

heart," says the Bible, "so is he." The Puritans did not think only with their heads.

The American Protestant characteristically was driven out of himself, not only into Christ but also into the world. Hence the description—"this-worldly ascetic"—so often applied to individuals in Reformed communities. The change in the history of Christianity that this phrase suggests is seismic. After Luther it was no longer necessary to withdraw from the world (and into a monastery) to serve God. A man could serve God in the secular world. ("What is the chief and highest end of man?" asks the first question of the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession. "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever.") Every job had a purpose, every man a calling, a vocation, no matter how lowly or how exalted. Working in *this* world, furthermore, men could transform the society about them, as the New England Puritans tried to do in their Bible Commonwealths. Though these societies failed according to their own ideals, the impulse to change society remained and would manifest itself in numerous ways, including the voluntarism of the 19th century, which became such a mainstay of American life.

AMERICAN Protestantism not only taught spiritual virtues but also the less heroic ones of sobriety, honesty, prudence, temperance, and diligence. In the context of these virtues, as Irving Kristol has often pointed out, capitalism made ethical sense. Protestantism was understood to tame and direct a man's interests, including his economic ones, toward worthy ends. Man was understood to be a steward upon earth, and he was to use his liberty and his talents responsibly (and diligently; there was to be no idleness, no sloth). There may be no more interesting text on this than Question 141 of the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession, which even as late as 1844 was described by Philip Schaff, a German writing on America's religious life, as "the reigning theology of the country." The question refers to the Eighth Commandment ("Thou shalt not steal") and asks what duties it requires:

The duties required . . . are: truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man; rendering to everyone his due; restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof, giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others; moderation of our judgments, wills, and affections, concerning worldly goods; a provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose of those things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition; a lawful calling, and diligence in it; frugality; avoiding unnecessary lawsuits, and suretyship, or other like arrangements; and an endeavor by all just and lawful means to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.

Consequences. It is unlikely that a predominantly Catholic or Jewish America would have given birth to the type of society that eventually evolved by the late 18th century. The reason is that neither would have emphasized to the degree the American Puritans did the importance of personal development in the moral (and for them spiritual) sense of character formation. The Westminster Confession describes the preaching of the word as "an effectual means of driving them [sinners] out of themselves" and "of strengthening them against temptation and corruption, and of building them up in grace."

That is doctrine that will shape a man, and the shaping, molding emphasis of the American Puritans, the character-building emphasis, can even today be seen—literally seen—in needlework shops where samplers bearing the old, straightforwardly didactic Protestant American messages can be found. Often such messages take the form of unedited Bible verses (from the King James version). Scripture was not incidental to the Puritan American. It was to be considered, meditated upon, learned by heart. "As a man thinketh in his

This answer offers much to reflect on; there is, for instance, the implicit approval of both commerce and the creation of wealth, even of one's own wealth. But the principal concern is man's duty, which is to have moderating effects upon his commercial activities. Tocqueville observed that the law allowed the American people to do everything, but that there are things which their religion prevented them from imagining and forbade them to dare. Religion—the Protestant religion here described—was thus a major source of the virtues a nation conceived in liberty always would need. It shaped the society and the individuals within it. Protestant Christianity helped answer the oldest of political questions: what kind of people, having what kind of character, does a society produce?

Tocqueville therefore was right to say that religion was America's "foremost political institution." It was the branch of government that the Constitution, based on self-interest and envisioning a commercial Republic, obviously could not create. Yet it was the branch essential to the maintenance of the Republic. It provided a check on the liberty guaranteed by our conventional political institutions. It was responsible for the character of the people. And as this "informal" branch of government, as our "foremost political institution," Protestant Christianity enjoyed its most significant form of "establishment."

IN THE past sixty years, we have witnessed the disestablishment of this religion. One could argue that it was bound to happen. Good American theory—as given by Madison—holds that the more factions the better for the Republic's chances of survival. This theory applies not only to economic interests but also to religious ones. Despite the fact that the nation had been settled by Protestants, other religious peoples could settle here, too, and eventually they did. The great immigrations from Southern and Eastern Europe after the Civil War brought millions of Catholics to the United States, and by the end of the 19th century a sizable number of Jewish and Eastern Orthodox communities were also flourishing.

