

done by Professor Jastrow. The UCS has privately admitted many of its defects, but does not, of course, abandon its conclusions, since the conclusions are what they begin from. A similar canard was advanced by the Office of Technology Assessment, which declared that if the Soviets doubled their missile force we would have to double our battle stations in space to counter it. In fact, it now looks more as though we would only need increase our stations by half if they doubled up. Then, some critics say the space stations themselves will be vulnerable. Not necessarily. It may be that they can sit quite deep in space, able to attack ICBMs but hard to attack themselves. They can dodge around, put out decoys, and, unlike ICBMs, be armored and shoot back at their attackers. Indeed, that contest may come

to resemble the evolution of World War I's defenseless and vulnerable observation plane into today's formidable fighter. Of course, attacking our space stations would preclude the advantage of surprise. And there's some chance that the anti-ICBM defense can be conducted from the ground: That's part of what research will reveal.

On the other side, in 1983 the Defensive Technologies Study Team under Dr. James Fletcher, former head of NASA, spent 100,000 man-hours examining the prospects for strategic defense. They consulted hundreds of experts. They concluded that SDI would work, thanks to the emergence of "powerful new technologies." And of course the Soviets themselves believe in it or they wouldn't be pushing ahead themselves—while objecting to our efforts.

With malice toward all, I would also like to deprecate a worthy group in Washington called High Frontier (another term for the SDI). Its publications argue for a hell-for-leather abrogation of the ABM treaty and immediate deployment. Well, not so fast! Five Presidents and their advisers have sweated blood over this issue, and so far nothing that worked and was politically acceptable has been found better than straight retaliation. It's premature to say that we *should* deploy, which means precipitating heaven knows what Soviet countermeasures.

No, what the President's doing, as distinct from saying, is right: Push the research as fast as we can, so that if ever a deployment decision needs to be made we'll have a sound basis for it. Another point to remember is that in the SDI *study* game we have intrinsic

advantages over the Soviets. For political reasons they can put more soldiers in the field than we can, but they don't have anything like our depth in computer technology and vast national familiarity with computers.

Then, we have more money. The Soviets spent about \$500 billion to counter our B-52 bombers—successfully, until the cruise missile came along. That's a lot for us but excruciating for them. Now comes an equally big challenge—space defense—that they're not so well fitted for. If we both succeed, fine, since right now they're better defended than we are. Maybe in time they'll agree to wind down this competition.

So go to it, SDI, on the research front, and when and if a later President ever wants to deploy let's consider that question at that time. □

Richard Brookhiser

THEOCRACY IN AMERICA: CAMPAIGN '84 REVISITED

Who did He vote for?

How does one begin an investigation of the relations of religion and politics—specifically, of religion in America to American politics? There is always Tocqueville, that standing rebuke to journalists everywhere (who will be reading our reports 150 years from now?). Much of what he passed on to his French public is still pertinent; some of it, amusingly quaint: American clergymen, he noted, do not hold public office—"unless this term is applied to the functions which many of them fill in the schools. Almost all education is entrusted to the clergy." (Where was the ACLU?) For a more up-to-date look, one could do no better than examine the discussion of church and state which dominated the 1984 presidential campaign, during the month of September.

Presidential elections are the season in which politicians speak their minds.

Richard Brookhiser is senior editor at National Review. This essay is adapted from his new book on the 1984 elections, The Outside Story, to be published later this year by Doubleday. © 1985 Richard Brookhiser.

When there is a lull or (at the other extreme) the irresistible pressure of some great event, politicians may speak out on matters of constitutional or philosophic importance. The beginning of last fall was such a lull. Ronald Reagan's leads in the polls were brushing thirty percentage points.

Everything Walter Mondale touched, meanwhile, turned to lead. He marched in a Labor Day parade in New York City; no one came. He addressed a crowd of students at USC; everyone booed. He was endorsed by John Anderson. The contest seemed headed for a rout (ultimately, it got there, though only

after a few interesting twists in October).

In this calm, the candidates, and other prominent Americans, engaged as if by prior agreement in a cluster of inter-connected debates concerning religion and politics. They pressed the limits, sometimes bent them, and in the process, dabbled in political and moral science.

