

The emergence of a pan-white, pan-Christian majority party, the Republicans, shows that the melting pot worked for whites. The ethnic divisions among Anglo-Americans and European-Americans have been effaced by assimilation and intermarriage. The once deep theological divide between Protestants and Catholics in the U.S. has been replaced by an alliance of conservative Christians against moral liberalism in both its secular and religious varieties.

By contrast, the core of the Democratic Party is a coalition of ethnic and religious minorities that have little in common other than suspicion of the white Christian majority. Blacks fear white racism; Latinos fear Anglo nativism; and Jews and post-Christian secularists fear Christian triumphalism. A traditional big-city patronage machine, the Democratic Party offers each minority what it wants: affirmative action (blacks and Latinos), mass immigration from Latin America (Latinos), and strict separation of church and state and moral liberalism (Jews and secularists).

The party of the majority and the party of minorities naturally look at government in different ways. Because it represents the white Christian majority, the Republican Party of today is nationalist, identifying the majority with the state; communitarian, thinking that the values of the majority should be enforced by the state; and majoritarian, trusting in elected representatives. As a coalition of minorities, the Democratic Party, with equal consistency, is anti-nationalist, insisting on the difference between the majority and the state; multicultural, rejecting the idea that majority values should be enforced by the state; and anti-majoritarian, trusting in unelected judges to protect ethnic minorities and maverick individuals against the national majority.

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Identity politics lives and dies by demography. Democrats hope that mass immigration from Latin America will permit a growing Latino population, allied with the urban minority coalition, to dominate the government. The Republican Party, as the nation-state party, cannot incorporate Latinos as a distinct voting bloc with distinct group privileges the way that the group-based Democratic ethnic machine hopes to do. The white Christian majority, however, might absorb most second- and third-generation Latinos into a mixed-race Christian majority, a task that would be easier if fewer Latinos were foreign-born.

And what of ideologues in this ethnically-based political system? There will still be libertarians, social democrats, greens, populists, and others. If they have any strategic

sense, they will not try to take over one of the two parties. Instead, they will organize themselves as non-partisan movements that seek to influence both of our identity-based national parties.

These ideological movements should call themselves by their proper names. Libertarians and populists who argue that they are the true conservatives are wasting their breath. So are social democrats and greens who argue that they are the true liberals or progressives. For the foreseeable future, the term conservative will be a synonym for Republican and liberal or progressive will be a synonym for Democrat. As labels for genuine public philosophies, those terms are gone for good. Good riddance. ■

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**John Lukacs** Have the adjectives—and nouns — “liberal” and “conservative” become meaningless? Not quite. But almost. Inflation first weakened, then liquefied much of their meaning.

Liberal became a political adjective only in the early 19th century. Before that (see, for example, Jane Austen) it was commendatory, meaning “generous,” “broad-minded,” etc. Soon after that, broad-minded people began to appear whose minds were so broad as to be flat. But that was only one kind of devolution. More important: the originally liberal advocacy of freedom, of limited government, lost much of its meaning as liberals began to champion governmental support of this or that, eventually accepting the provider state. Worse was to come. That was (and still is) the liberals’ unquestioning and thoughtless belief in Progress, often at the expense of religion. Thus, among other things, they have advocated the extension of all kinds of liberties well beyond reason.

Hence the paradoxical situation. Liberalism has won. Abolition of slavery, universal suffrage, female and other emancipations, free speech, and the end of censorship were accomplished; they have become worldwide. But that is, too, why liberalism has become boring. It has little or nothing more worth advocating; indeed, it has almost nothing more to say.

Conservative, too, became a political adjective only in the early 19th century. Its meaning was unpopular, with few exceptions. In the United States, virtually no politician would designate himself a conservative until after about 1950. Thirty years later, more Americans said and thought that they were conservatives than those who said and thought that they were liberals. Presidents were elected as they thought it

advantageous and popular to call themselves conservative. The trouble with that inflation was manifold. Most conservatives disliked liberals more than they liked liberty. Serial marriages, divorces, consumers of pornography, barbaric households with mannerless children were as frequent among conservatives as they were among liberals. Worse: conservatives came to believe in Progress even more than liberals; their inclinations to conserve shrank to near nothing.

