

# God and the Commons

## Does Religion Matter?

What role should religion play in the public sphere, if any? How valid are the critiques of secular culture? In what ways can our religious traditions help us think about the problems that we face at home and abroad? What are our concerns regarding secularism, fundamentalism, and the political aspirations of conservative religious groups? To improve the quality of our public life—and reduce mistrust, hatred, and violence—we need to work together to address these challenging questions.

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	We have a long tradition of separating religion from government. The First Amendment has helped protect minorities and keep the peace in a pluralistic society. Religion belongs in the private sphere, where it can serve as a guide for those who want it, but it shouldn't be a basis for public policy.
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	Most of our founding fathers believed that we should embrace religious values, especially those associated with our Judeo-Christian heritage. Politicians should not have to check their religious beliefs at the public door, and government should not be hostile to religiously inspired symbols, ideas, and public policies.
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	Our society is impoverished when we exclude religious thinking from our public discourse. We need a neutral—not secular—public sphere where everyone has an equal voice. We must not allow government to enforce one religious/cultural perspective on its citizens.
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### College Issue Forums

Developing inclusive ways of addressing potentially divisive issues is a challenge for any community. Finding solutions can be especially difficult on college campuses, since differing perspectives related to ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual identity, socioeconomic class, and geographic origin have to be considered. Further more, the significant turnover of students each year creates communities in constant transition.

**Deliberative Forums** are public conversations designed to assist people with finding solutions to tough problems. Forum participants share their experiences, priorities, and values as they consider different approaches to an issue. The goal isn't compromise or consensus, but for everyone to communicate effectively across differences and develop common ground for acting together.

The **ground rules** for deliberation support increasing mutual understanding rather than undermining an "opponent's" position, defending one's own view, or withdrawing to avoid conflict. Participants are asked to consider the advantages and drawbacks of all perspectives as they search for common ground.

The **College Issues Forums Series** of discussion guides has been developed in collaboration with students and faculty at Franklin Pierce and are based on practices developed by the National Issues Forums Institute over the past 25 years. Each guide presents three approaches for addressing an ethical problem. Topics range from issues especially important to college-age students to those that affect everyone in our society.

### Ground Rules

1. **This a dialogue, not a debate.**
2. **Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one person or group should dominate.**
3. **Treat all participants as equals.**
4. **Listen to each other with empathy. Disagree respectfully.**
5. **Listening is as important as speaking.**
6. **Examine your own assumptions as well as the assumptions of others.**
7. **Explore the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.**
8. **Speak from direct experience, not hearsay.**
9. **Our goal is to move toward greater mutual understanding of the issue.**
10. **Try to imagine what others who are not present might say.**

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## Does Religion Matter?



“God was in Rindge on Saturday,” wrote a reporter for the *Keene Sentinel*, commenting on the many references speakers made to the divine during the graduation ceremony at Franklin Pierce, a small liberal arts college in southwestern New Hampshire. The headline for the story read “In God They Trust.” “While graduations are often a time to thank God, among other clichés,” the news reporter explained, “several speakers went above and beyond a passing reference to the deity, instead focusing their entire speeches on the effect God has had on their lives.”

Chief among them was Lisa A. Biron, valedictorian of the Franklin Pierce Graduate and Professional Studies Program. She spoke about how her faith in Jesus Christ had helped her to overcome a life of alcohol abuse, and enabled her to change the abusive nature of her intimate relationships and successfully complete her education. She went on to say that she now plans to go to law school to arm herself with the knowledge and skills to fight the American Civil Liberties Union, which she says is trying to destroy religion in this country. She concluded her speech by saying, “I am more certain than ever that with God all things can be done.”

**The phrase in the First Amendment known as the Establishment Clause says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” Together with the Free Exercise Clause, these make up what are commonly known as the religion clauses.**

### **The Traditional Religious Challenge**

Maybe the reason Lisa Biron is optimistic about effecting social change in this country is because she is one of a growing number of organized and politically active conservative evangelical Christians in America (President George W. Bush among them) who have come to feel that our country has been on a harmful course in recent decades. Evangelicals such as Biron believe our country’s major social institutions—the family, law, government, media and education—are being shaped primarily by secu-

lar values rather than religious ones. In their view, the American Civil Liberties Union, with its mission to defend an interpretation of the Constitution and Bill of Rights that stands for a “wall of separation” between religion and politics and defends all manner of free thought and expression, has become emblematic of the shift in the last half of the twentieth century to a more secular (non-religious) American society. These evangelicals are also concerned about how this way of viewing the Constitution seems to have guided many of the rulings of the Supreme Court in recent decades, which has strengthened this transformation to a more secular society.

Echoing the critique laid out in a seminal book, *The Naked Public Square*, by Richard John Neuhaus, many Americans have come to feel that these decisions have led to the trivialization of religious devotion. Columbia University Law School professor Stephen L. Carter has characterized this as a widespread “culture of disbelief.” Critics of secularization say America was formed, in large part, by Christian values and that the founding fathers never intended the freedom of religion and the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to lead to the strict institutional separation of church

and state, and to what, in their view, has amounted to a government-enforced freedom from religion in the public sphere.

### The Progressive Religious Challenge

More liberal, progressive Christian evangelicals and people of other faiths are also critical of the drift toward a more secular America. They argue for restoring the civic value of religion in our society, which, they say, has been historically profound and today is sorely missed. Important social movements that have greatly improved our society over the years—including abolition, women’s suffrage, and civil rights—were based on spiritual motivations and aligned with faith-based organizations. Other speakers at Franklin Pierce’s commencement made references to the religious nature of these past movements and to contemporary organizations that are making efforts on behalf of international peace and the rehabilitation of gang members and drug addicts in inner city America.

Liberal and progressive believers like Jim Wallis of *Sojourners* magazine and Michael Lerner, editor of the Jewish journal *Tikkun*, are inclined to agree with Alexis de Tocqueville, who in 1831 recognized the central, but indirect, role that religion played in American society. “Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must nevertheless be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions in that country; for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of free institutions . . . I do not know whether all Americans have a sincere faith in their religion, for who can search the human heart? But I am certain that they hold it to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions.”

### The Liberal Secular Defense

Others, such as writer Susan Jacoby in her recent book, *Freethinkers*, defend the secularist heritage of the United States. They emphasize that many of our nation’s founding fathers, as students of the Enlightenment, had as much—and, in some cases, more—faith in human reason as they did in God and they were intent on giving Americans the first government in the world based on reason rather than on the authori-

ty of religion. They sought to augment the natural counter-balancing of interest groups in a large and diverse country with governmental checks and balances on power, the non-establishment of religion, freedom of thought and religion, and mechanisms for civic discourse and democratic participation. They thought this approach would guide Americans toward the good life and a free society.