Religion had permeated the Democratic primary campaign. On the wild side, Louis Farrakhan, head of the Nation of Islam, and protégé of Jesse Jackson, enlivened things with a radio broadcast in which he called Judaism a "dirty religion." Once Jackson was out of the picture, Farrakhan was dismissed as a lunatic aberration (though he would exert an indirect influence later on). But more normal religions pervaded the political discussion of the mainstream. Jackson himself was a minister. Mondale was a minister's son, and Gary Hart a former divinity student; George McGovern was both. Reubin Askew was an elder of the Presbyterian Church. All the Democratic candidates used religious figures of speech and justifications



continually. McGovern invoked the Creator's perspective on the arms race. Mondale called nuclear weapons "godawful," and said that social injustice was a "sin." Geraldine Ferraro testified that she had been shaped by her faith.

Some of this was boilerplate. All politicians invoke God. Nelson Rockefeller's stenotypist developed an acronym, BOMFOG—for "the brotherhood of man, under the fatherhood of God"—because the phrase appeared so often in his speeches. But the Democrats' God-talk was not all ritual; it reflected an understanding of ethics and public policy. Some codes of human behavior, the Democrats believed and argued, flowed from the order of the universe; others didn't; they upheld the ones that did. Ronald Reagan, said Mario Cuomo in his keynote address to the San Francisco convention, practiced the ethics of Darwin; Democrats practiced the ethics of St. Francis of Assisi ("the first Democrat," Cuomo called him). It might be going too far to say that God was on the Democratic party's side. But He was on the side of their beliefs; in the political realm, they were on His side.

The Republicans, meanwhile, had done invoking of their own. One of their most controversial religious allies over the last years had been Rev. Jerry Falwell.

Falwell was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, of a mixed family—a violent, alcoholic father, a religious mother. Falwell became a Christian in his twenties. He went to a Bible college in Missouri, then returned to Lynchburg in 1956 where he opened a church in an old bottling plant. A dozen years

Dinesh D'Souza's *Falwell: Before the Millennium* is the only biography that doesn't froth.



and two thousand members later, it had become the ninth largest church in the country.

As far as the country was concerned, it might as well have been on the moon. About the last America had heard of fundamentalism was Mencken's account of the Scopes trial, and such feeble re-tellings as *Inherit the Wind*. Since their defeat in Dayton, fundamentalists

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had been relegated to the category of invisible facts—things which perhaps exist, but, since no one thinks or talks about them, have no importance. Fundamentalism took its name from *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, a set of Biblical commentaries published in Los Angeles in the 1910s. As the tone of the title suggests, the movement was in retreat from the beginning. Other theologies had taken over the Protestant churches. Soon after the Scopes trial, fundamentalists retired from the public realm as well. "We have a message of redeeming grace through a crucified and risen Lord," preached Falwell in 1965, expressing the consensus fundamentalist view. "Preachers are not called to be politicians but soul-winners." The soul-winning message consisted of mysteries believed by orthodox Christians of all denominations—the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the virgin birth—as well as the arcana of Revelations, including graphic images of last things. "When the trumpet sounds," said Falwell in another sermon, "stark pandemonium will occur on . . . every highway in the world where Christians are caught away from the driver's wheel."

But what about the interval before the trumpet's blast? Falwell's 1965 sermon had been directed against liberal churchmen active in the civil rights movement. (Falwell at that time accepted segregation as Biblically sanctioned, and acknowledged later that it took a considerable mental wrench to overcome the mistake.) By the seventies, he had found issues of his own that he felt could not simply be left until the millennium. Mostly these were the so-called "social issues." Falwell's interest in next-to-last things was specifically triggered by *Roe v. Wade*. By 1976, he was declaring that "the idea that religion and politics don't mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country."

Falwell's formal political debut was arranged by the New Right. In 1979, a common acquaintance set up a meeting with Paul Weyrich, Richard Viguerie, and Howard Phillips. Weyrich first spoke the phrase "moral majority" in passing, and thought it was too off-putting to be an effective title. But the others liked it. The Moral Majority, chartered that June, made a general-

ized, unsectarian pitch (no talk about Christians running their own country): against abortion, ERA, the gay rights movement, drugs, and pornography, and for a strong defense; in its own terms, pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, and pro-American.