But let us face it: the *isms* are becoming *wasms*. Conservatives should be better off than liberals because while liberalism is an *ism*, conservatism is something of an oxymoron, since a conservative ought to be opposed to any kind of ideology. Meanwhile, Original Sin—a conservative, not a liberal, recognition—continues to exist.

The real enemy is now the (outdated) idea of Progress, together with the (thoughtless) belief in Technology. Conservatives should be the first to recognize that. If they don't, their demise will be worse than that of the liberals who, after all, had won—though only on one level and too late. A conservative who fails to protect and to conserve is nothing but a radical loudmouth of a bad sort. ■

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## Heather Mac Donald

Upon leaving office in November 2004,

Attorney General John Ashcroft thanked his staff for keeping the country safe since 9/11. But the real credit, he added, belonged to God. Ultimately, it was God's solicitude for America that had prevented another attack on the homeland.

Many conservatives hear such statements with a soothing sense of approbation. But others—count me among them—feel bewilderment, among much else. If God deserves thanks for fending off assaults on the United States after 9/11, why is he not also responsible for allowing the 2001 hijackings to happen in the first place?

Skeptical conservatives—one of the Right's less celebrated subcultures—are conservatives because of their skepticism, not in spite of it. They ground their ideas in rational thinking and (nonreligious) moral argument. And the conservative movement is crippling itself by leaning too heavily on religion to the exclusion of these temperamentally compatible allies.

Conservative atheists and agnostics support traditional American values. They believe in personal responsibility, self-reliance, and deferred gratification as the bedrock virtues of a prosperous society. They view marriage between a man and a woman as the surest way to raise stable, law-abiding children. They deplore the encroachments of the welfare state on matters best left to private effort.

They also find themselves mystified by the religiosity of the rhetoric that seems to define so much of conservatism today. Our Republican president says that he bases "a lot of [his] foreign policy decisions" on his belief in "the Almighty" and in the Almighty's "great gifts" to mankind. What is one to make of such a statement? According to believers, the Almighty's actions are only intermittently scrutable; using them as a guide for policy, then, would seem reckless. True, when a potential tragedy is averted, believers decipher God's beneficent intervention with ease. The father of Elizabeth Smart, the Salt Lake City girl abducted from her home in 2002, thanked God for answering the public's prayers for her safe return. When nine miners were pulled unharmed from a collapsed Pennsylvania mineshaft in 2002, a representative placard read: "Thank you God, 9 for 9." God's mercy was supposedly manifest when children were saved from the 2005 Indonesian tsunami.

But why did the prayers for five-year-old Samantha Runion go unheeded when she was taken from her Southern California home in 2002 and later sexually assaulted and asphyxiated? If you ask a believer, you will be told that the human mind cannot fathom God's ways. It would seem as if God benefits from double standards of a kind that would make even affirmative action look just. When 12 miners were killed in a West Virginia mine explosion in January 2006, no one posted a sign saying: "For God's sake, please explain: Why 1 for 13?" Innocent children were swept away in the 2005 tsunami, too, but believers blamed natural forces, not God.

The presumption of religious belief—not to mention the contradictory thinking that so often accompanies it—does damage to conservatism by resting its claims on revealed truth. But on such truth there can be no agreement without faith. And a lot of us do not have such faith—nor do we need it to be conservative.

Nonbelievers look elsewhere for a sense of order, valuing the rule of law for its transparency to all rational minds and debating Supreme Court decisions without reverting to mystical precepts or "natural law." It is perfectly possible to revere the Founding Fathers and their monumental accomplishment without celebrating, say, "Washington's God." Skeptical conservatives even believe themselves to be good citizens, a possibility denied by Richard John Neuhaus in a 1991 article.

I have heard it said in the last six years that what makes conservatives superior to liberals is their religious faith—as if morality is impossible without religion and everything is indeed permitted, as the cliché has it. I wonder whether religious conservatives can spot the atheists among them by their deeds or, for that matter, by their political positions. I very much doubt it. Skeptical conservatives do not look into the abyss when they make ethical choices. Their moral