Moreover, prior to the Enlightenment, Europe lived through hundreds of years of bloody wars fueled by religious group differences. For this very practical reason alone the American founders wanted to keep religion out of the public domain in order to eliminate one of the major sources of conflict in society. Their solution involved moving religious belief and practice outside of political institutions and placing it in the private sphere of life. And indeed, the First Amendment and the Establishment Clause in the Constitution have protected our pluralist nation and preserved a measure of peace among religious and cultural groups and between the religious and the non-religious (continued)

### Key Terms

- **The First Amendment.** The First Amendment to the Constitution is part of the Bill of Rights. It says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”
- **The Establishment Clause.** This clause has been commonly interpreted to mean that it is unconstitutional in the United States for government to “establish” a national religion, or for Congress to make laws that would give preference of one religion over another or of religion over non-religious philosophies in general. This clause is the constitutional foundation of the American institutional practice of the “separation of church and state.”
- **Secularism.** Secularism is the indifference to or rejection of religion or religious considerations.
- **Secularization.** Secularization is a theory that religion has a declining significance in modern societies.
- **Fundamentalism.** Fundamentalism is the inclination to cling to unchanging principles of a religious or cultural tradition. Intense forms of fundamentalist religion are rigid, authoritarian, and exclusionary.



Interpreting the intent of the framers of the Constitution is an important aspect of today's debate over the role of religion in public life.

**We can now see the limitations of science—namely, its inability to answer moral questions.**

in our society.

The United States is unique in that it was founded expressly as a place where people could be free to practice their religion, and where there was no official national church. The founders believed that this

would allow religion and government to co-exist but operate separately. This ideal of freedom was the driving force behind the founding fathers' constitutional disestablishment of religion and their unwillingness to require any religious test for public officials. "Our minds and hearts," Jefferson wrote, "are free to believe everything or nothing at all—and it is our duty to protect and perpetuate this sacred freedom."

### **The Persistence of Religion After the Enlightenment**

In the intervening years we have lived through many more cultural and social changes. Moreover, recent science and scholarship have developed theories regarding the natural world and human behavior in a way that eliminates consideration of a possible transcendent point of reference. These theories include Darwinian evolution, Marxism, rational choice theory, conflict theory, structuralism, functionalism, and post-modernism. But although these cultural and social changes have transformed the small, homogeneous, tight-knit communities that human beings have lived in for thousands of years, they have not erased that history. In addition, faith in human freedom, reason, and democratic political mechanisms have been shaken to some extent by events in the last century such as the two World Wars and the rise of terrorism around the world.

Now at the beginning of a new millennium, it seems many people in the United States are not satisfied with a purely scientific world view. In spite of its many legitimate, even glorious, achievements, we can now see the limitations of science—namely, its inability to answer moral questions. Consequently, many people are drawn to traditional religion or to new spiritual beliefs and practices in their quest to find a meaning for existence. Senator Barak Obama has admonished the Democratic

Party to take more seriously the 38% of Americans "who consider themselves committed Christians." These people, the senator explained, just "want a sense of purpose, a narrative arc to their lives."

Indeed many Americans today have found purpose and meaning in their lives through an embrace of the moral structure and experience of community that traditional religion offers. Interest in traditional religion has grown so much in recent decades that some sociologists are beginning to think that we are in the midst of a Fourth Great Awakening. And as in past religious revivals (which occurred in the 1730s-1740s, the 1820s-1830s and the 1880s-1890s), Americans are in the process of rethinking the way we understand the relationship between religion and government—and renegotiating the boundaries between church and state.

Secularization, the idea that religion would become increasingly irrelevant in modern society, is a view born of the Enlightenment and held by many secular intellectuals over the last couple of centuries. It has now come to seem misguided in light of the resurgence religion is experiencing in the United States and around the world. The religious impulse beats strongly in human beings and appears to be a perennial feature of humanity. As sociologist Peter L. Berger explains, "existence bereft of transcendence is an impoverished and finally untenable condition." For some people this is emotionally untenable because it suggests an existence without meaning, which is too painful and insupportable a reality to bear. For other human beings this state of affairs is the reality that human beings must courageously accept, as Albert Camus' memorable hero, "Sisyphus," does.

But in his recent book, *Why Religion Matters*, comparative religion scholar Huston Smith writes, "the finitude of human existence cannot satisfy the human heart completely. Built into the human makeup is a longing for a 'more' that the world of everyday experience cannot provide. This outreach strongly suggests the existence of the something that life reaches for in the way that the wings of birds point to the reality of air. Sunflowers bend in the direction of light because light exists, and people seek food because food exists.

Individuals may starve, but bodies would not experience hunger if food did not exist to assuage it. The reality that excites and fulfills the soul's longing is God by whatsoever name."

### **What is Religion's Role in Public Life?**

We stand at a crossroads in human history and in American life. How will human beings in the new millennium give personal and public expression to this perennial feature of their existence—the religious impulse? What role should religion play in the public sphere, if any? How valid are the critiques of secular culture raised by both conservative and liberal religious people? In what ways can, and do, our religious traditions contribute to our common life and help us think about the enormous cultural, economic, and political problems that we face today at home and abroad? What are our concerns regarding secularism, fundamentalism and the political aspirations of conservative Christians, Muslims and other traditional religious groups? The presence of religion in American public life is not new; it has been a matter that Americans have debated for generations. Time and again, American citizens have had to find workable resolutions for many crucial problems concerning the proper role of religion in American public life.

Today more citizens see religion as one of the few antidotes to a perceived decline in morality, and more politicians are unwilling to check their religious beliefs at the public door. And there are others from across the political and religious spectrum who call our attention to the civic purposes of religion. If we are not to ignore those religiously motivated citizens and public officials—and recent elections indicate that we cannot—then the fundamental political and social challenge of these times is, as the leaders of the Pew Forum Dialogues on Religion and Public Life framed it, to figure out “how a polity can be open to religiously motivated insights without succumbing to the temptation to impose specific religious beliefs through the state.”

The path that avoids these pitfalls, globally and within our own country, is one that recognizes the need to genuinely listen to those with views other than our own.

Having a way to talk productively about and think through the challenge that religion presents both at home and internationally could help improve our

society and reduce religiously based mistrust, hatred, and violence in the 21st century. The circumstances call for campus and community conversations as well as a national, public dialogue.

To help facilitate these kinds of exchanges, this discussion guide offers a framework for exploring three approaches about how we might address this national dilemma. Each approach offers a different diagnosis of the problem and calls for different remedies. Weighing the advantages and drawbacks of each and sharing our perspectives with each other will help to better inform us as individuals and as a public. For in a democracy, it is the citizens who are ultimately sovereign and who must make choices and provide direction for the future about what part religion should play in our society and in our public life.



**Philosopher William James and sociologist Peter Berger have noted that people tend to find their lives richer, more satisfying, and effective when lived with a sense of a spiritual dimension they perceive as interpenetrating ordinary reality.**

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# Interpreting Church-State Relations in the 20th Century

## Key Events & U.S. Supreme Court Cases

**1925 The Scopes Trial** (Scopes v. State of Tennessee, often called the Scopes Monkey Trial) The Court upheld a Tennessee law that forbade the teaching of “any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible” in state-funded educational establishments. This decision is often interpreted as forbidding public schools to teach the theory of evolution. Noah Feldman, a legal scholar, argues that it was a watershed moment because while the 19th century antireligious movement of “strong secularism” was defeated in the court of public opinion, what followed was a new focus on secularizing the state—legal secularism—rather than on secularizing society. The trial signaled the end of the era of old-line literalist American Protestantism and the beginning of a trend that made religious institutions more attentive to serving social concerns.

