Richard Land is gloating, and who can blame him? When I called him a few weeks after the 2004 election, he said he'd been driving around his home town of Nashville with his cell phone ringing constantly, CNN on one line, *Time* magazine on the other—everyone wanting to ask the prominent Southern Baptist how his people had managed to win the election for George W. Bush. Yes, he told me, "we white evangelicals were the driving engine" of the president's victory. But then he veered into the kind of interview a quarterback gives in the locker room, in which he thanks the offensive line and the tight end and the coach and, well, really the whole team for bringing it home. "You'd be shocked," Land said, "at the number of Catholics who voted for this president. You'd be shocked at the number of Orthodox Jews, even observant Jews. This was a victory for all people of traditional moral values."

"Moral values." The phrase has turned into the hanging chad of the 2004 election, the cliché no one takes seriously. Do the debates over Iraq and the economy not involve moral values? Is everyone in the exit polls who didn't check that box a secular hedonist? As a way of explaining the outcome of the election, the "morality issue" has been amply debunked as all but meaningless.

But when Land uses the phrase to express his feeling of oneness with his Catholic (not to mention Jewish) brethren, it counts as a momentous development. Land does not, after all, come from some Quaker meetinghouse where all religious viewpoints are equally welcome. Rather, as the president of the Southern Baptists' Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, he comes out of a tradition that has called the papacy the "mark of the beast." (It's no coincidence that in the Left Behind series so beloved by evangelicals, a former American cardinal serves as lackey to the Antichrist.) Yet Land is not shy about announcing now, "I've got more in common with Pope John Paul II than I do with Jimmy Carter or Bill Clinton." Of course, he still has theological differences with Catholics, but "these differences are in addition to the basics," he says. "Together we believe in the virgin-born son, who died on the cross and was resurrected on Easter Sunday—really resurrected, like *The Washington Post* could have reported it. We both say all human life is sacred, that marriage is between a man and a woman, that homosexual behavior is contrary to God's will." All this is just "more relevant," he says, "than whether I'm Catholic or Protestant."
Much of the post-election commentary about the "God gap" followed the old culture-war lines drawn by Pat Buchanan at the 1992 Republican National Convention, describing this presidential race as pitting the people of God against the godless. But although that has an epic sound to it, it's wrong—if only because there are far too few godless in the country to bring John Kerry to near parity. (Gallup polls show that only five percent of Americans don't believe in God or a higher power.) Rather, the election results confirmed an idea that sociologists have been dancing around for the past decade: that the more fundamental divide is within religious America, between different kinds of believers. Gradually the nation's spiritual map is being redrawn into two large blocs called traditionalist and modern—or orthodox and progressive, or rejectionist and accommodationist, or some other pair of labels that academics have yet to dream up.

For most of American history, of course, the important religious divides were between denominations—not just between Protestants and Catholics and Jews but between Lutherans and Episcopalians and Southern Baptists and the other endlessly fine-tuned sects. But since the 1970s fundamental disagreements have emerged within virtually all these denominations—over abortion, over gay rights, over modernity and religion's role in it. "There's a fault line running through American religions," Land says. "And that fault line is running not between denominations but through them."

Evidence for Land's claim pops up in newspapers every year starting around springtime, when many denominations hold their biennial or quadrennial meetings. In the past the subject of contention was typically abortion; of late it's more likely to have been homosexuality. The story line is remarkably consistent. A gay minister has been ordained, or a group of bishops have blessed a gay union. An internal trial is held, and sanctions are handed out. At the denomination meeting liberal protesters wearing rainbow stoles light candles; a conservative group called Solid Rock or First Principles threatens to break away and start a splinter faction unless the denomination holds fast to tradition. A vote is taken, and the denomination barely avoids schism. Last year the Episcopal Church got the most-dramatic headlines, after an openly gay bishop was ordained in New Hampshire and a coalition of congregations broke off from the American church. But similar rifts have appeared in the past few years within the United Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans—almost any denomination one can name. Nor is it just the mainline Protestant churches. At their June meeting the American Catholic bishops split over how strictly to hold politicians accountable for their positions on abortion. When Reform rabbis sanctioned gay unions, in 2000, Conservative and Orthodox rabbis issued statements objecting. And last year the Southern Baptists voted to pull out of the Baptist World Alliance, citing a move toward liberalism that includes tolerance of homosexuality and women clergy. The proximate cause was the acceptance into the alliance of a more liberal evangelical group, the Cooperative Baptists.

