue to feel looked down upon by certain institutions, especially the news media.

Another reason for the tension is that this is a group with very distinctive religious beliefs and practices. They are deeply religious people who believe and behave in distinguishing ways, compared to the American public as a whole. They build strong communities. They are very involved in their churches and the organizations connected to their churches — something of an exception in recent American society. Evangelicals represent a counter-trend to the last several decades of decline in what scholars call “social capital” and in American community and sociability generally.

Evangelicals tend to stress traditional morality. They pay considerable attention to sexual behavior. They are very interested in families and children. They worry about institutions that have an impact on families and children — schools, the news media, entertainment, education. Moral issues are particularly important because they link evangelicals to politics and play an important role in the

way evangelicals perceive the world of politics.

If we could remove from American politics these moral issues, then it is safe to say that the evangelical community would not be so strong a constituency of the Republican Party. It would be divided, and there would be many more evangelical Democrats. There would, of course, still be quite a few Republicans, because the evangelical community is diverse. But for now it is moral issues that tie evangelicals to partisan politics. That’s why evangelicals are so central to our discussions of politics in America. But a presidential candidate such as John Kerry might actually appeal to a fair number of evangelicals on economic and social issues if moral issues were somehow subdued or removed from the table.

There is an old phrase that says Christians should be “in the world but not of the world.” In many ways that describes the tension within the evangelical community. Evangelicals perceive themselves to be very much “in” the modern world, and they are. But they do not see themselves as being “of” this world. They have other values and aspirations that set them at odds with the very society to which they belong.

— *John Green is professor of political science and director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Politics at the University of Akron in Ohio.*



## Discussion Questions

- 1 Are evangelicals part of mainstream America? If not, what sets them apart?
- 2 What do you think of evangelizing and proselytizing to convert others?
- 3 What evangelical influences do you observe in American culture, politics and religion? How are evangelicals influenced by the society around them?
- 4 Do you think the media and other institutions are hostile to evangelical values? In what ways?
- 5 How do black, white and Hispanic evangelicals differ? What signs of diversity and complexity do you see among evangelicals and their concerns?

## Readings and Resources

*American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* by Christian Smith (University of Chicago Press, 1998)

*Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America* by Randall Balmer (Beacon Press, 1999)

*Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* by Christian Smith (University of California Press, 2000)

*Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith (Oxford University Press, 2000)

*Evangelicalism: The Next Generation* by James M. Penning and Corwin E. Smidt (Baker Academic, 2002)

*The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* by Mark A. Noll (W. B. Eerdmans, 1994)

*The Transformation of American Religion* by Alan Wolfe (The Free Press, 2003)

**W**e used to talk about evangelicals as if they were a countercultural force, marginalized from society. But if we're talking about popular culture, then the influence of evangelicals is everywhere. There is an emotionality to American culture that owes a great deal to evangelical forms of worship. There is a populism to our culture that grows out of the way evangelicals structure their entire approach to religion.

Evangelicals can't ignore the culture. Their whole religious sensibility is based upon meeting the culture halfway. At the same time, American culture, just like American religion, is an enormously powerful force. It will change religion, just as religion will change culture. Evangelicals often lose this battle. They're far more shaped by the culture than they are capable of shaping the culture to their own needs. The whole megachurch phenomenon is premised upon the idea that you can't do anything with people unless you get them to church first, so the priority is to get them in there. But to get them in there, you play down the Christian symbolism; you take the crosses off the church; you make the pews as comfortable as you possibly can; you put McDonald's franchises in the lobby. Sometimes you don't even know you're in church when you go to church, because the church doesn't look like a church.

The growth of evangelicalism is probably going to do more harm to evangelicals than less harm, because it's going to expose them to so many parts of the culture that will change them in ways they can't possibly anticipate. It could not happen without the culture influencing the religion far more than the other way around. I have enough faith in American culture — in its democratic capacities, in its leveling capacities — to say to the evangelical community, "Welcome to the culture! We'd much rather have you in here being influenced by the culture than out there being a fundamentalist, being marginalized, being angry." It's much better for democracy that evangelicals join the society than that they remain outside it.