Meanwhile, something was happening to the old Protestantism itself. Evangelical Protestant Christianity (revitalized by the Second Awakening in the early years of the Republic) had held on strongly throughout the first half of the 19th century, but after the Civil War the tendencies toward Arminianism—i.e., the belief in divine sovereignty *and* human freedom—that had been present even in the 18th century became far more pronounced.

On the one hand, a liberal variety of Protestantism developed. Liberal theology had little interest in Original Sin; indeed sin to it was nothing more than mere error. Liberal Protestantism emphasized instead man's freedom and his natural goodness. Dogma and the sacraments were slighted, and there was immense optimism about the

human race. Influenced by Kant, liberal Protestants reduced Christianity to morality; they had no prophetic voice, to speak of (or with). Liberal Protestantism was an accommodation to culture. H. Richard Niebuhr perhaps best described its God as One "without wrath" Who "brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

Liberal Protestantism was not the only accommodation to culture. More conservative Protestants—the keepers of the old religious flame—proved to be poor stewards of it. The old Protestantism descended into revivalistic orgies, as brought to us most sensationally by Billy Sunday. Christianity was presented as something dulcet and sentimental, and as often as not it was allied to the pursuit of profit. Frequently the old Protestantism was served up as a civil religion—a heresy, as Jonathan Edwards, but not Billy Sunday, would have recognized. Here too, and not surprisingly, dogma was neglected. A remark by Dwight Moody's perhaps best captures this. "My theology!" he exclaimed, when asked about it. "I didn't know I had any."

In the 1920's H.L. Mencken would acidly but correctly assert that "Protestantism is down with a wasting disease." One of the deepest reasons for its condition was that the Enlightenment had finally made its way to America. By the end of the 19th century the higher biblical criticism had disturbed the Protestant theologians' confidence in their ultimate authority, the Bible. So had the modern sciences, not only the physical sciences (especially biology in the form of Darwinism) but also the newer, social sciences. Truth no longer seemed absolute but relative to time and place, and the insights into personality and society provided by psychology and sociology seemed at least as plausible as those found in the Bible.

The half-decade following the Civil War had been the great age of urbanization. The rise of the city had also seen for the first time in American history the development of an intellectual class, and it was not kind to the old Protestant faith. By the 20's it had become intellectual fashion not to believe in God and, if one were a writer, to attack "Puritanism."

WITH the great immigrations, the decline of the old Protestant religion, and the rise of an intellectual class not merely indifferent but hostile to religion, the stage had been set by the 1920's for the cultural disestablishment of the old faith. Indeed, it had begun earlier. The end of World War I in 1918 had inaugurated a period of laxity in morals and manners. This is typically what happens after wars, but the decade of the 20's eventually would prove to be a dramatic break from the past. For it was not followed by a recovery of the old morals and manners, as also typically happens after social upheavals; the Victorian era stayed firmly in the

past. Church attendance declined throughout the 20's. People lost their fear of Hell and had less interest in Heaven. They made more demands for material fulfillment.

Such demands, of course, are as American as the Declaration of Independence, which after all sanctified the idea of the pursuit of happiness. That idea owed more to the Enlightenment than to the Bible; certainly it did not sail to America aboard the Mayflower. Since the Declaration of Independence America had held its commitments to liberty and to virtue in tension. By the 20's it was clear the tension had begun to resolve itself in favor of liberty. Americans now insisted, as William Leuchtenburg has noted, not only on the right to pursue happiness but also on the right to possess it. The 20's saw the beginnings of the installment-buying plan; it is impossible to imagine such a purchasing scheme in the American culture of 200 or even 100 years earlier.

Since the 20's the disestablishment of the old Protestant religion has taken place most obviously in the intellectual, governing, bureaucratic, and cultural classes, and to a lesser but no less real and increasing degree in the rest of society. Today the disestablishment is perhaps most easily detected on the college campus. Logical positivism may have long ago fallen out of favor among philosophers, but as a cultural attitude among intellectuals and academics it is still going strong. God-talk (the literal meaning of theology) is not fashionable, not even, it sometimes seems, in a college chapel.