Every four years since 1992 a group of political scientists sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life has attempted to track these shifting loyalties; with each survey, says John C. Green, a professor of political science at the University of Akron and a member of the group, "the argument for the culture war in religion gets more convincing." The survey subdivides the three largest religious groups—evangelicals,
mainstream Protestants, and Catholics—into "traditionalists," "centrists," and "modernists." Traditionalists are defined as having a "high view of the authority of the Bible" and worshiping regularly; they say they want to preserve "traditional beliefs and practices in a changing world." Centrists are defined as wanting to adapt beliefs to new times, while modernists have unabashedly heterodox beliefs, worship infrequently, and support upending traditional doctrines to reflect a modern view. The three categories are similar in size (centrists are a little larger and modernists a little smaller) and have remained about the same size over the dozen years of the survey.

On a wide range of issues, traditionalists agree with one another across denominations while strongly disagreeing with modernists in their own religion. For example, 32 percent of traditionalist evangelicals and 26 percent of traditionalist Catholics say abortion should always be illegal, compared with only seven percent of modernist evangelicals and three percent of modernist Catholics.

The current divide first became apparent in the 1970s, when evangelicals, who had largely retreated from public life following the Scopes trial of 1925, re-engaged after Roe v. Wade. "As the issues heated up, each side began organizing around them; then candidates picked up on them," Green says. Soon the religious landscape seemed like a copy of the political one.

Perhaps the survey's most surprising finding is the degree to which evangelicals are splintering along the same lines as all other denominations. About half the evangelicals surveyed in 2004 defined themselves as centrist or modernist. This reflects a new movement of what are sometimes called "freestyle evangelicals." They are often married women with children who attend one of those suburban mega-churches where the doctrine is traditional but the style is modern. Their morals are conservative but their politics are more heterodox, featuring considerable support for education and the environment. In time they may erode the stereotype of evangelicals as overwhelmingly conservative.

The divide between traditionalists and modernists is likely to widen in the coming years. In a recent study of twenty- to thirty-four-year-olds Robert Wuthnow, the head of the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University, found that ideological splits were much more pronounced than they had been in a similar study he conducted in the mid-1970s. In particular he found that political and religious views were tracking more closely, with the most religious more avidly pro-life, and the spiritual but less traditionally religious more avidly pro-choice.

Even some who are skeptical of an American "culture war" concede that religious traditionalists are gelling into a united force. According to Alan Wolfe, the author of One Nation, After All (1998), "The theological differences between conservative Catholics and Protestants that created five hundred years of conflict and violence have been superseded by political agreement. They are simply not interested in citing theology so long as they agree on abortion. People like Wuthnow are saying this has been going on
for fifteen, twenty years. But there's an intensity this time around, much more so than most of us were prepared for."

That intensity was not entirely spontaneous. From his first month in office President Bush focused on the emerging religious split and exploited it, systematically courting traditionalist religious leaders—not only the usual Republican checklist of evangelicals but also conservative Catholic bishops and Orthodox rabbis.

According to the National Catholic Reporter, last year Bush asked Vatican officials for help enlisting American bishops' support on conservative issues. He held regular conference calls with Catholic conservatives, and hired Catholics to turn out the vote in their communities. He created an atmosphere that enabled a small group of outspoken leaders—including Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver, Archbishop John Myers of Newark, Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis, Bishop Michael Sheridan of Colorado Springs, and Bishop Paul Loverde of Arlington, Virginia—to make their case that public positions can't be separated from private faith.

Chaput in particular has emerged as a strong advocate of a politically engaged Catholicism. A sixty-year-old Native American, he has written stinging columns in the diocesan newsletter and an op-ed for The New York Times arguing that "if we believe in the sanctity of life ... we need to prove that by our actions, including our political choices." A few weeks after the election he described his position to me at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in Washington, D.C. As a bishop, he said, he couldn't be partisan. "We are not telling [parishioners] how to vote," he explained. "We are telling them how to take communion in good conscience." In practice that distinction can be a little hard to discern. Although in the run-up to the election Chaput never told his audiences to vote against John Kerry, he did argue that the killing of the unborn was a "non-negotiable" issue, and then reminded them that Kerry supports abortion rights and Bush doesn't.

"We've tried one approach for thirty years—to be against abortion but measured and contextualized," he explained to me. "But it hasn't rooted out abortion." Chaput says he doesn't spend much time thinking about what his position means for politics. "We're not with the Republican Party," he told The New York Times. "They're with us."

