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## THE WORD OF GUEST EDITOR

This special edition of *Politics and Religion Journal* examines recent patterns of how religion influences the American political system. The edition presents six articles which employ a variety of methodological techniques to examine diverse topics, but are unified in highlighting the unique position of religion in U.S. politics. The articles are ideal contributions to the *Politics and Religion Journal* given its objective to develop the 'politology of religion' or the political science of religion. The subfield studies the myriad ways religion can influence political priorities, principles, and events including attitudes held by electorates, decisions by governmental elites, and judicial, electoral and legislative outcomes. The articles illustrate the multiple ways religion affects politics through the different levels of the American political system. Importantly, three articles illustrate the unique position, i.e., *status*, religion occupies in American society. Religious values can enter the American political system at the grassroots level through the mobilization of electoral coalitions and the competition between the Democratic and Republican parties. Religion also potentially drives political change as generations are replaced by younger voters who may hold different value systems. Religion enters American politics at the elite level through the voting decisions adopted by members of Congress. Finally, religion continually evokes controversies in American politics through our constitutional structure. The free exercise of religion is guaranteed in the United States, but when may the state intrude upon those fundamental freedoms, especially in a pluralistic democracy? How does the American political system balance the separation of church and state with protecting the social norms of communities? And what explains how religious groups respond to governmental intervention? These questions and issues give rise to one of the most important ongoing dynamics in American politics—the relationship between religion and the state.

Recent patterns and controversies in American politics highlight the various ways religious values enter the political system. Religion's influence is evident at the mass level through public opinion, the distribution of electoral coalitions by American political parties, interest groups, and organized churches. Putnam and Campbell (2010) find that religion has the potential to both divide and unite Americans. They observe the politicization of religious conflict and difference contributes to the rapidly growing group of "nones" or citizens who claim no religious preference in the United States. The increase in the number of "nones" and seculars is juxtaposed against religious traditionalists' claims on cultural issues. These divisions are often reflected politically by the competition between the Democratic and Republican Parties. At the same time, the United States continues to be strongly religious which encourages tolerance of different faith traditions.

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Religious conflict also is manifested in American political institutions and policies. President Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act requires contraceptive coverage for employees, including employees of Catholic organizations. This provision has generated considerable complaint by American Catholic Bishops as an unconstitutional infringement on religious rights. The controversy reflects the difficulty of balancing the free exercise of religion and the needs of a pluralist democracy.

Three articles examine the reciprocal influences of religion and politics within the American constitutional structure. American political processes and institutions have the ability to both inflame and mediate political-religious controversy. There is a significant body of literature suggesting that democracies cannot function without commitment to certain liberal, egalitarian, and democratic values. Many of us can both appreciate the importance of these shared values and yet worry about what happens when the state tries to promote them. Citizens' right to the free exercise of their religion—even if it is a minority religion—is guaranteed. At the same time, the United States is a pluralist society where the rights of citizens with no religious affiliation must be respected. Nor can we expect unanimity among religious across all values. How does a constitutional democracy balance the protection of individual liberties against practices by members of minority religious groups that are out of the mainstream or threaten extant social mores? Emily Gill's provocative article, *Religion, Civic Values, and Equal Citizenship in the Liberal Democratic Polity*, considers these very important questions focused upon when may the state persuade or coerce private religious organizations to change their views and behaviors that are inconsistent with public values. Since the U. S. Constitution forbids both the state establishment of religion and any interference with the free exercise of religion, the answer would seem to be never. Historical experience though implies the answer is more complicated and nuanced. Gill considers the case of whether the killing of an animal may be seen as a religious sacrifice? Or can a religious organization be required to pay for activities it finds contrary to their religious teachings such as contraceptive coverage?

Jerold Waltman considers similar questions regarding conflict between individuals or religious institutions and the state. *The Landscape of Contemporary Jurisprudence Regarding Free Exercise of Religion* illustrates that debate about the meaning of the free exercise of religion clause is a continuing controversy throughout American political history. This article examines constitutional trends in the practice of religious liberty in a variety of circumstances including the use of religious speech and association in schools, churches' independence in employment practices, property rights, and reproductive rights of women. Since 1990 there has been a significant increase in the number and tone of these conflicts. Perhaps this reflects the increased politicization of religion in American politics

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and the emergence of new issues that separate religious traditionalists and modernists. Waltman attributes the heightened conflict to the increasing religious diversity in the United States, growing secularization, and differing perceptions of a threat to religious liberty by various religious groups. Decisions by the courts also reflect the special status of religion in American society and politics.

Against the backdrop of extensive legal protections for religious groups, when does the government decide to intervene in the activities of private religious groups? And conversely, how do religious groups respond to governmental interference into their practices? Trent Engbers elucidates these questions in *Politics of Polygamous People: How a Minority Religion Can Help Us Understand Religion and Politics in America*. Conducting a case study of fundamentalist Mormons, Engbers concludes that the state will intervene in private religious practices when two conditions are met: the size of the religious group becomes sufficiently large, and their activities deviate from social norms the government finds too difficult to ignore. Federalism conditions the response by religious groups as well as the actions adopted by government.

Public opinion is fluid. This is clearly evidenced by the growing popular acceptance of gay marriage versus the continued opposition to this practice by many churches. Opinion change is often explained, in part, by processes of generational replacement. Recent research suggests that younger generations are more liberal and tolerant on cultural issues such as gay marriage, the environment, and abortion. Lauren Smith and Laura Olson's article, *Attitudes about Socio-Moral Issues among Religious and Secular Youth*, investigates attitudes toward abortion, stem cell research, environmental protection and same-sex marriage among different generations. Popular media reports assert that young Americans—specifically those under age 30—are more liberal compared to their older generations on many social issues. If correct, then generational change has significant consequences for existing electoral coalitions built by the parties. The Republican Party's appeal to cultural warriors in the 1980s may be less appealing to younger and more culturally liberal voters. Alternatively, as Smith and Olson find, are younger voters socialized into the same religious value systems as their elders?

James Guth's *Militant and Cooperative Internationalism Among American Religious Publics* specifically examines the influence of religion on the public's foreign policy attitudes. His research makes an important contribution given the relative dearth of studies exploring whether religious values influence foreign policy opinions and international relations. He finds that religious factors, independent of common political considerations, shape American foreign policy attitudes in the mass public. Religious traditionalists, especially Evangelicals and Mormons, are inclined toward a militant internationalism whereas religious modernists (including ethnoreligious groups and seculars) are inclined toward

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cooperative internationalism.

The work by Collins, Wink, Guth, and Livingston continue the theme of how religion influences American foreign policy by examining elite level behavior. In *The Church and Congress* the authors consider whether religion sways the voting decisions of members of Congress on foreign policy issues. Using the roll call votes of members of the U.S. House of Representatives between 1998-2003 they find that religious affiliation influences member decisions separate from political and ideological factors. The most distinctive patterns are exhibited by Evangelical, Mormon, and African-American Protestant members of Congress. The authors' study illustrates the need for additional research investigating the connections between religious values and elite-level decision making.

This collection of essays offers insights into the interplay between politics and religion at multiple levels of the American polity. They reveal the unique position religion exercises in American society and its politics. Religious values create distinct controversies in American politics because of the priority attached to religious freedom. At the same time, the church-state relationship is unique in the United States (especially in comparison to other developed democracies) because of America's extraordinary combination of religion and pluralism. As such, religion and politics promises to continue to be a source of debate. I wish to thank the authors for their important contributions to this special edition of *Politics and Religion Journal*.

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