**1943 West Virginia v. Barnette** In this groundbreaking decision, issued in wartime, the Court championed religious liberty when it ruled that a state could not force Jehovah’s Witness children to salute the American flag.

**1947 Everson v. Board of Education** While the Court found school boards’ reimbursement for public transportation costs of children attending parochial schools constitutional, Justice Black’s statement that the clause “was intended to erect a ‘wall of separation between church and State’” was a major interpretation of the Establishment Clause, and guided Court decisions for the next 40 years.

**1962 Engel v. Vitale** In an 8-1 decision, the Court struck down the New York State Regent’s “nondenominational” school prayer, holding that “It is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers.”

**1963 Abington School District v. Schempp** In an 8-1 decision, the Court struck down Pennsylvania’s in-school Bible-reading law as a violation of the First Amendment.

**1973 Roe v. Wade/Doe v. Bolton** One of the Court’s most significant decisions, Roe erased all existing criminal abortion laws and recognized a woman’s constitutional right to terminate a pregnancy. This case has been widely criticized by traditional religionists who hold that abortion violates the “rights of the unborn.” In Doe, the companion case, the Court ruled that it is up to the attending physician to decide if an abortion is “necessary,” and should be based on *all* factors relevant to a woman’s well-being.

**1973 Lemon v. Kurtzman** This decision, which became known as the Lemon test, required every law to have a secular purpose. It served as a guide for determining the constitutionality of future statutes, laws, and practices.

**1984 Lynch v. Donnelly** The Court’s upholding of the constitutionality of a Christmas crèche in a public park became a turning point in church-state interpretation. Sandra Day O’Conner, reinterpreting the Lemon test, wrote that the Court must ask “whether the government intends to convey a message of endorsement or disapproval of religion.” Since the crèche, in this context, “did not make anyone feel like an outsider to the political community,” the government shouldn’t get involved because it could make some people less equal than others. Feldman believes this decision shifted the government’s role from

one of maintaining secularism to protecting equality.

**1985 Wallace v. Jaffree** This decision found Alabama’s “moment of silence” law, which required public school children to engage in “meditation or voluntary prayer,” in violation of the Establishment Clause.

**1987 Edwards v. Aguillard** This case ruled that states can’t require public schools to balance evolution lessons with creationism.

**1989 County of Allegheny v. ACLU Greater Pittsburgh Area** In contrast to Justice O’Conner’s “endorsement” test, here the Court held that a public display endorsed Christianity and was therefore unconstitutional. Feldman argues that these two cases opened up a new socio-legal strategy for religious evangelicals by making equality a core Establishment Clause value. Previously legal secularists focused on the protection of vulnerable minorities, like Jews and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Some charged this emphasis slighted the majority, who wanted religion in public life. In the early 1990s, Christian evangelicals began identifying themselves as minorities who were discriminated against by the government. They argued that governmental funds should be made available to religious organizations because religion was subject to discrimination at the hands of secularist elites. They believe that religious groups are part of America’s cultural diversity and therefore entitled to the same access to resources as minorities.

**1992 Lee v. Weisman** The Court ruled that any officially sanctioned prayer at public school graduation ceremonies violates the Establishment Clause.

**1995 Rosenburger v. the University of Virginia** This case used O’Conner’s endorsement test to rule 5-4 that the University had engaged in viewpoint discrimination when it refused to fund a student evangelical publication because student activities funds could not be used to endorse religion. According to Feldman, this ruling establishes that when “state funds [are] generally available for a range of civic purposes, the Establishment Clause would not be violated by allowing those funds to go to religious organizations.” This became the legal rationale for using federal dollars to support faith-based organizations who are performing public services under the “charitable choice” part of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act.

**1996 Welfare Reform Act Charitable Choice Provision** This provision, written by Senator John Ashcroft, draws on the legal reasoning of Justice O’Conner to establish a rationale for why faith-based charities and organizations ought to be eligible to compete for federal dollars for social services.

**2001 Establishment of the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives** The office was established to coordinate and execute, where appropriate, the federal funding of faith-based social service organizations.

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### Stay the Secular Course

At the end of a dramatic six-week courtroom clash in 2005, in a battle reminiscent of the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial, a federal judge barred a Pennsylvania public school district from teaching “intelligent design” in biology courses, saying the concept is creationism in disguise. In his opinion, Judge John E. Jones argued that the Dover Area School Board’s decision to insert intelligent design into the science curriculum violated the constitutional separation of church and state.

Jones said the Dover policy was a “breath-taking inanity” that was in fact a concealed effort on the part of several school board members to promote religion. In the judge’s view, the testimony in the long hearing for the case yielded “overwhelming evidence” establishing that intelligent design is “not a scientific theory.” In the midst of the whole ordeal, which drew national attention, the Dover School District voted out of office the board members who backed intelligent design and replaced them with a new slate opposed to the policy.

#### Preserve the Separation of Church and State

The ruling by Judge Jones, a churchgoer himself, was exactly the right decision in the view of the supporters of Approach One. Not only was the judge correct in his view that intelligent design is a religious belief and not a scientific theory, but in his decision he was reinforcing the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. To rule otherwise would have been to give state support to a religious belief inserted into the public school curricula and to violate the First Amendment prohibition of government-supported religion.

This decision is consistent with many other court decisions since the 1950s—part of a pattern and a strategy legal scholar Noah Feldman has termed “legal secularism.” Its effect has been to shift the church-state issue to the federal level and make our public lives increasingly more secular. This has been primarily achieved through court



victories like this one and *Edwards vs. Aguillard*, a similar 1987 Supreme Court case that ruled states cannot require public schools to balance evolution lessons with creationism. These and other high court cases have drastically changed the role of religion in the schools and in public life more generally. As Feldman writes, “School prayer was deemed unconstitutional in 1962, and a moment of silence for private prayer was banned in 1985 . . . in 1992, the Supreme Court held that nondenominational prayer opening a school graduation violated the Constitution, and in 2000 it added public prayer before **(continued)**”

This cartoon, originally published in the *Chicago Tribune*, had the caption, “The proposition would get a lot of support if the monkeys could vote on it.”

*Courtesy of the Chicago Tribune.*

Secularists believe religion is essentially a private matter and that it is not appropriate to invoke it in the public sphere.



high school football games to the list.” In addition, there have been several other cases that banned the display of particular religious symbols in public places such as courtrooms, town squares, and in schools. (See page 6.) Supporters of Approach One believe these rulings are on the right track and that recent legal victories are having a positive effect on American public life.

They also worry that hard-fought legal and social gains could be lost if we were to lose sight of the value of having a secular public sphere. Those who say we should “Stay the Secular Course” believe that our country’s secular public culture is good and that the enforcement of a strict separation of church and state is essential to protecting religious and non-religious minorities, preserving social peace, and fostering a diverse, pluralist society. As a recent Pew Charitable Foundation poll showed, most Americans, whatever their religious views, have a healthy respect for the Constitutional principle of separation of church and state.