The campuses of the old Protestant culture emphasized the importance of the Christian faith. Now their chapels still stand, but university policies have changed. There is probably no more striking instance of this than at Princeton University, over which both Jonathan Edwards and John Witherspoon once presided. Last year Princeton went looking for a new Dean of the Chapel. A Presbyterian of deep commitment and faith had retired, and his retirement provided the occasion for a reevaluation of the Dean's function. A trustee report came forth with a new job description: henceforth the Dean should be a person of "deep religious faith" but "above all, he or she must be personally gracious and open, and his or her own religious commitment must include sensitivity to the vulnerability of human finitude and the particularity and relativity of the views he or she espouses." The clauses following "above all" say everything that needs to be said about the distance Princeton has traveled.

Other evidences of disestablishment abound. Today the old idea that law has its roots in the Judeo-Christian ethic, as was believed at the Founding and throughout most of American history, is no longer much discussed, let alone believed in by many American legal philosophers and judges. The public philosophy of America, as Harold Berman has pointed out, has in the past two generations "shifted radically." Law is in

theory no longer religious but secular; no longer moral but political and instrumental; no longer communitarian but individualistic. (People increasingly engage in "unnecessary lawsuits.") It is no wonder that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, at Harvard for the commencement address three years ago, left his audience stunned when he spoke of law in a religious context.

MEANWHILE, liberty, like law, has been severed from its religious basis. What Jefferson once called the "firm conviction" in the minds of Americans that their liberties derive from God is hardly so firm anymore, certainly not among political scientists, columnists, television personalities, and others who influence public opinion. Having been given its own existence, ontologically speaking, liberty fairly runs riot now. The distinction between liberty and license transmitted to us by the old Protestant culture has faded almost completely among the educated classes. Consider again the college campus, where the old doctrine of *in loco parentis* is out of fashion. Administrators now run their campuses as if there is no God, since virtually everything is permitted. Probably the most libertine societies in America today exist on those very campuses that were originally the creations of the old Protestant culture.

To be sure, many other parts of America are closing fast on the campuses. It is the style nowadays not only among the college-educated but also among many blue-collar workers to be economically conservative but socially and morally liberal. This, translated, means balance the budget but decriminalize marijuana and cocaine and let us have abortion on demand. If the liberalism of the 60's has a definite legacy, it is found in the far more liberalized and hedonistic lives many Americans, including many older Americans, and indeed many political conservatives, now lead.

The "Me-Decade" has been well chronicled. Perhaps less obvious, but no less significant, is the change in ethical *thinking* that has occurred throughout society. A book could be written on what has happened to the idea of character. People in authority—teachers, parents, and even ministers—resist the fact that they are in authority. They will not "impose" their values; the idea is to let the young "clarify" *their* "values" (now considered as relative as any matter of taste). Moral education is no longer rooted in the virtues of courage, temperance, prudence, and the like. It is full of form but empty of content. What matters is that you feel sure the "option" you have chosen for yourself is the right one for you. I have seen a course in "values clarification" offered to adults in a Presbyterian Sunday School curriculum—and as an "option," no less!

Perhaps because the old imperative of "America the Beautiful"—"confirm thy soul in self-control"—has become too hard to follow, ethical teaching, while studiously neutral about personal life, is as

siduously assertive in social matters. Where once the major emphasis was on tidying up the individual soul, on making it conform to reality, now the focus has shifted to the external world, to tidying up the laws that regulate the public lives of man and man (or woman). Where people, whether of secular or religious disposition, seem to feel most comfortable, and certainly most confident, is in talking about "social injustice" or "racism" or "poverty" or "exploitation." Recently I joined a panel at a major university on the subject of religion and virtue. A participant who was a professor of theology centered most of his remarks on "corporate sin." I don't recall his once mentioning the idea of virtue, let alone any particular virtue. Sometimes it is hard to find a difference between what ministers and theologians say and what many secular intellectuals say.