The phenomenon of the religious right went far beyond Falwell, who was not the only preacher who had gotten into politics. (He and his fellows, curiously, had built their national audiences through television—the supposed homogenizer, instead defining and distinguishing.) But the Moral Majority was the lightning rod. During the 1980 election, Falwell was routinely lumped with neo-Nazis and the Klan, and compared to Khomeini and Jim Jones. On his fundamentalist flank, meanwhile, he was condemned for "subtle ecumenicity." But Ronald Reagan took the religious right seriously. "I know that you can't endorse me," he told a rally of evangelicals in Dallas in August 1980, "but . . . I want you to know that I endorse you." So did many of that election's losers; "they beat my brains out," said one defeated pol, "with Christian love."

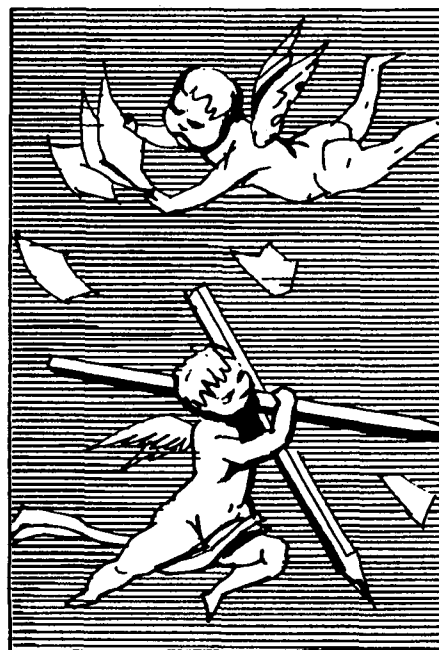
Four years later, as the post-convention campaign commenced, the new religious right found itself sharing the spotlight with that very old religious right, the Roman Catholic Church. Its right-wing days, many observers hoped (or feared), were long past. The Catholic Church's major political initiative in the Reagan Administration had been the American bishops' pastoral letter on nuclear war. The bishops' letter had a textual history as complicated as *Hamlet*: three shifting drafts, the third at the behest of the Vatican. Whatever its final meaning, it was taken, particularly in the early stages, as an ecclesiastical addendum to the freeze movement, with which it coincided. Many bishops, on their own,

embraced pacifism explicitly; Archbishop Hunthausen of Seattle called the Trident submarine the "Auschwitz of Puget Sound."

But the Catholic Church had also taken a political stand, for the last dozen years, against the legalization of abortion (a third of the Moral Majority's members, interestingly, were Catholics)—a continuity with its old right days, never abandoned. There was, moreover, an intrinsic asymmetry between the two positions. The pastoral letter on nuclear weapons, in all its incarnations, was long and complicated, and afflicted with the turgidity that darkens all Catholic official prose. It left to politicians the responsibility for deciding how best to achieve the ends it marked out as moral. The position on abortion, by contrast, was plain. The Catholic bishops stressed repeatedly that the two positions were both authoritative expressions of Catholic teaching. But in practical political terms, any American politician who was not an explicit warmonger—which is to say, any American politician—could find some way of putting himself on the right side of the pastoral letter. The abortion issue required other shifts.

The question arose in a particularly acute form with the selection of Mondale's running-mate. Geraldine Ferraro's congressional record was down the line pro-choice; she also was (and much was made of the fact) a Catholic: "very religious," said the governor of New Mexico at the San Francisco convention; shaped by her faith, she had said when she made her campaign debut with Mondale at his hometown of Elmore, Minnesota.

It was in Elmore that Ferraro tried out her first response. Pro-life picketers had been showing up for nearly every major Democratic event since the first TV debates. Some of their signs now had a personal angle. HEY FERRARO WHAT KIND OF CATHOLIC ARE



YOU? Questioned about the protesters, Ferraro responded by questioning Reagan's religion. "The President walks around calling himself a good Christian and I don't for one minute believe it because the policies are so terribly unfair and they are discriminatory and they have hurt a lot of people."

Three days later, Mondale took up the attack. "My faith," he told an interviewer in Lake Tahoe, where he was resting up for the convention, "unmistakably has taught me that social justice is part of a Christian's responsibility. My upbringing taught me a sense of community." Reagan, who had had a similar small-town background, "would have to explain how he came to a different conclusion."