— Alan Wolfe is director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College.





# Religion and the

*Tikkun Olam* at St. Stephen's Church (detail), 1999

*by Missy Daniel*

There are many signs today of a renewed conversation between religion and the arts. Churches and faith communities across the country are connecting, through a variety of programs and ministries, with the world of arts and letters and exploring the influence of the arts on spiritual and devotional life. From jazz vespers and artist- and composer-in-residence programs to dance and theater projects, book groups, concert series, exhibitions, poetry readings and workshops designed to “discover your spiritual resources and express them artistically,” there is a renaissance of religion’s involvement in the arts and the arts’ encounter with religion.

For more than three decades, a year-round series of chamber music concerts has brought audiences to the sanctuary of San Francisco’s Old First Presbyterian Church. In 1998, Old First added a monthly jazz service inspired by the jazz ministry at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in New York City begun in the 1960s by the late Rev. John Garcia Gensel, who said that jazz, “a music with deep religious roots,” is probably the best music for worship “because it speaks to the existential situation of a human being.”

The Archdiocese of Chicago turned to a jazz musician and priest, Father John Moulder, to serve as liaison to the city’s arts community when it established an arts alliance two years ago. The church hasn’t always upheld its ancient and venerable tradition as patron of the arts, says Moulder, although for centuries it has relied on art “to transport people and to deepen the realm of the sacred.” With the alliance, he says, the archdiocese hopes “to support artists, build connections, and look for ways that religion and art can coexist.”

Artists, museums and cultural institutions, too, are rediscovering the rewards of collaborating with religious organizations. The Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, has an ongoing project to use its collection to promote interfaith dialogue. The Dallas Museum of Art has invited local religious leaders to write exhibition labels interpreting sacred and secular works of art. The Columbus Museum of Art offered a series of community events on art as an aid to enlightenment and meditation during a recent exhibition of Buddhist art, and from the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford to the Ackland Museum at the University of North Carolina, museums are using art to offer fresh perspectives on world religions and how they relate to one another.

“Great art raises profound questions,” says Connie Wolff, executive director of San Francisco’s

# ARTS

Contemporary Jewish Museum, which recently hosted a traveling exhibition called “100 Artists See God” and with Grace Cathedral sponsored a public forum about the show. “Artists ask questions about the meaning of life in the same way that rabbis, ministers and philosophers do,” Wolff explains. “Art’s ancient function was to see God,” she adds, and since Sept. 11, “artists have stepped back to think about this. Everyone is looking for more meaning, and art adds meaning.”

In part the renewed conversation between art and religion is simply a recognition that creativity is closely connected to spiritual experience. As the sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow has written, the arts

“draw people closer to God, often by expressing what cannot be put into words. They spark the religious imagination and enrich personal experiences of the sacred.”

“Meditation feeds into most artists’ work” says Connecticut artist Jo Yarrington, whose installation of photographic transparencies in church and synagogue sanctuaries was part of the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art’s 1999 exhibition, “Faith: The Impact of Judeo-Christian Religion on Art at the Millennium.” “All art is talking to God,” according to painter Makoto Fujimura, whose work often draws textual inspiration from biblical writing. Other visual artists, too, speak about the relationship they experience between faith and form, and both artists and theologians refer to the arts as “avenues of grace,” a way of contemplating the divine and listening for God.

It may be that the human situation in an age of terror and doubt has deepened both religion and art and brought them nearer together. As the dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London said on the occasion of a recent exhibition of contemporary art in cathedrals throughout Britain, “If the church is serious in working with people where they are today, then it needs to rediscover a working relationship with artists of all traditions.”

— Missy Daniel is information editor at Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly.



## Discussion Questions

- 1 In what ways are the arts and religion related? Are they also at odds? What antagonisms or suspicions do you think exist between art and religion?
- 2 How do the arts encourage an interest in spirituality? Describe the ways the creative arts have been a part of your religious tradition or worship experience, and discuss the writers, painters, poets and musicians who have influenced your spiritual life.
- 3 How might the arts serve as a catalyst for interfaith dialogue and education?