THIS, then, is the picture so far of an America that has experienced the cultural disestablishment of its old religion, the dissolution of its once "foremost" political institution. Consideration of a few trends within the Supreme Court will help complete the picture.

In 1947 the Supreme Court, in *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township*, said the First Amendment "requires the state to be neutral in its relations with groups of religious believers and non-believers." This new doctrine of neutrality not only would seem to forbid the establishment of a religion—as Madison would have had it—but also the establishment of religion in general over non-religion and thus irreligion.

With its doctrine of neutrality, the Court has denied substantial public aid to elementary and secondary church-related schools. And by striking down prayers and Bible readings and now, this past fall, even the posting of the Ten Commandments in the public schools, it has acted according to an implicit doctrine that the public schools should be secular—and "value-free."

In 1961, in *Torcaso v. Watkins*, the Court so enlarged the definition of religion that an observer might say irreligion had now become a religion. The Court decreed that neither a state nor the federal government can "constitutionally pass laws nor impose requirements which aid all religions based on a belief in the existence of God as against those founded on *different beliefs*" (emphasis added). A footnote listed "Ethical Culture" and "Secular Humanism" among other examples of "religions" founded on "different beliefs."

In other contexts the Court has said that virtually anything may qualify as a "religion," so long as the "religious person" believes in whatever he believes in with, as Justice Black put it, "the strength of traditional religious conviction." This definition of religion celebrates individual conscience. It is hardly surprising that in cases involving "privacy" the Court has reduced public restrictions on private choice (as with its abortion decision in 1973). The legal trend here, like the cul-

tural trend, has been toward a pronounced individualism in matters of religion and morals.

These trends of the Court round out the portrait. We are all "pluralists" now. And it should be stipulated that this is not altogether a bad thing. I doubt that any serious religious believer would wish a return to the days of intolerance that were an admitted ill of the old Protestant culture. But people who take religion seriously—and I mean here religion that has social and historical dimension, not merely something you might believe with "the strength of traditional religious conviction" in the midst of a Saturday night drunk—will find much in this picture that is disturbing. For the disestablishment of the old Protestantism has meant defeats not only for Protestants but for Catholics and Jews as well.

By contradicting the historical meaning of the establishment clause of the First Amendment, the Court has said, in effect, that promotion of religion is not in the public interest. Daniel P. Moynihan has correctly written that the recent decisions based on the establishment clause are "an intellectual scandal," and it is perhaps not too much to hope that the Court will one day reverse itself on this matter. Meanwhile, however, the severing of both law and liberty from their historic rooting in religion has serious and more immediate implications. Instrumentalists may argue that obedience to law can be brought about solely through the threat of coercive sanctions, but, as Berman has written, what is far more important is "the tradition of being law-abiding, which in turn depends upon a deeply or passionately held conviction that law is not only an instrument of secular policy but also part of the ultimate purpose and meaning of life."

As for the loss of the religiously-grounded distinction between liberty and license, we have all witnessed the proliferation of rights with no concomitant responsibilities that has been the result. With traditional religion now pushed to the margin of our public life, not only thanks to the Court's doctrines of neutrality and secularism but also, and more importantly, thanks to the pedagogy of school and college teachers alike, religion is less able to exercise its historic role as a political counterweight, as the voice of constraint and responsibility.

The shift in ethical thinking away from character formation toward personality adjustment and values clarification on the one hand, and social problems on the other, is perhaps the most disturbing change of all. The emphasis on virtues that the old Protestant culture provided was precisely what the Founding Fathers acknowledged their new Constitution could not provide. And yet the Founders also knew that just these virtues were what the best thinkers in antiquity had thought necessary to the maintenance of a republican order. If the old evangelical Protestantism had a special fire in it that burned the ancient virtues into the souls of men, the virtues them-

selves were not special to that faith. For these were virtues agreeable to Catholic and rabbinical tradition, to the Deists of the Founding period, to the Greeks and Romans. The old Protestant religion understood, as ancient philosophy did, that politics is ultimately about the cultivation of character. It is unclear today that our modern culture even understands this point, let alone wants to deal with it.*

Even so, it is answered, by default if not by design. Protestant Christianity is no longer America's "foremost political institution," but this fact does not obviate the need for a system of values in which Americans can move and live and have their commercial (and now leisure) being. If our morality is not engrafted upon Protestant Christianity, it will be engrafted on something else—God only knows what. The brilliance of the Founding Fathers did not anticipate this situation, but surely they did not believe that any institution could ever be "value-free." We are all the time engrafting our way of life upon some set of values.