Attacking Reagan was all very well. But that still begged the question of a Catholic politician's responsibilities on the abortion issue. Mario Cuomo took it up next, directly.

He did so by taking on Archbishop (not yet Cardinal) John O'Connor of New York. Any Catholic, Cuomo said in an interview published in early August, who believed "literally" what O'Connor was saying, "can only vote for a right-to-lifer." O'Connor had indeed said something very like that, in a news conference two months earlier: "I don't see how a Catholic in good conscience can vote for a candidate who explicitly supports abortion." But this was before a Catholic who explicitly supported abortion had been put on a national ticket. O'Connor answered Cuomo's interview the day it was published with a demurrer. "My sole responsibility is to present . . . the formal official teaching of the Catholic Church. I leave to those interested in such teachings" to judge how "the public statements of officeholders and candidates" match up. Cuomo professed himself "delighted" with O'Connor's clarification.

In Archbishop O'Connor, Cuomo

had found an opponent worthy of his mettle. O'Connor had succeeded to Cardinal Cooke's place after a career as a Navy chaplain, in which he rose to the rank of rear admiral. Like Cuomo, he was personally unprepossessing: bespectacled, almost squirrelish in appearance; fussy in his enunciation, as if he had once overcome a slur. As with Cuomo, the appearance deceived. O'Connor was John Paul II's point man in the drafting of the nuclear arms pastoral letter, and in the American church generally. An intelligent Pope trusted his intelligence, and his orthodoxy. He was not going to be caught in any overt political interventions; he was also not about to let the faith be defined by random faithful.

Early in September, O'Connor bore in more directly. He criticized Ferraro by name for the first time, on doctrinal grounds, for having said "things about abortion relative to Catholic teaching which are not true. . . . I have absolutely nothing against Geraldine Ferraro; I will not tell anybody in the United States you should vote for or against" her "or anybody else." But "she has given the world to understand that Catholic teaching is divided on the subject of abortion" when in fact there was "no variance," "no flexibility," and "no leeway."

The September doldrums were perking up. Ferraro denied on the 10th that she had ever misrepresented her church, whereupon the archbishop produced evidence—a two-year-old letter, signed by her, inviting Catholic congressmen to a briefing by Catholics for Choice, a group of pro-abortion Catholics, who would "show . . . that the Catholic position on abortion is not monolithic."

Ferraro took cover in the ambiguity of the word "Catholic." The church's position on abortion, she conceded, after O'Connor produced her letter,

was "monolithic." "But I do believe that there are a lot of Catholics who do not share the view of the Catholic Church." The Catholic position, in other words, equaled the position of Catholics; when in doubt, take a poll. She and O'Connor, she said on the 11th, had simply "agreed to disagree." "Religion," she added later, "has been injected into a presidential campaign. I have not welcomed it [certainly not

in a democracy, it was the voice of necessity. Cuomo the politician bowed his head to it.

It was an attractive statement, far more so than any of Ferraro's. He hadn't entangled himself in disputes over the "Catholic position," and he had avoided the inconsistency of deprecating Reagan's Christianity in July, and complaining about religion in politics in September. There was only

"Secular humanism" was in fact a self-description, devised by secular humanists.

since Elmore] and I do not want it to be an issue in this race."

The fact was, Ferraro had been too out-front, both in her advocacy of abortion and her appeals to piety, simply to fudge the question, and she was not subtle enough to craft a convincing synthesis. But help was on the way. On September 13, Mario Cuomo was scheduled to deliver a talk to the theology department at Notre Dame. The very man who had sponsored St. Francis for membership in the Democratic party would set things right.

Cuomo presented himself to his audience as "an old-fashioned Catholic who sins, regrets, struggles, worries, gets confused and most of the time feels better after confession"; also as a lawyer and a politician. What was the right relation between his faith and his career? Cuomo suggested criteria in the form of questions. Is a religious belief "helpful? . . . essential to human dignity? Does it promote harmony? . . . Or does it divide us so fundamentally that it threatens our ability to function as a pluralistic society?"

Pluralism was the key; because of it, "public morality" in America "depend[ed] on a consensus view of right and wrong." Gauging the state of the consensus was "a matter of prudential political judgment." The way to the synthesis was now all clear.