Religion may play a role in people’s

private lives, say supporters of this approach, but it should not be fostered through government policies. Their logic echos that argued by Benjamin Franklin, who in 1780 wrote, “when a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that its professors are oblig’d to call for help from the civil power, it is a sign . . . of its being a bad one.”

### **Check Your Religious Beliefs at the Public Door**

Where Approach One supporters do depart from the founders is in their view that religious beliefs be divorced from all public discourse and from the formation of public policy. They believe that when people speak as citizens or as officials in the public sphere, they should “check their religious beliefs at the door” and make their arguments for particular policy positions in purely rational terms and on the basis of general non-religious moral principles. Proponents of this approach argue that it is only when citizens and public officials alike “translate” their beliefs into a language that is religiously neutral that we are abiding by the spirit of the First Amendment Establishment Clause and building a fair and inclusive public sphere.

Defenders of this secularist position believe that although it may inform individual consciences, religion is essentially a private matter. It is not appropriate in the public sphere and in political debate, where discourse should be secular. Secular reasoning, they argue, is open to criticism and revision in the give-and-take of dialogue in ways that religious positions are not, since they are usually derived from “revelation” (i.e., are given in authoritative sacred texts). One does not have the right to demand that others accept the tenets of one’s own faith in making a political decision.

### **Keep the Public Sphere Secular**

Supporters of this approach say that keeping our public discourse secular will ensure the rationality and fairness of our political life. Values derived from faith are not open

## **Approach One** **For Further Reading**

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When is a Christmas crèche on public grounds unconstitutional? According to the legal reasoning in *Lynch v. Donnelly*, a crèche in Pawtucket, RI, was constitutional because it was part of a broader Christmas display that included reindeer and a wishing well, and therefore did not make some people less equal than others. But in the *County of Allegheny v. ACLU Greater Pittsburgh Area*, a crèche was ruled unconstitutional because it was displayed alone within a frame of flowers on the staircase of a Pennsylvania county courthouse. The reasoning in these cases represents a departure from earlier U.S. Supreme Court cases such as *Lemon v. Kurtzman* in that the primary value used to guide interpretation of the Establishment Clause was equality instead of secularism. (See page 6.)

to rational critique or empirical verification. If faith-based beliefs are allowed to shape public discourse, it would lead to factually reckless, dogmatic, and impractical policy-making. Public reasoning must eschew dogmatism of all kinds and stay oriented to doing what is useful and practical for the greatest number of citizens.

Moreover, to protect the public voice of minorities (religious and otherwise) and promote unity in our religiously diverse country, the public sphere needs a language that is more or less universal and not particularistic as is the discourse of religious belief. Advocates for this approach fear that if values derived from faith play a part in the formation of laws and public policy, we will go down a path of greater intolerance, which may lead to the persecution of religious minorities, atheists, and agnostics. Our nation would move away from being what philosopher Karl Popper famously described as an “open society” because the values of those who are members of majority religious traditions would increasingly shape our laws and public lives in their own dogmatic image.

### The Ties That Bind

The idea of a secular public sphere is based on a different view of social solidarity than those held by traditionalists and religious fundamentalists, each of whom would utilize different means for building a good society. Traditionalists and religious fundamentalists—what Noah Feldman calls “Values Evangelicals”—believe that the key to freedom, unity, strength, and social health lies in finding and embracing true, traditional values, those derived from Christian Scriptures and other teachings based upon them.

Jürgen Habermas, one of the world’s leading secularist thinkers, has a different view of social unity. According to Habermas, in an open and democratic society, social unity is not dependent on shared cultural values from an authoritarian past. Instead, he believes, the “unifying tie” emerges from the actual exercise of democratic freedom and engagement in public debate. In other words, only through the “habits,” or practices, of open, inclusive and secular public reasoning and dialogue can we forge the ties that bind us together in a pluralistic country and identify the values we share.

**Only through the “habits” of open, inclusive, and secular public dialogue and reasoning can we forge the ties that bind us together in a pluralistic country.**

# Traditional Religion

## Recover Our Judeo-Christian Heritage



Not unlike Lisa Baron, a recent graduate and valedictorian of the Franklin Pierce Graduate and Professional Studies Program, many people have found a path out of drug and alcohol addiction through religious conversion. And for almost 50 years, a Christian-based program called *Teen Challenge* has helped many young people do just that.

Based in Fort Worth, Texas, this program now has over 180 centers in the United States and over 230 programs in some 90 countries worldwide. *Teen Challenge* is open to all drug addicts, regardless of faith. They live within the strict structure of the treatment center, undergo counseling, and are taught basic life skills.

According to Emily Pyle, Director of Fort Worth *Teen Challenge*, “drug addiction is not the problem.” In an *Austin Chronicle* interview, she identifies “an underlying suffering, memories, or feelings so painful that they drive individuals to drugs, to alcohol, to promiscuity, to whatever numbs or distracts or provides temporary relief” as the real issue. Many substance abuse counselors would agree with Pyle when she says, “Until the underlying wounds are healed, there is no cure.” However, far fewer therapists agree with her belief that “The cure isn’t Valium or years of psychotherapy. It’s Jesus.”

While the success rates of *Teen Challenge* have not been assessed conclusively, supporters say the program probably does no harm and, in many cases, actually helps people change their lives for the better. Examples of other programs that use a faith-based approach include *InnerChange* prison programs run by Charles Colson, and *Amachi*, a public-private, religious-secular program in Philadelphia that mentors the children of inmates.

**Faith-based Initiatives:  
A New Church-State Relationship**  
For over a decade now, many citizens and

politicians have been making the argument that faith-based programs can provide something secular government programs do not—personal transformation, fellowship, and a caring community. Supporters of this approach believe it is time to give these programs more support through providing them with state and federal resources. President George W. Bush, himself an evangelical Christian who credits his own victory over alcohol abuse to his faith in Christ, has been a strong advocate of this approach. Bush’s support dates back to when, as Governor of Texas, he began to put into practice a new vision for church-state cooperation.

The first step in this direction, however, was actually taken in the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 passed during the Clinton presidency. The “charitable choice” provision of this law guarantees religious groups the right to seek public funding for their faith-based outreaches. This ensures that faith-based providers be given equal consideration when bidding against secular, non-profit organizations for social service contracts. Such funding was previously off limits to them.

In an interview for the documentary film *The Jesus Factor*, E.J. Dionne recalled a question put to him by a friend that captures this sentiment. She asked, “Why should Freud get all the federal grant money and Jesus get none of it?” This query succinctly articulates the rationale of the shift in government practice. Nowadays under the White House Office of

Faith-Based and Community Initiatives set up by President Bush, faith-based organizations can *get some of those* federal tax dollars, provided they do not use the funds to proselytize or indoctrinate. The efforts of these organizations to provide social services without proselytizing their beneficiaries and still maintain their own religious integrity will, no doubt, be examined and tested in the courts in the years to come.