## Readings and Resources

*All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion* by Robert Wuthnow (University of California Press, 2003)

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Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion  
[www.imagejournal.org](http://www.imagejournal.org)

Christians in the Visual Arts  
[www.civa.org](http://www.civa.org)

Calvin Symposium on Worship and the Arts  
[www.calvin.edu/worship/sympos](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/sympos)

American Composers Forum  
[www.composersforum.org](http://www.composersforum.org)

The Episcopal Church and Visual Arts  
[www.ecva.org](http://www.ecva.org)

Auckland Art Museum: Five Faiths Project  
[www.ackland.org/fivefaiths](http://www.ackland.org/fivefaiths)

# The Spirit and the Flesh

by Jeffrey L. Sheler

Nearly four decades after the sexual revolution, organized religion's stand on human sexuality is undergoing intense new scrutiny. A debilitating sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church has given new ammunition to those calling for an end to priestly celibacy and a greater role for women in the church, while polarizing debates over same-sex marriage and the ordination of homosexual clergy are forcing other Christian denominations to reexamine religion's role in the bedroom.

In each case, those espousing a more liberal sexual ethic face strong opposition. Yet voices calling for change within religious institutions are growing louder, signaling an increasing and perhaps unavoidable conflict between traditional standards and changing cultural mores. The problem, says Duke Divinity School ethics professor Stanley Hauerwas, "is not just that what was thought unthinkable and even unmentionable a short time ago is now commonplace," but that "we are unsure how to assess these changes and determine their significance for the Christian community."



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No issue has proved more polarizing than same-sex marriage, which could be "the final battle of the culture wars," according to Boston College political science professor Alan Wolfe. Massachusetts's highest court in 2003 struck down that state's opposite-sex-only marriage laws and opened the way for legal same-sex marriages. Officials in San Francisco, New Mexico, Oregon and upstate New York began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples in apparent violation of state laws.

Many religious leaders have vowed to fight for federal and state constitutional amendments to prohibit gay marriages, though polls show the nation almost evenly split on a federal constitutional amendment that would define marriage as only between a man and a woman. Almost two-thirds of Americans oppose same-sex marriage, but only 51% support such an amendment, according to a Gallup Organization report in late February 2004. A compromise might be possible that would permit civil unions while denying marital status to same-sex couples, but, says Wolfe, "in the short run I'm afraid it's going to get pretty ugly."

Battles over homosexuality loom large on other religious fronts. The election and consecration in 2003 of an openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church has pushed the 2.3-million-member denomination to the brink of schism. Other mainline Protestant churches — Presbyterian, United Methodist and Evangelical Lutheran —



continue to grapple, as they have for decades, with whether to ordain active homosexuals and bless same-sex unions. So far, the 1.3-million-member United Church of Christ takes the most tolerant position of the mainline denominations by leaving the question to its regional church bodies, several of which have chosen to ordain practicing homosexuals. Among other major U.S. religious groups, only Reform Judaism, with some 1.5 million adherents, and two smaller groups — the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Reconstructionist movement in Judaism — accept actively homosexual clergy as a matter of official policy.

**Christian theologians through the centuries** have used biblical texts in Leviticus and the writings of St. Paul to depict homosexuality as contrary to the “providential norm” of sexual relations within the bonds of marriage. But for some Christians, attitudes toward homosexuality are not dependent upon biblical arguments alone. “People know about love and sex and family and children,” says Wolfe. “They don’t need religious leaders to tell them gay marriage violates their religious belief.” For others, adds Hauerwas, it amounts to “a gut feeling . . . that if nothing is wrong with homosexuality then everything is up for grabs.”

Despite explicit warnings on some types of sexual behavior, the Bible’s teachings on sex are not without ambiguity and have been a subject of contention for centuries. More than 100 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, Christian theologians, often reading between the lines of Scripture, began to formulate a systematic code of sexual conduct. As Princeton University religion professor Elaine Pagels has noted, some early Christians went so far as to argue that the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden had been sexual — that the forbidden fruit of the “tree of knowledge” conveyed, above all, carnal knowledge. But this view of the absolute sinfulness of the sex act was widely rejected. Clement of Alexandria, a Christian intellectual writing around A.D. 180, declared that participation in procreation is “cooperation with God in the work of creation.”