"My wife and I," Cuomo stressed, "were enjoined never to use abortion to destroy the life we created, and we never have. . . . For me life or fetal life in the womb should be protected, even if five of nine justices of the Supreme Court disagree with me. . . . But not everyone in our society," he went on disarmingly, "agrees with me and Matilda." Cuomo the politician gave his read-out of the consensus: Anti-abortion laws were "not a plausible possibility" and "wouldn't work" anyway. "Given present attitudes, it would be Prohibition revisited, legislating what couldn't be enforced and in the process creating a disrespect for law in general." *Vox populi* was not *vox dei*; it might be the opposite. But

one weak spot. Consensus was the glue that held his position together. Who provided the consensus on abortion? Two hundred million Americans, ultimately. But wasn't Governor Mario Cuomo a prominent and respected one of them? When, before Notre Dame, had he made a resonant statement of his opinion of abortion? Whatever his pledges to God and Matilda, Cuomo, in his public life, had been "for" abortion, every bit as much as Ferraro. His politics and his judgment of the consensus coincided to a remarkable degree.

O'Connor answered him—not by name, though the sense of slow-motion debate was palpable—in an address to a Catholic medical group on October 18. It was a speech scored, in publicity terms, for full orchestra and brass band; Mother Teresa of Calcutta sat by the lectern as he spoke. He fingered the weak spot directly. "You have to uphold the law, the constitution says. It does not say that you must agree with the law, or that you cannot work to change the law. . . .

"There are those who argue that we cannot legislate morality. The reality is that we do legislate behavior every day. . . . It is obvious that law is not the entire answer to abortion. Nor is it the entire answer to theft, arson, child abuse, or shooting police officers. Everybody knows that. But who would suggest that we repeal the laws against such crimes because the law is so often broken?"

He exited the debate where he had first entered it. "I have the responsibility of spelling out . . . with accuracy and clarity what the Church officially teaches. . . . I recognize the dilemma confronted by some Catholics in political life. I cannot resolve that dilemma for them. As I see it, their disagreement, if they do disagree, is not simply with me" but "with the teaching of the Catholic Church."

While the Catholics curvetted, Protestants and Jews were not still. On August 24, the morning after his



nomination, Ronald Reagan addressed an ecumenical prayer breakfast in Dallas. "I believe," he began, "that faith and religion play a critical role in the political life of our nation and always has [sic]." Reagan ran through mentions of God in American founding documents—the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, Washington's Farewell Address. "The truth is," he concluded, "politics and morality are inseparable. And as morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related." That was a plausible description of American history; an incontrovertible description of the opinions of the politicians involved in the 1984 campaign.

But in the middle of his speech, Reagan made a slightly different point. Reviewing the Court's school prayer decision, Reagan noted that there were those "fighting to make sure voluntary prayer is not returned to the classrooms. And the frustrating thing for the great majority of Americans who . . . understand the special importance of religion in the national life . . . is that those who are attacking religion claim they are doing it in the name of tolerance, freedom and open-mindedness. Question: Isn't the real truth that they are intolerant of religion?"

Reagan had isolated an anomalous, but real strain in American political life: the aggressive secularist. "Secular humanism" had become such a favorite buzz word of Falwell types that most people naturally assumed that they had coined it. It was, in fact, a self-description, devised by secular humanists. They represented a genuine, if marginal, American tradition: of Paine and Ingersoll; of the village atheist and the village crank. Their organs were gray magazines like the *Humanist* (Walter Mondale's brother Lester was on its editorial board), subsisting on anti-religious propaganda and exposés of ecclesiastical plots. ("Fundamentalists who collaborate with the Vatican are used by the Holy See to counter the best interests of the United States.") As an electoral force, they were nearly nil, but to the extent their ethos informed groups like the American Civil Liberties Union, they wielded disproportionate judicial clout. Of them, it could reasonably be said that they were "intolerant of religion."

Your opponents' most vulnerable allies are fair game. But there were other elements, not recognized by Reagan, in the opposition to school prayer. By far the smallest was authentic civil libertarians. Most supporters of absolutist interpretations of the Bill of Rights have ulterior motives; but there are a handful who sincerely revere

it, in the same way that cargo cultists honor the DC-3: They don't know what it is for, or how it got there, but they know it is holy. (So sincere was Nat Hentoff in his devotion that he had begun to question abortion and infanticide on civil libertarian grounds.) The great majority of the prayer decision's supporters—the Walter Mondales, not the Lesters—simply saw it as a matter of pluralistic good housekeeping: The less we all try to believe together, the better we'll each believe by ourselves.