### **Our Religious Traditions Are Public**

This approach calls for a closer working relationship between government and religious communities because the traditional values derived from religion are essential not only for the personal well-being of individuals, but for the public good. Supporters argue that religious faith and the values it engenders have both personal and public benefits.

At least some of our founding fathers would agree. Consider John Adams' words in a letter to a cousin in 1776: "[I]t is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free constitution is pure virtue." Many of the founders linked morality and religion and their relationship to a healthy and free society. For example, Daniel Webster claimed that, "[O]ur citizens should early understand that the genuine source of correct principles is the Bible, particularly the New Testament, or the Christian religion."

According to proponents of this approach, many of those in leadership positions today are not aware of the moral and spiritual pre-requisites of self-government and of a just and good society. Many, instead, are thoroughly persuaded secularists who believe that science and secular human reasoning alone are sufficient to address our individual, social and political needs.

Supporters of this approach belong to a group that Noah Feldman calls "values evangelicals." Feldman explains, "Not every values evangelical is, technically speaking, an evangelical or born-again Christian, although many are. Values evangelicals can include Jews, Catholics, Muslims, and even people who do not focus on a particular



religious tradition but care primarily about identifying traditional moral values that can in theory be shared by everyone." What these "evangelicals" do have in common, according to Feldman, is the goal of promoting a particular set of values. They believe that since these provide guidance on the best way to live one's life, the government should adopt the values and promote them to the public. People who support the "evangelical" approach believe the best way to hold the United States together as a nation is for us to clearly understand traditional values and to live by them. They believe it is essential to have general public agreement on what these values are, Feldman explains, because they are the "key to unity and strength."

### **Secularism: An Aggressive Ideology**

Approach Two proponents believe our society has been hijacked by a secular cultural elite who imposes their moral relativism on the rest of the nation through their disproportionate power as leaders of major social institutions. They argue that most Americans are religious, and that many have come to feel that their traditional values are under assault by a militant secularism and relativism that is dismissive of religious belief and any notion of universal values.

Before becoming Pope, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger expressed concern about an "aggressive secularism" which he believes no longer has "that element of neutrality, which opens up areas of freedom for everyone. It is beginning to turn into an ideology that imposes **(continued)**

**Supporters of Approach Two believe that the best way to hold our country together is for us to understand traditional values and, with the help of government, live by them.**

**A closer relationship between government, religious communities, and traditional values derived from religion is essential not only for the well-being of individuals, but for the public good.**

**Secularism is no longer that element of neutrality that opens up areas of freedom for everyone. It is beginning to turn into an ideology that imposes itself through politics.**

—Pope Benedict XVI

itself through politics and leaves no public space for the Catholic and Christian vision, which thus risks becoming something purely private and essentially mutilated. We must defend religious freedom against the imposition of an ideology that presents itself as the only voice of rationality.” This statement captures the sentiment felt today by many traditionally religious people in America and Europe—that of being a persecuted minority.

On the other hand, those who support secularism would argue that it does not lead directly to relativism or to an amoral society. They believe there is a secular morality. Its first principle is that to be moral, a person must wish for and act for the good of others as well as for the good of oneself.

### **Foundations for Democracy: Inalienable Rights and Universal Truths**

The discrediting of religious thought as purely subjective, irrational, and something to be confined to the private realm of life is a view that Approach Two supporters strongly reject. Insight born of religious experience and rationally played out and elaborated in theology, philosophy, and social ethics has long been the source of some of our most cherished ideals in the West and, indeed, forms the very core of the humanistic values that secularists celebrate.

The notion, for example, of the dignity

of the human person—so basic to our own Bill of Rights—is rooted in the Judeo-Christian belief that we are all made in the image of God. The idea supported by monotheism and common to all the Abrahamic religions is expressed in the first commandment that “You shall have no gods but me.” This has often been noted by social theorists from Max Weber to Jürgen Habermas as propelling the “leap forward” in Western culture, which in the words of Habermas, “granted man freedom of reflection, the strength to detach himself from vacillating immediacy, to emancipate himself from his generational shackles and the whims of mythical powers.”

Approach Two proponents fear that in the privatizing of religion and the discrediting of the role religious traditions have had in our history and can continue to play in our public lives, we run the risk of destroying the foundations of our liberty and unity as a nation. Doing so would adversely affect our ability to sustain a genuine pluralism and our capacity for self-governance and the responsible use of human freedom.

This theory of democracy, George Weigel, an Ethics and Public Policy Center Fellow, explains, was the social doctrine of Pope John Paul. It offers “a sharp challenge to the skeptical relativism that is currently fashionable in American high culture” and in much of American higher education. And it rejects the secular enterprise aimed at making the state into a “procedural

Throughout American history, there have been those who believed that religion is essential to the public good.

Daniel Webster wrote, “Our citizens should early understand that the genuine source of correct principles is the Bible, particularly the New Testament, or the Christian religion.”



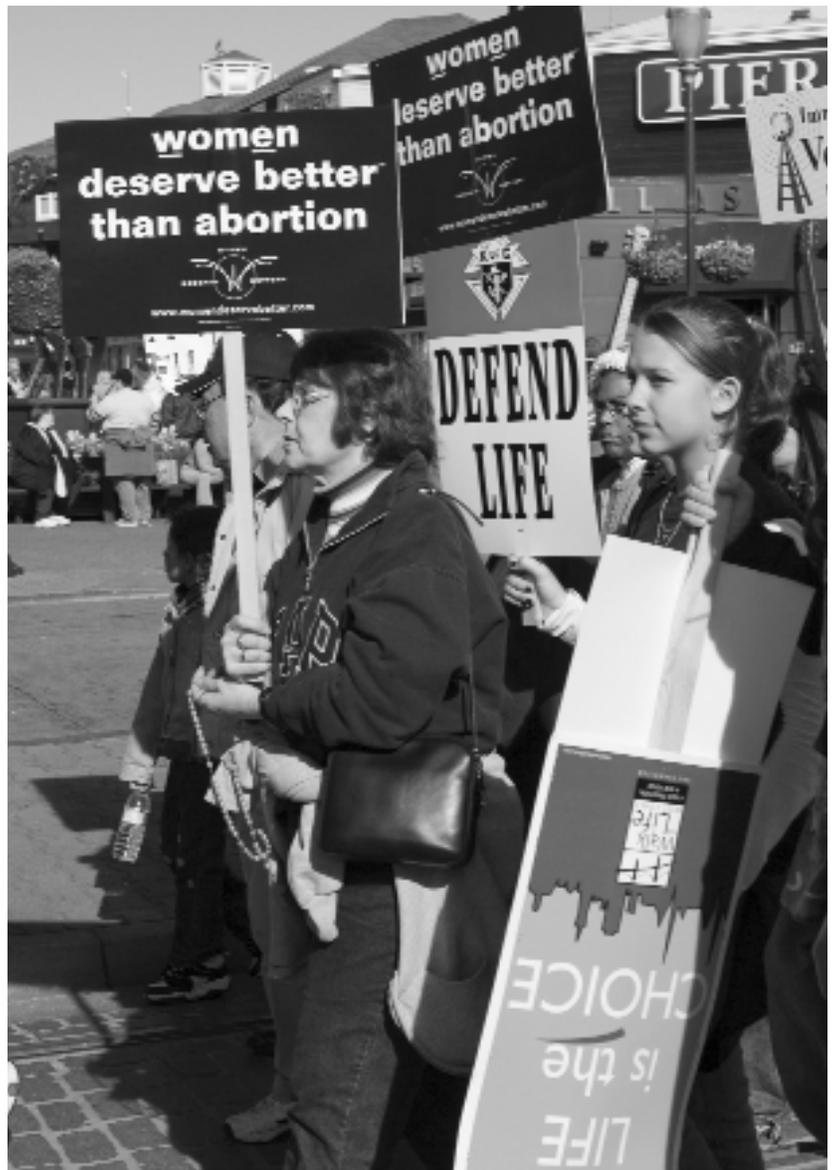
republic,' which removes all moral reference points from our common life on the radically relativistic grounds that a democracy cannot adjudicate between competing moral systems—as an illusion that will ultimately prove self-destructive.”