In every age, Christian and Jewish teachers have understood God’s admonition to “be fruitful and multiply” to mean that sex was primarily for procreation. Augustine of Hippo endorsed marriage and procreation but insisted that intercourse without a procreative purpose was sinful. For many early Christian thinkers, sexual pleasure was a problematic concept. The idea of marital sex for pleasure and emotional well-being began to gain a hold relatively late in Christian thought. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas allowed that sexual union could be an aid to love quite apart from its procreative purpose. Protestant reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin agreed with Augustine

that sexual desire tended to be disorderly, but prescribed marriage rather than celibacy as the remedy. In Calvin’s view, the emotional bond between husband and wife was the greatest good of marital sex.

After the Reformation, the basics of Christian teaching on sexuality changed surprisingly little until the twentieth century, when modern contraception dramatically altered popular sexual mores. Anglicans approved contraception in 1930, but Pope Pius XI rejected it for Catholics by reaffirming the procreative purpose of sex. In the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council took a giant step by affirming sexual intercourse as a unique expression of marital love, no less important than procreation. But in 1968, Pope Paul VI wrote *Humanae Vitae*, an encyclical declaring contraception immoral — a decree that goes largely ignored by American Catholics.



The Couple of the Eiffel Tower, Marc Chagall, 1938

Since then, rancorous debates over abortion, contraception, homosexuality, celibacy in the priesthood and women’s role in the church have rocked Catholicism. But the church shows little sign of moving on those issues.

That may be the most troubling dilemma for churches as they wrestle with sexual issues. What is the proper role of the church in modern culture? Is it to call an errant world to repentance and redemption? Or is it to swim in the mainstream where it can offer a helping hand to those who are in distress? Can the church effectively do both? It is just that tension that has both plagued and prodded Christianity from the start.

— Jeffrey L. Sheler is a contributing editor for U.S. News & World Report.

## Discussion Questions

- 1 What issues are at stake within your faith community in light of recent controversies about human sexuality?
- 2 Will it be possible for various denominations to live with intense disagreements about human sexuality? Should disunity over human sexuality be a church-dividing issue? Can debates about sexuality within faith communities transcend the rhetoric of the culture wars?
- 3 How have conditions for marriage changed over time? What does your faith tradition say about human sexuality and the meaning of marriage? Do you favor civil unions rather than marriage for same-sex couples? Why?
- 4 How should ancient scriptures and texts be applied to twenty-first-century questions and debates about sexuality?



Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), Fall of Man, after 1537

*Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice* by Stephanie Paulsell (Jossey-Bass, 2002)

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*Religion and the Body* edited by Sarah Coakley (Cambridge University Press, 2000)

*Sexuality and the World's Religions* edited by David W. Machacek and Melissa M. Wilcox (ABC-CLIO, 2003)

*Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* edited by Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Blackwell, 2002)

## Readings and Resources

*Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* by Lisa Sowle Cahill (Paulist Press, 1985)

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*The Body and Society* by Peter Brown (Columbia University Press, 1988)

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*Ethics of Sex* by Helmut Thielicke (Baker Book House, 1975)

*Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* by Derrick S. Bailey (Shoe String Press, 1986)

*The Unhealed Wound: The Church and Human Sexuality* by Eugene Kennedy (St. Martin's Press, 2001)

*The Way Forward? Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church* edited by Timothy Bradshaw (W. B. Eerdmans, 2004)

Alliance for Marriage  
[www.allianceformarriage.org](http://www.allianceformarriage.org)

Emory University Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Religion  
Sex, Marriage, Family and the Religions of the Book  
[www.law.emory.edu/cisr/projects\\_2001.htm](http://www.law.emory.edu/cisr/projects_2001.htm)