Falwell's "subtle ecumenicity" competed with alliances that Jewish liberals had made with entirely different parts of the gentile culture.

There were, finally, those concerned about school prayer and religion in politics generally who might be called aggressive theists: believers in one faith, suspicious of the encroachments of others. The line from the *Humanist*, quoted above, recalled good old-fashioned Protestant No Popery. It was kindred sentiments that Walter Mondale now tried to rouse.

He and Reagan both addressed a Washington convention of the B'nai B'rith service group on September 6. Mondale led off with a reply to the Dallas prayer breakfast. He denied that he was "intolerant of religion": "Never before" had he "had to defend my religious faith in a political campaign." Right; and he hadn't even attacked anyone else's since Lake Tahoe. But the bottom line of his speech was the threat of fundamentalists—a "determined band . . . reaching for government power to impose their own beliefs on others." Three days later, Senator Kennedy took up the same theme: the "intolerance which still flourishes at the extremist fringe of American politics . . . infects the very center of our national authority."

In his B'nai B'rith appearance, Reagan backed out of the fight he had picked; his advisers, solicitous of his September lead, would risk nothing that might disturb it. Mondale, however, did not back off. Falwell replaced James Watt as the demon of his and Ferraro's rhetoric all the way till November. If it was not a conscious attempt to alarm Jewish voters by waving fundamentalist hobgoblins, it gave a good impression of one.

Falwell, it must be said, had given Jewish Americans reason to worry about him; not good reason maybe, but reason. He had carefully expunged the Christian-country language from his rhetoric. He was moreover a firm, not to say fanatical, supporter of Israel; Zionism was a pre-condition of membership in the Moral Majority.

Menachem Begin had given him an award as a friend of the country. But, nonetheless, the talk had been there; and some of Falwell's fellow clerics were capable of odd statements. "In all due respect," one Rev. Bailey Smith had said in the midst of the 1980 campaign, "I do not believe that God hears the prayers of Jews." For weeks, the quotation was routinely attributed to Falwell, a fine example of unconscious editing: He *ought* to have said it; therefore, he must have.

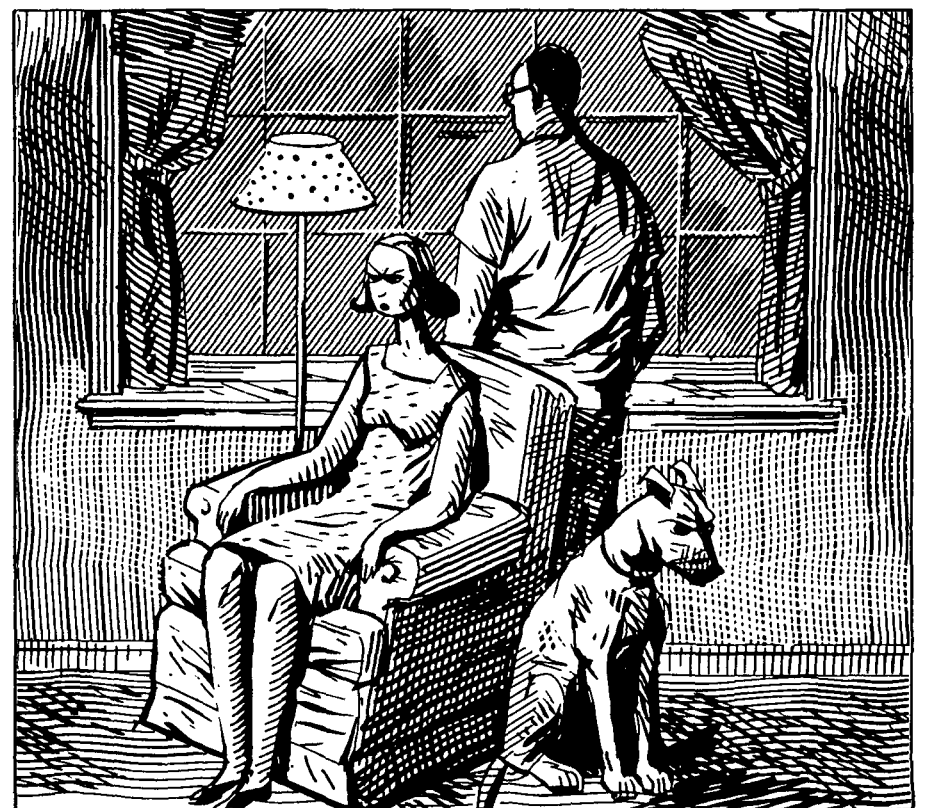
And what kind of friend of Israel was he, anyway? Falwell's Zionism, like Begin's, was derived from Biblical exegesis. The existence of the State of Israel was a necessary precondition of his chiliastic scenarios. Sophisticates didn't like this at all ("mad," "bonkers," "rattle-brained tripe," ran a typical judgment). On the deepest level, Falwell inadvertently called attention to splits within the Jewish community itself. His Jewish allies—and there were a fair number—tended to be Orthodox, of deep hue. Falwell's "subtle ecumenicity" competed with alliances that Jewish liberals had made with entirely different parts of the gentile culture.