It is in this context of traditional values that many of the public policy positions taken by Approach Two supporters become fully understood. According to this view, the right to life from conception to natural death—which undergirds public policy positions on stem cell research, abortion, and end-of-life issues—is a fundamental and inalienable human right. The legal protection of these rights is indispensable to the sustaining of free societies. Hence, proponents of this approach support overturning the ruling in *Roe vs. Wade*, which, in their view, wrongly made abortion legal in the United States.

They also support Pope John Paul’s resistance to the establishment of an internationally recognized right to abortion-on-demand and the U.S. policy on restricting the dissemination of birth control information in other countries. They ground their opposition to gay marriage and birth control and their support of sexual abstinence in universal truths about human nature that are reflected in our Judeo-Christian traditions. They believe these policy positions should be dictated by human reason, divine revelation, and the natural order of things.

Similarly, President George W. Bush often invokes this line of thinking when he says that the war his administration is waging on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan is not being fought for *American* values, but for a cause that is *universal*—the cause of human freedom and liberty from tyranny. Preemptive intervention in the affairs of another sovereign country when its leader(s) are committing atrocities and genocide is a moral obligation when one thinks that human rights are universal.

Whatever one thinks of these positions, these leaders and many of those who want to “Restore Our Judeo-Christian Heritage” think of themselves as articulating *public*, not sectarian, truths. And they ask the world to consider those truths on their own merits.



Supporters of this approach believe the right to life from conception to natural death is a universal truth, and an inalienable right. They ground their opposition to gay marriage and birth control and their support of sexual abstinence in universal truths about human nature that are reflected in our Judeo-Christian traditions.

## Approach Two For Further Reading

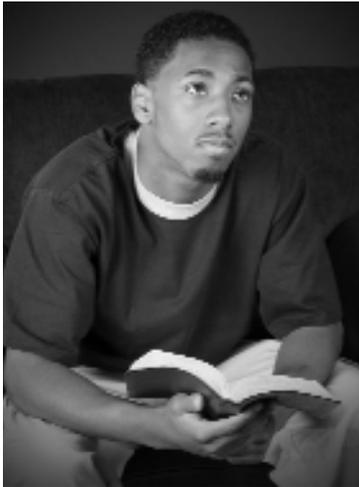
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**Approach Three****Embrace Religion's Civic Value**

Supporters of Approach Three embrace both religious traditions and non-religious moral viewpoints.

In 2006, in the midst of rains of Biblical proportions, and buoyed by their religious faith, some 500 leaders met in Washington, D.C. to launch *From Poverty to Opportunity: A Covenant for a New America*. Two hundred of them were under the age of 30.

Kenneth Williams, reporting for the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, articulated the movement's two foundational principles, "that poverty should rise in the American conscience as the pri-

mary moral issue of our day, becoming a focal point of the national politics, and that the religious right should not be the only voice of faith heard in the public square."

Among them was Rev. Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners* magazine and author of the best-selling book, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*. The three-day rally in Washington called on our nation's political leaders to end child poverty in America and reduce extreme poverty and inequality globally through actions such as raising the minimum wage in the United States and supporting the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, which call for increased aid to the poorest nations, debt cancellation, and fair trade policies.

In his newspaper article about the Pentecost 2006 Conference, Williams cites the morally scandalous fact that "thirty-seven million Americans live below the poverty line, and 13 million are children. Forty-five million Americans have no health insurance. More than 2 billion people [globally] live on less than \$2 a day. We spend billions of dollars on the war in Iraq." As Marion Wright Edleman from the Children's Defense Fund told conference participants, "We spend more on our pris-

ons in America than we do on education."

Williams explains the movement's driving concern: "Our priorities as a people and the use of our limited resources need to be examined for their human impact. Quality of life issues are moral issues that must be addressed, particularly by people of faith."

This group of religious leaders brought their policy proposals to the nation's public doorstep. They boldly and unapologetically speak about how their policy ideas are motivated and shaped by a broad spectrum of religious traditions. Although their values are based on the same traditions as those who support Approach Two, they have a very different view about how religion and government should be institutionally related. Advocates of this approach focus on different public issues and draw different political conclusions.

### **Between Enlightenment and Religious Fundamentalism**

Like the proponents of Approach Two, supporters of this approach also seek to have their faith-based voice heard in the public arena above what they characterize as the din of a secular culture that in recent decades has drowned out the insights of religious Americans. But they differ from those who advocate restoring our Judeo-Christian heritage as the remedy. Instead, they advocate embracing religion's civic value in ways that incorporate both religious traditions and non-religious moral viewpoints.

However, unlike supporters of



Sociologist Robert N. Bellah believes that we need to steer a path between “Enlightenment fundamentalists on the one hand and extreme religious fundamentalists on the other.”

Approach One, those who seek to “Stay the Secular Course,” proponents of Approach Three believe that religion need not be a purely private matter. On the contrary, they feel it is an enormously valuable resource for addressing our public problems. Religious thinking should not be discredited as a form of public reasoning nor barred from our nation’s public discourse.

This approach seeks to steer a path between what sociologist Robert Bellah calls “Enlightenment fundamentalists on the one hand and extreme religious fundamentalists on the other.” In other words, Bellah, along with the supporters of this approach, would argue “against the extreme secularist view that would exclude religion from public life altogether but also against a dogmatic view that would exclude all secular and religious views except one.”

### **Transforming Encounters and Rational Arguments**

Admittedly, for many, religious life is rooted in an experience that transcends the empirical and rational. Many, but not all religions, are based on “revelation” which is conveyed in religious texts that guide belief. Bellah argues that strong secular views are themselves derived from a kind of “revelation” or

transforming encounter and, as such, are just as immune to human reason in that original moment of encounter as are experiences that form the basis of many religious beliefs. We need to acknowledge, he argues, that ~~both~~ religious and secular views can be rooted in a revelatory encounter. After that moment, however, their adherents rely on rational arguments to interpret those encounters and draw publicly relevant conclusions from them.