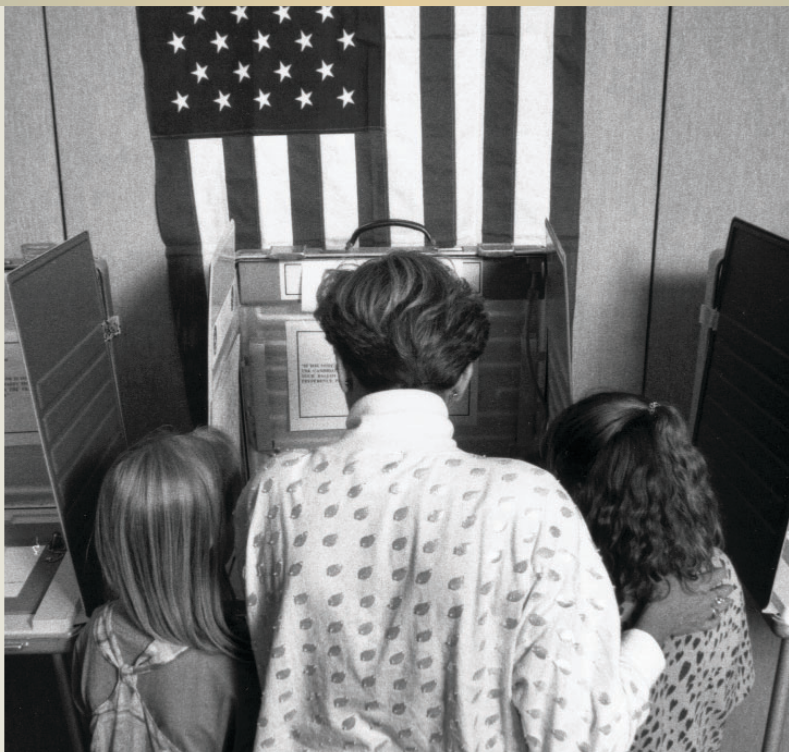
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# GOD AND POLITICS

WHAT ROLE IS RELIGION PLAYING IN THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL RACE?

by *Shaun Casey*

Religion presents perils and opportunities for both President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry during the 2004 presidential campaign. Each candidate might profit from a successful outreach strategy to specific religious groups, but at the same time each candidate could create potential risks with other significant groups of voters.



It is the conventional wisdom that voters in about 16 swing states may determine the outcome of the election. A look at the religious demographics of some of these states shows that undecided or persuadable Roman Catholics and evangelicals may prove to be the decisive voters in these states and thus for the whole race. The campaign that best recognizes the possibilities this represents and designs the most effective strategy for reaching these groups may prevail in November.

The religious profiles of a few important swing states indicate that they have significant blocs of Catholic voters, and some have interesting configurations of mainline Protestant and evangelical Christian voters as well.

According to the Glenmary Research Center's 2000 study of U.S. religious congregations and membership, the 4.9 million religious adherents in Ohio, for example, are a complex mixture of denominations. A total of 2.2 million Roman Catholics, 566,000 United Methodists, 302,000 members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

America and 167,000 Southern Baptists are the four largest religious groups, followed by the Presbyterian Church USA with 161,000 members and the United Church of Christ at 157,000 members. No single strategy would effectively reach these diverse Catholic, mainline Protestant and evangelical constituencies.

Catholic voters also represent the largest

single religious group in other swing states. Nearly half of Arizona's 2 million religious adherents are Catholic, and the same is true in Michigan, where total religious membership is just over 4 million. Of Florida's 6.5 million adherents, 2.6 million are Catholic. Missouri presents a complex mosaic similar to Ohio's, with 857,000 Catholics, 798,000 Southern Baptists, and 227,000 United Methodists out of a total 2.8 million adherents.

Some commentators have identified what they call a "God gap" or strong religious attendance gap, in partisan terms. Higher levels of religious attendance are associated with Republican voting and lower levels with Democratic voting. But the indicator for this alleged strength of religious attachment — frequency of church attendance — is an inadequate measure of religious commitment or depth of adherence. It favors religious groups such as conservative Protestant congregations that offer many more church-going opportunities in any given week than the religious traditions of Judaism and Roman

Catholicism. In those traditions, services are less frequent, and opportunities to attend are fewer. When emphasis on the frequency of church attendance is lessened, the gap essentially disappears.