Mondale needed Falwell to undo the effects of his party's association, through Jesse Jackson, with Louis Farrakhan. The implied parallel was scurrilous. Falwell's social behavior was about as much like Farrakhan's as it was like Jim Jones's. Falwell had never

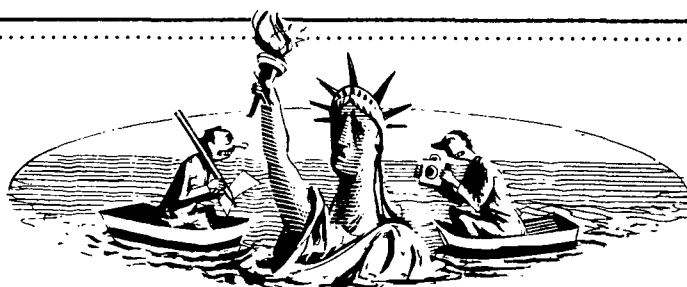
written off whole religions as dirty. But his reputation was such that he might profitably be used to cancel out the memory of the Muslim. At least, Mondale was willing to try.

So the September debate broke off in partisan jockeying. What had been revealed? Nothing, maybe, more elevated than this: American politicians call in religion when it supports them; when it does not, they tend to talk about separation of church and state. They find their room to maneuver in the discontinuities of the American system. Some of these were built in from the first; others are later alterations. Church and state have been separate at the national level since the First Amendment. Religion and state, however, have never been divided. The American government, and its leaders, traditionally profess a reticent theism, which sees God as taking a special interest in America, and as the source of proper American ethics (whatever those are thought to be). Church and religion both, finally, play a lively role in American politics, limited by the restraints of decorum: It is okay to draft God for your side; less okay to point out His absence from the other side; not okay at all to call specific politicians God-less. The new, would-be tradition of the humanists—that religious forms and expressions must make no intrusion into the political realm whatsoever—can be called on by a politician who feels the heat of believers upon him; though to do so, one runs the risk of seeming to be a clumsy hypocrite, like Geraldine Ferraro.

Not Tocqueville; but it will do for starters. □



PRESSWATCH



RAPE IN THE NEW AGE

by John O'Sullivan

When Governor James Thompson of Illinois pronounced Gary Dotson guilty but popular in the Dotson-Webb rape case and released him from prison, the *Chicago Tribune* editorially reproved the entertainment industry for its unhealthy interest in the case. Despite the unsatisfactory matter of an inconclusive ending, Hollywood was taking an interest and a made-for-TV movie loomed. Would Dotson-Webb T-shirts be long delayed? "What began as a crime, real or fictional," it sniffed, "is becoming an industry."

The charge, usually leveled against "sensationalist" popular newspapers, is a familiar one. They blow up sex cases or crime stories out of all proportion to their real importance or social worth. Profound issues are unforgivably personalized. Unsavory aspects of life are highlighted. It is all very distressing, and an educated electorate deserves better, but because of the regrettable power of competition, stays away in droves when better is available. *O tempora, o mores*, oh dear.