Such an understanding puts religious and secular reasoning on equal footing and shows the fallacy in the position that sees only secular discourse and empirical science as rational. It also takes religious belief off the kind of pedestal that fuels dogmatism and fundamentalism. When religious views address our public interests, Bellah explains, it must be “legitimate to argue with them not only in terms of their implications for the common life but also as to their adequacy of their expression of religious truth.”

Secularists go wrong, proponents of this approach argue, when they claim that their position is the only one compatible with intellectual sophistication and scientific truth. Science does not and could not take a stand on religion any more than it can broker public policy deci- **(continued)**

While modernization has secularizing effects, it seems to also provoke a response that often strengthens religion.



sions, as public problems are ultimately moral questions and not scientific ones.

Approach Three proponents point out that politics is ultimately a realm of moral debate. We are not likely to agree about the answers to hard moral questions, but, as Noah Feldman recommends, we must not shy away from focusing “on substance rather than procedure—on what God or reason or whatever source of values teaches about human life and intimate choices, not about whether God belongs in the conversation at all.”

### The Importance of a Religiously Neutral State

While Approach Three proponents see the First Amendment as legitimating a public voice for religion, they also see its Establishment Clause as wisely mandating the institutional separation of religion and government. From their point of view, the state must be *secular*, but in this context, the meaning of secular is neutrality. The

neutral state, as Robert Bellah explains, “is prohibited from enforcing any secular orthodoxy just as much as any religious orthodoxy. By the same token, the state must guarantee access to participation in the public sphere of individuals and groups whatever their secular or religious beliefs. Such participation is conditioned, however, on one fundamental norm, namely, the renunciation of violence.”

Noah Feldman presents a similar solution to America’s church-state problem in his book *Divided by God*. Like advocates of the other two approaches, Approach Three proponents argue that their view is in line with the approach to the disestablishment of religion taken by the founders, rooted not in anticlericalism or a strong secularism, but rather in a commitment to free speech, religious freedom, and keeping some measure of social peace between dissenting groups with strongly held beliefs.

Proposals like Feldman’s call for a reversal of recent legal trends in the area of church-state relations. Court decisions in the last fifty years have actually moved the country toward a less visible demonstration of religious beliefs in political discourse and public places while at the same time allowing for greater institutional entanglement between religion and government. Supporters of this approach would reverse this trend—more religious speech and symbolic displays in public and less financial and organizational connections between religious institutions and institutions of government.

Feldman writes, “The tradition of institutional separation that must be reasserted goes beyond funding for religious schools. All attempts to use government resources to institutionalize religious practices countermand the American tradition of non-

### Approach Three For Further Reading

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establishment, grounded historically in the belief that government has no authority over religious matters. When government funds social programs under the rubric of charitable choice, the programs must not be ones that rely on faith to accomplish their goals, or else the government is institutionally sponsoring the religious mission of the church in question.”

Approach Three proponents would agree with Feldman that “secularists must accept that religious values form an important source of political beliefs and identity for the majority of Americans, while [values] evangelicals need to acknowledge that separating the institutions of government from those of religion is essential for avoiding outright political-religious conflict.”

### **Religion as a Prophetic Voice in a Democratic Society**

The main problem in modern society is not secularism, as Michael Lerner, editor *Tikkun*, argues, but rather the materialism and selfishness that are the driving forces of global capitalism. Lerner, like other advocates of Approach Three, remain adamant about church/state separation, but not as a means for keeping religious and spiritual values out of the public realm. Instead, getting the state out of the “God business” is a way to ensure that spiritual values retain their vital and distinctive character, uncompromised by an alliance with political power.

According to this view, only in functioning separately from the state can reli-

gious and cultural pluralism be preserved. Moreover, it is in the realm of civil society apart from the state that religious institutions and spiritual values express their strongest civic value and play their most important role in society and public policy as a redemptive alternative to socially destructive unregulated, free-market capitalism.

Not all advocates of the third approach would be as critical of capitalism as Lerner, but most find that their religious faith is a source of social criticism, offering a kind of prophetic voice for societal reform and speaking out on issues of economic justice and social inequality. From their perspective, we must not let religion reinforce the status quo or offer quiet dissent, but rather have it perform a role it has often played in history—that of asking the difficult questions, looking beyond the taken-for-granted assumptions of society, and considering them in light of ultimate reality.

Speaking of religious communities in our country and the world at large, Bellah says, “they demonstrate to the larger society their alternative realities by the way they live. The public sphere would be enormously impoverished without them. None of them have the sole answer, but perhaps together, and learning from one another, they can help move us from the impasse we have reached to a form of life that will be less destructive and more fulfilling for all on our planet.”

***Martin Luther King, Jr. often claimed that his advocacy of non-violent resistance as a strategy for social change followed by many during the civil rights movement was rooted in his commitment as a Protestant minister to imitating Jesus Christ.***

# Issue Map

## **1 Approach One** **Stay the Secular Course**

America has a long tradition of separating religion from government based on the First Amendment. This arrangement is a practical way to protect minorities and keep the peace in a pluralistic society.

### **Supporters Believe**

Religion is best kept in the private sphere of life as a guide to personal meaning and purpose for those who want it. It should not be invoked as a basis for law and public policy. We should avoid any mixing of religion and government.

### **What Should Be Done?**

- Continue to support a strict “wall of separation” between church and state by restricting governmental support of religion. Continue to outlaw prayer in public schools, the teaching of creationism or intelligent design, and the display of religious texts and symbols in public places.
- Repeal the Charitable Choice law, which violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Keep tax dollars and government agencies out of the business of supporting faith-based organizations, even if the money is used for social services.
- Appoint judges and other public officials who do not seek to blur the distinctions between “God’s justice and ours.” We need to maintain the boundary between secular government and religiously-guided politics.

### **Critics Say**

- The founding fathers did not intend that government be the enforcer of a secular culture on its citizens.
- Most Americans believe religion is a positive social force and that government should play a role in supporting faith-based organizations that provide needed social services.
- Scientific and rational explanations are not enough to address life’s ultimate questions. We need the resources of religion to guide our moral and political decisions.
- Acknowledge that all religions ask their adherents to bring about moral good in the public sphere. Confining these efforts to the private realm increases resentment and strengthens religious extremism.

### **Tradeoff**

- A secular public sphere leaves our society without valuable resources for societal reform and for addressing damaging social trends and problems in American society.

## **2 Approach Two** **Recover Our Judeo-Christian Heritage**

Our founding fathers did not intend that government be the enforcer of a secular culture on its citizens, which is what has happened in the last fifty years.

### **Supporters Believe**

Our national strength and health lie in embracing the traditional values of religion, especially those associated with our Judeo-Christian heritage. Politicians should not have to check their religious beliefs at the public door; government should not be hostile to religiously inspired symbols, ideas, and policies.

### **What Should Be Done?**

- Allow public schools to teach students about the Judeo-Christian heritage and ideas about natural human origins that challenge scientific evolutionary theory.
- Strengthen government support of faith-based initiatives. Encourage government-religious partnerships for an array of tasks from social services to international diplomacy.
- Accept that science alone cannot tell us what to do morally and politically as a society. Affirm that some values—the sacredness of the human person, for example—are universal and the foundation for a democratic society, and that these values have religious roots.
- Let religious belief inform our public discourse and policy decisions. Our religious traditions can be a useful guide for guiding public policy.