A still more surprising alliance seems to have arisen in the past few years between the Bush administration and the normally insular Orthodox Jewish community. Here, too, the administration's outreach has been aggressive. Bush has held Hanukkah parties at the White House with invitation lists heavy on actual rabbis—Orthodox rabbis in particular—rather than on leaders of Jewish interest groups. In 2002 the Seattle Hebrew Academy, destroyed in an earthquake, was denied federal relief funds because it was a religious institution. Soon after, Bush signed an order allowing such institutions to compete for federal funds. That year the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, the largest umbrella group for Orthodox Jews, began signing on with the Southern Baptist Convention and the Christian Legal Society to support some of the administration's faith-based initiatives.
Bush closed the deal during the Republican convention last summer, with an event at the Waldorf-Astoria tailored especially to Orthodox Jews—the first such event ever held by a presidential campaign. Rabbis came in from all over the country. Senator Sam Brownback, of Kansas, and Tim Goeglein, from the White House, spoke about their commitment to Israel and values. Tevi Troy, a campaign official and an Orthodox Jew, also spoke. "That event generated a lot of buzz in the Orthodox community," recalls Nathan Diament, a spokesman for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. "In the more insular segments of the community they don't watch TV, or get a newspaper outside the Orthodox papers. Suddenly there were headlines in the Jewish press saying the Bush campaign did this unprecedented thing, that for the first time they weren't lumping us in with the rest of the Jewish community."

The gambit worked. Thanks to Bush's attention (and, no doubt, his strong support of Israel), Hasidic enclaves—Kiryas Joel, north of Westchester; Lakewood, New Jersey; the Wickliffe suburb of Cleveland—voted as much as 95 percent for Bush, according to Diament, even though they had supported Al Gore by overwhelming percentages in 2000. (The enormous swings reflect voters' loyalty to the dictates of their rabbis.) Similarly, the Miami precinct with the largest Conservative synagogue voted 80 percent for Gore in 2000 and 57 percent for Bush this time around. A strong majority of Jews nationwide voted for Kerry, but Bush's focus on politically conservative rabbis helped increase his share of the Jewish vote from 19 percent in 2000 to 25 percent last year.

"We're starting to get an echo in our community of the divide Christians have, between traditionalists and progressives," Diament says. "We do, however, have a different theology than evangelical Christians, and that theology can lead to different positions on matters of public policy." For example, Orthodox Jews don't view "an embryo sitting in a petri dish" as having the same rights as a full human being, and the Jewish imperative to heal the sick puts them in favor of stem-cell research. But, Diament says, his community shares a general sense of the corruptive influence of the mainstream culture and appreciates "the role faith plays in Bush's life and the life of his community, and how he talks about it."

What does the country's religious divide mean for the future? Much depends on how modernists respond to the surge of activism on the traditionalist side. If religious America is truly undergoing a culture war, it is at the moment a lopsided one. "There's a sense of complete reversal from the late fifties and early sixties," says James Davison Hunter, the author of *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991). "Conservatives within denominations are so well mobilized, while progressives within Protestantism and Catholicism find themselves flat-footed, without any coherent course of action or any way to make sense of what's going on." Typically, Hunter says, evangelicals are wary of mainstream society, and prone to doomsday predictions. But he found them brimming with a "stunning sense of optimism" when he recently visited an evangelical church in Houston. "Their understanding of their own hopes and dreams about the culture were entirely linked to getting out the vote for Bush. They seemed very pragmatic, very pleased."
For the moment, at least. It's an open question whether religious traditionalists will maintain the level of political engagement they showed in the 2004 election. The greatest obstacle here may be not a modernist backlash but the burden of high expectations.

Already there are signs that evangelicals may be headed for a crushing disappointment. Following Bush's victory, James Dobson, of the evangelical group Focus on the Family, declared that if the Republicans don't deliver on issues such as abortion and gay marriage, "I believe they'll pay a price in the next election." Similarly, Bob Jones III, the president of Bob Jones University, read an open letter to Bush in chapel: "In your re-election, God has graciously granted America—though she doesn't deserve it—a reprieve from the agenda of paganism. You have been given a mandate … Don't equivocate. Put your agenda on the front burner and let it boil … Honor the Lord, and He will honor you."

It's not hard to imagine that perhaps six months, or a year, or three years down the road, religious traditionalists will face frustration and a sense of betrayal by the political system with which they are now engaging so enthusiastically. It wouldn't be the first time. After the election the conservative luminary Paul Weyrich issued a letter to evangelicals exulting, "God is indeed a Republican. He must be. His hand helped re-elect a president, with a popular mandate." And yet only five years ago Weyrich, who in the 1970s helped found the Heritage Foundation and coined the phrase "Moral Majority," was disillusioned about conservative Christians' ability to influence the national agenda on abortion and other issues. "Politics has failed," he wrote then. His prescription at the time: "Drop out of this culture" and find places "where we can live godly, righteous and sober lives." In 2008 we'll see if Weyrich and other religious conservatives remain engaged or start dropping out again.

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