Yet heavyweight, liberal, and plain old dull newspapers (they overlap considerably) exhibit a corresponding bias which receives much less attention. They tend to subordinate the personal and the particular to some broad social theorizing of a high-minded (and usually progressive) tendency. It is as if such newspapers were written by people whose history teachers told them very firmly that history was made not by great men but by Movements and Trends and Ideas—with people like Napoleon and Hitler playing the role of ventriloquist's dummy. By a curious coincidence, this bias in favor of general ideas colored much of the reporting and more of the comment in the Dotson-Webb case.

Mr. Dotson, as the world now knows, was sentenced six years ago to 25-50 years in prison for the rape of

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Catherine Crowell. Miss Crowell subsequently married a Mr. Webb and was later converted to a traditional form of Christianity. As she now tells the story, she had given false witness against Mr. Dotson and, upon conversion, her conscience naturally troubled her. Her clergyman was consulted and advised that she had a moral duty to set free an innocent man by telling the truth. Since Mrs. Webb could not even recall the defendant's surname, she obtained the help of a local Wisconsin lawyer who contacted a Chicago TV station, WLS-TV. Its assignment editor tracked down Mr. Dotson's sister and broke the news that her brother's accuser had recanted. She broke down and cried, as subsequently did Mr. Dotson's mother.

WLS-TV ran the story on a late news program on March 21. Two days later, the local Chicago press picked it up. The *Sun-Times*, probably downgrading an important item about Senate budget deficit maneuvers or an announcement by the Federal Aeronautics Administration, ran the story on page one. But the *Tribune*, resisting the temptation to be interesting, relegated it to page five.

And in the following days, the *Tribune* maintained this reserve. In the dry neutralist language that schools of journalism have inculcated as proper journalistic style in impressionable

youngsters, it presented such aspects of the story as the state prosecutor's view of Mrs. Webb. "Sources close to the investigation say authorities remain unconvinced," it revealed breathlessly, "because the woman is associated with a religious cult and living in 'an emotionally charged atmosphere.'" Wow. What the paper plainly wanted to convey was the prosecutor's view that Mrs. Webb was bonkers and so no one could believe a word she said. But its principled addiction to bureaucratese got in the way of this simple message, which was a good thing since the cult to which Mrs. Webb, like about 40 million other Americans, belongs is the Baptist Church. And to be cool, calm, and collected when withdrawing a rape accusation against a man who had served six years for it would be somewhat better evidence of barminess than heightened emotion. So, if you have ever wondered what disinformation is, well, that little item was disinformation.

When on March 27 Mr. Dotson held a press conference, again the *Sun-Times* put it on page one, and again the sober *Tribune*, refusing to get excited, thought that the local "Chicagoland" section was the appropriate grave. But since Mrs. Webb appeared on "Good Morning, America" and "The Today Show" on March 20, the story had by

then escaped from Chicagoland and headed for the big time.

Let us now pause and reflect on the nature of the story. It is extraordinarily interesting on two counts. As human interest journalism, it is, well, sensational. A young man is falsely accused, he serves six years of a twenty-five-year sentence, then his accuser experiences a religious conversion, struggles morally with herself to do the right thing, repents, and finally confesses her lie to the world, whereupon the innocent man forgives her! It is a pity that the two central characters did not actually hug each other when urged to do so by the beautiful Miss Phyllis George on CBS's morning television news. It would have provided the ideal fadeout shot. But one can hardly blame Hollywood for having its interest piqued. In the sad absence of Joan Crawford and Henry Fonda, I should suggest Faye Dunaway as Catherine Webb and Dustin Hoffman in the Dotson role. Hire the guy who wrote *Call Northside 777*, book your hotel room for the next Academy Awards—and count your Oscars. In regarding the Dotson-Webb case as first-class soap opera, the entertainment industry and the pop press were being true to themselves and to the story. There was nothing inauthentic in their responses to it.

But the case was surely no less interesting as a social issue. Here is the ultimate liberal nightmare: a person sentenced to long imprisonment for a crime he did not commit. Admittedly, it would have produced a much more agreeable *frisson* if he had actually been executed for the crime. The name of Dotson might then be celebrated in folk song and abstract verse. Nonetheless, even a live Dotson could be a perfectly serviceable symbol of the system's cruelty. The indignant questions ask themselves: How had this miscarriage of justice occurred? Why had a poor youth, from a deprived background, been railroaded into a fifty-year sentence? Who or what was