### **Critics Say**

- Today we are a pluralist society. We cannot enforce one religious/cultural perspective through government, law, and public policy.
- Teaching religious based theories about natural and human origins is “dumbing” down the scientific curriculum of our schools and leads to less respect for human reason.
- Mixing religion with political ideology and political power is dangerous and can lead to oppression carried out in the name of religion.

### **Tradeoff**

Trying to reestablish Judeo-Christian values through the operations of government and other social institutions may foster intolerance. It could lead to a social environment many would find oppressive.

### 3

## Approach Three Embrace Religion's Civic Value

Religion has played an important role in helping bring about progressive and healthy social changes throughout American history. Our society is impoverished when we exclude religious thinking from our public discourse.

### Supporters Believe

We need a neutral (rather than a secular) public sphere where the religious and the non-religious have an equal voice, but we must not allow government to enforce one religious/cultural perspective on its citizens, for the sake of both the fairness of government and the purity of religion.

### What Should Be Done?

- Keep religion institutionally separate from government. Although religion plays an important role in the lives of many Americans, this is the best way to honor and support our religious and cultural diversity.
- Allow a multiplicity of religious perspectives to be part of the public discourse along with non-religious ones. Seek to persuade others on the basis of universal ethical values rather than on grounds mandated by a particular religious tradition.
- In political discourse, be civil and don't demonize when there is disagreement.
- Broaden our understanding of rationality; give up the fallacy that only secular discourse and empirical science are rational, and put religious and secular thought on equal footing.

### Critics Say

- Religion is backward; human reason alone is the only way to solve our public problems.
- Both historically and in contemporary society, the majority of Americans are Christian. Therefore, it is appropriate to emphasize that particular religious tradition in our cultural life, and to do so with the support of government.
- Allowing religious perspectives a place in the public sphere is to invite the worst kind of conflict into society; religion is best kept in the private realm of life.

### Tradeoff

Welcoming religion into public life may result in greater moral conflict in society and could lead to oppressive laws and policies that violate our sense of personal and economic freedom.



# Deliberative Dialogue

## **Engaged Communities/Engaged Learning**

The New England Center for Civic Life's College Issues Forums are based on practices developed by the National Issues Forums Institutes over the past 25 years. Deliberative dialogues are structured conversations that encourage participants to speak not only as individuals or groups with competing interests, but as members of a community with shared concerns. The goal is to work through conflicting choices together in an effort to reach some common understandings and actions. Participants are encouraged to talk not only in terms of expert analysis, but also from the perspective of their values, priorities, and personal experiences. Often some new insight for addressing a problem gets created during the deliberations.

The discussion guides have been created through an issue framing process. In issue framing, people who are affected by the problem define it in their own terms and develop approaches for addressing it. Each approach represents the values and priorities of a different group. Through reviewing the advantages and drawbacks of each approach participants develop a greater understanding of each others' viewpoints and begin to develop common ground. Common ground is that place where individuals see how their goals are shareable, their values overlap, and their interests intersect.

Engaging in deliberation encourages students to become active producers of knowledge because they are put into situations that ask them to think critically, listen attentively, work collaboratively, value diversity, and publicly voice their ideas. Because explicit links are made between personal experiences and broader social issues, many begin to see the connections between their own lives and public life. Awakening commitment, cultivating knowledge, and developing skills are essential if students are to look beyond their immediate self interest and become citizens and leaders of vital and productive communities.

### **Credits**

**Author:** Dr. Douglas F. Challenger, Professor of Sociology, Franklin Pierce University. The author can be contacted by email at [challedf@fpc.edu](mailto:challedf@fpc.edu).

**Series Editor:** Joni Doherty, Director, New England Center for Civic Life, Franklin Pierce University

**Designer:** Eva Ruutopõld, StudioBluu

**Cover Artist:** Patrick Welby, Peterborough, NH

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For more information about College Issues Forums or to order discussion guides, please contact the New England Center for Civic Life at 603-899-1150 or [necccl@fpc.edu](mailto:necccl@fpc.edu).

# God and the Commons

## Does Religion Matter?

Before we get started, we would like to get a brief preliminary indication of your thinking on this issue. The purpose of asking these questions, as well as the somewhat similar ones on the questionnaires that will be distributed at the end of the dialogue, is to help us to identify forum outcomes.

### I. Viewpoints

Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements below.

	strongly agree	somewhat agree	somewhat disagree	strongly disagree	not sure
a. Our society has become too secular.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Religious beliefs should be used by officials to formulate public policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Public schools should teach more about the Judeo-Christian heritage of America.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. A <i>strict</i> separation of religion from government is good for our country.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Citizens and politicians should make their public policy arguments in purely rational and secular (non-religious) terms.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. The key to our nation's freedom, strength, and social health lies in embracing the traditional values of religion.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
g. It is good for our society to allow faith-based social service programs to receive public monies.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
h. Morality and religion are inseparable.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
i. The state should make laws and policy based on Judeo-Christian values.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
j. Religious thought can be a helpful form of public reasoning if it does not seek to exclude other religious and secular views.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
k. We need a neutral (rather than a secular) public sphere where the religious and non-religious have a voice.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

### II. Background Information

1. Which age group are you in?

- Under 18
- 18 to 29
- 30 to 44
- 45 to 64
- Over 64

(continued on back)



# God and the Commons

## Does Religion Matter?

Now that you've had a chance to participate in a forum on this issue, we'd like to know what you are thinking. Your opinions, along with those of others who participated, will help us identify the forum's outcomes.

### I. Viewpoints

Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements below.

	strongly agree	somewhat agree	somewhat disagree	strongly disagree	not sure
a. Our society has become too secular.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. Religious beliefs should be used by officials to formulate public policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. Public schools should teach more about the Judeo-Christian heritage of America.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. A <i>strict</i> separation of religion from government is good for our country.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. Citizens and politicians should make their public policy arguments in purely rational and secular (non-religious) terms.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. The key to our nation's freedom, strength and social health lies in embracing the traditional values of religion.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
g. It is good for our society to allow faith-based social service programs to receive public monies.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
h. Morality and religion are inseparable.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
i. The state should make laws and policy based on Judeo-Christian values.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
j. Religious thought can be a helpful form of public reasoning if it does not seek to exclude other religious and secular views.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
k. We need a neutral (rather than a secular) public sphere where the religious and non-religious have a voice.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

### II. Closing Reflections

1. Are you thinking differently about the relationship between religion and public life now that you have participated in the forum?  Yes  No

If yes, how?

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(continued on back)

**2.** In your forum, did you talk about aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before?     Yes             No

**3.** Has your understanding of other people's views on this issue:  
 Increased a lot  
 Increased somewhat  
 Not increased at all  
 Not sure

**4.** What ideas do you think should guide our public practices when it comes to the use of religious thinking in law-making and the formation of public policy?

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