IF WE ARE today a secular society, we are still also a liberal society. And in the current groping toward what inevitably will be our public philosophy, the religious person is entitled, if not to prevail, at least to be heard. The religious person can expect to be allowed a voice in matters of public policy. He can expect that his religion will not disqualify him from speaking on political matters, and that if he offers a religious or ethical justification for his position on a public issue, it will not *ipso facto* be considered out of the bounds of public discourse. The question here is ultimately one of where you get your basic beliefs. If, as Michael Novak has written, we should be willing to let people get their politics as much from the Bible as from Gloria Steinem, then biblical or religious values should be permissible in public debate. Unless the free exercise of religion, vouchsafed in the First Amendment, is to mean only trivial whispers, something practiced in the closet, then it must mean a voice equal to that of anyone who is not religious.

The trends go against even this minimal kind of free exercise of religion. It has been argued by serious public philosophers that only a rational, utilitarian morality should ever be enforced by law, and that this morality by definition would exclude any influenced by or grounded in religious considerations. Today this argument, spoken by non-philosophers, is used against the Moral Majority and their kind. You cannot legislate morality, it is said, meaning you cannot legislate a particular kind of morality—the kind having to do with religion as traditionally conceived.

History is not irreversible, but the trends for the past hundred years suggest that traditional religion will have an increasingly marginal influence

on our public life. America is still one of the most religious countries in the world, and yet church affiliation (40 percent of Americans profess one) continues to decline, as Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab noted recently in these pages ("The Election & the Evangelicals," March). These are just the circumstances to expect in a country to which the Enlightenment came late. The much-touted religious renaissance of recent years does not promise to change this state of affairs, at least not soon. Lacking is what has been lacking in much of American religious life for the past hundred years—solid theological content—and on this score the seminaries that have brought us the "death of God," "liberation theology," and other similar inspirations cannot inspire hope. As for the turning of a few scientists toward God, this is hardly a full-blown theological revolution. To postulate, as Sir John Eccles has done, that the brain is the product of evolution but that only God could have created the mind may prove an invaluable service to religion. But we are still a long way from any *Summa*, and a longer way from a great cultural movement.

One need not hold a brief for Jerry Falwell, nor for his cousin evangelists who appear on the television screen in the shank of the evening, to acknowledge what they have done, which at the least has been to flush the anti-religious bias out into the open. The early reaction to Falwell was dominated by comments from civil libertarians who implied, ironically enough, that Falwell had no right to speak out on public issues. Such was not the reaction when the Reverend Martin Luther King wrote his letter from a Birmingham jail, but the hypocrisy is less interesting, I think, than the secular bias that produced it.

If, someday, people with traditional religious views should be effectively banned from public debate, not only will the free exercise of religion have been denied but a new religion will have been culturally established as our "foremost political institution." It would no doubt look very much like what the Supreme Court alluded to in its *Torcaso* ruling—the religion of "secular humanism." God save us from that.

* Can a government, asks Francis Canavan, "committed to absolute neutrality among 'religions' . . . be capable of educating anyone? . . . The right questions were raised, but not answered, by Justice Jackson in his dissenting opinion in *Everson* where he said: 'Our public school . . . is organized on the premise that secular education can be isolated from all religious teaching so that the school can inculcate all needed temporal knowledge and also maintain a strict and lofty neutrality as to religion. The assumption is that after the individual has been instructed in worldly wisdom he will be better fitted to choose his religion. Whether such a disjunction is possible, and if possible whether it is wise, are questions I need not try to answer'" ("The Impact of Recent Supreme Court Decisions on Religion in the United States," *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1974).