### The Bush Game Plan

How will each presidential candidate approach the country's diverse religious constituencies this year? The tasks for President Bush are to mobilize conservative Protestants in greater numbers than he did in 2000, pick off a slightly larger number of African American voters and persuade more moderate and conservative Roman Catholics to give him their votes. The challenge will be to solidify his conservative Protestant base without having to use hot-button tactics that would alienate moderate and undecided voters. In 2000, Mr. Bush employed a very sophisticated strategy to do this by the targeted cultivation of specialized religious media combined with a rhetoric softer than his father's ill-fated attempt to reach conservative Protestants in 1988 by trying to use their language. In 2000, George W. Bush's compassionate conservatism was

designed to reach a wide range of religiously motivated voters, but it is questionable whether the same strategy can be used in this election while simultaneously running as a war president.

The president's chief political adviser, Karl Rove, has famously observed that more than 4 million evangelical voters stayed home instead of voting for Bush in 2000. It may simply be that to mobilize this conservative religious base requires exploiting wedge issues such as a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, but such a strategy risks offending other important voter groups. At a minimum, the president will continue to grant access to specialized religious media while reaching out to prominent evangelical religious leaders. The extent to which he will deploy explicit culture-war rhetoric remains to be seen.

Bush's courting of Catholic voters is limited to nurturing a group of conservative Catholic intellectuals while also using the ban on so-called partial-birth abortions to attract segments of the Catholic vote. His variance from Catholic teaching on the war in Iraq and the death penalty, however, is played down.



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Left: George W. Bush speaks about his faith-based initiative at a church in Council Bluffs, Iowa, 2000

Opposite page: John Kerry at the New Greater Bethlehem Temple Church in Jacksonville, Mississippi, 2004

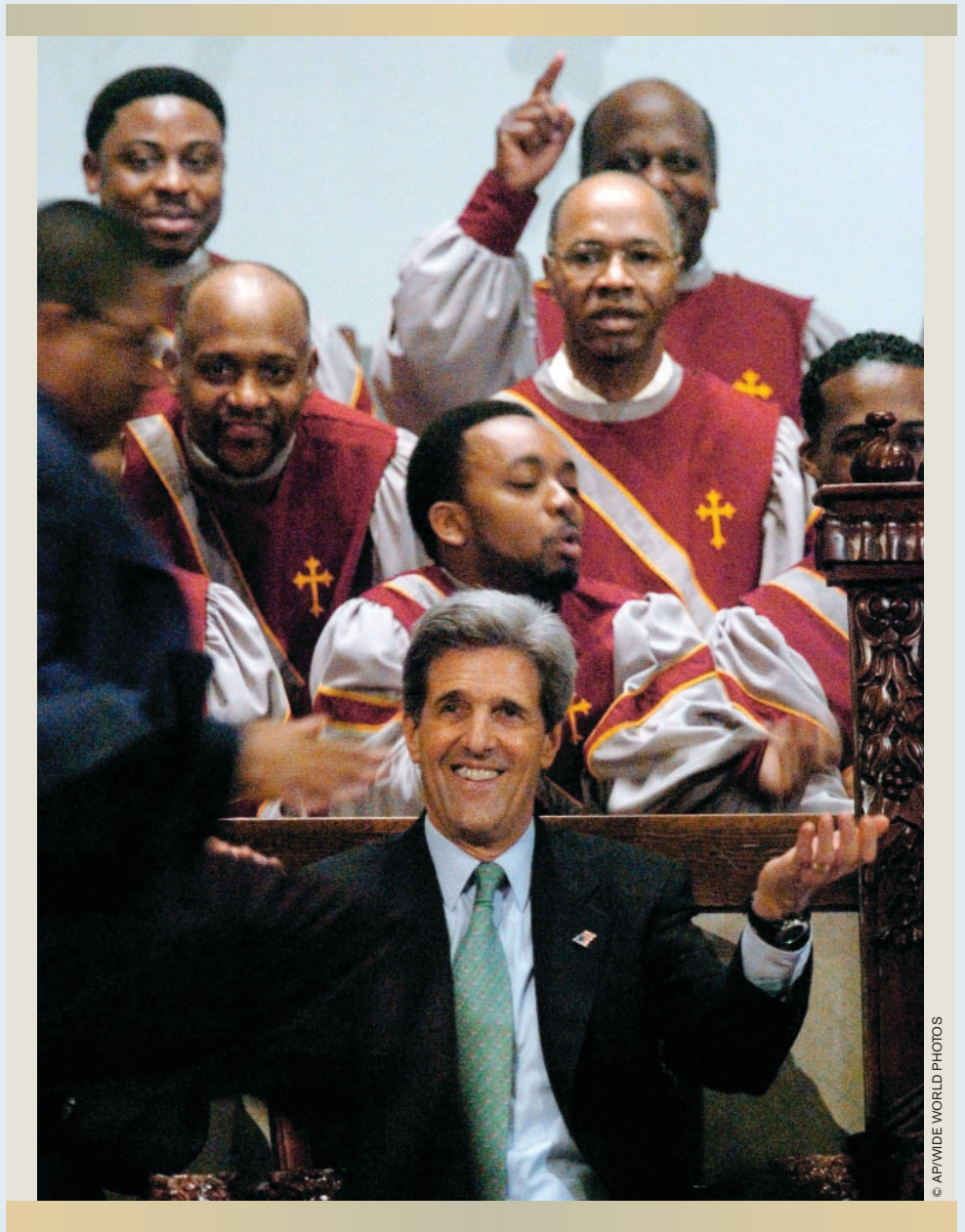
## Kerry's Catholicism

A strategy for Sen. Kerry, the first Catholic at the top of a major party ticket since John F. Kennedy in 1960, is harder to predict. Kerry's biggest asset with religious voters is that unlike Al Gore, he does not have to defend his loyalty to a president whose personal behavior left much to be desired in the eyes of many religiously motivated voters. Combined with the fact that his Catholicism may itself attract some voters, this could give Kerry opportunities with Catholics and some evangelicals that Gore never had.

At times the Democratic Party has had a tin ear for religion in American public life. While religious constituencies make up a large part of the historic Democratic vote, Democratic candidates have not always found effective ways to reach these voters. In presidential politics this is ironic, since the last four times that the Democrats won the popular vote they ran evangelical Christian candidates: Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton (twice), and Al Gore — all Southern Baptists.

Will Kerry be able to reach out beyond traditional Democratic groups such as African American churches and Jewish voters? Can he attract persuadable Catholics and evangelicals? And what themes would help him do this?

A number of issues might resonate. Every four years the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issues a statement setting out the principles Catholics should remember as they exercise their political duties in voting. "In the Catholic tradition," the bishops wrote in their most recent statement, "responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation." It is striking that the bishops also observe that some Catholics may feel "politically homeless." Neither party fully embodies their view of what the common good should be; their stance on abortion puts them at odds with the pro-choice position of Sen. Kerry, while the president's



resort to war in Iraq puts him at odds with their view on war.

It will be interesting to see whether Sen. Kerry's reception by the Catholic bishops is uniform. A few have gone on record to say that they will deny him Communion, but most have not weighed in on this issue publicly. The Archdiocese of Boston let Kerry know that he is "as welcome as any other Catholic" to receive the sacrament, while one Vatican cardinal said that Catholic politicians who support abortion rights are "not fit" to receive Communion at Mass. Given the damaged status of the U.S. Catholic Church's leadership in the wake of the clergy sexual misconduct scandals, it is doubtful that Kerry's public standing will suffer if the American bishops' reaction to his candidacy proves to be frosty. The far more important question is whether he can find messages that

will attract Catholic voters. The dignity of the human person, central in Catholic social teaching, means that pocketbook issues such as jobs, health care, prescription drug costs, the loss of manufacturing jobs, the rise of childhood poverty and hunger and the plight of the aging all might resonate with Catholics as well as with other religiously oriented voters.

Clearly most white evangelicals are going to vote for President Bush or they are going to stay home. But the evangelical world is endlessly complex and decentralized. No set of opinion leaders, institutions, publications or mouthpieces controls its unruly diversity. A recent national survey by *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* suggests that about a quarter of evangelicals say they are Democrats or they lean Democratic. A modestly successful outreach to these voters by Sen. Kerry could turn the election. Economic issues and anxiety that the country is heading in the wrong direction under President Bush's leadership both could pull a small percentage of these voters into Kerry's column.

Just as it is impossible to predict the final outcome of the race, it is also impossible to fully discern the extent of religion's influence in this election. But the role it plays will surely be interesting, and it might prove to be decisive.

— Shaun Casey teaches Christian ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.



## Discussion Questions

- 1 In what ways do you see religion and politics interacting in the United States? Does religion influence how people see the 2004 presidential race? Is there a "God gap" in American politics?
- 2 Do you think there is a relationship between religious affiliation and political preference? Between faith, citizenship and a sense of political responsibility? How does religion guide your political choices or your thinking about social and economic issues?
- 3 Is participation in the political process a moral obligation?
- 4 What important role can non-Christian religions play in politics and American public life?

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Interfaith Alliance: One Nation, Many Faiths – Vote 2004  
[www.interfaithalliance.org/Election2004/Election2004Main.cfm](http://www.interfaithalliance.org/Election2004/Election2004Main.cfm)

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life: Religion in Politics  
[www.pewforum.org/religion-politics/](http://www.pewforum.org/religion-politics/)



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## America's Evangelicals

### *Evangelicals and Culture*

Originally broadcast April 30, 2004. From pop music to politics, evangelical Protestants have become a much more visible presence in the secular world around them. But who is having the greater influence on whom in the engagement of evangelicals with American culture?

## God and Politics

### *Catholic Politicians*

Originally broadcast May 14, 2004. The recent debate over abortion and Catholic politicians focused on Senator John Kerry and his campaign for the presidency, but it affects all Catholic public officials who are pro-choice. A look at the challenges faced by Catholic politicians, past and present.

## Narrative Medicine

### *Spiritual Care for Cancer Patients*

Originally broadcast April 2, 2004. Providing spiritual care to the sick can be a considerable challenge. In the nation's capital, the Washington Hospital Center offers special training sessions for a special kind of sick person — the patient with cancer.

## Islam and Democracy

### *Seyyed Hossein Nasr on Islam*

Originally broadcast February 7, 2003. Against the backdrop of looming war with Iraq, a conversation about Muslims and Islam with Seyyed Hossein Nasr, University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University and the author of many books, most recently *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* and *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization*.

## The Spirit and the Flesh

### *What Is Marriage?*

Originally broadcast March 26, 2004. The debate about marriage for homosexuals has provoked widespread reexamination of what marriage is for everyone — a civil contract or a sacrament?

### *Same-Sex Marriage*

Originally broadcast August 22, 2003. Will same-sex marriage further erode an already embattled institution or bring it new strength and relevance by expanding and redefining its borders?

## Religion and the Arts

### *Martin Luther King and the Arts*

Originally broadcast January 17, 2003. A visit to a traveling exhibition focused on Martin Luther King, Jr. and an exploration of the connections between spirituality, art, and the civil rights movement.

### *Klezmer Music*

Originally broadcast May 18, 2001. Based on East European Jewish wedding and folk music, klezmer is now played throughout the world. A report on its spiritual influences and growing popularity.

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## Multifaith Calendar

Information on holidays and religious observances can be found at [www.pbs.org/religion](http://www.pbs.org/religion). To learn more about the Multifaith Calendar, please contact David Spence, Managing Editor, The Multifaith Calendar Committee, at 604-469-1164, or send an e-mail to: [mfcalendar@pacifccoast.net](mailto:mfcalendar@pacifccoast.net).

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