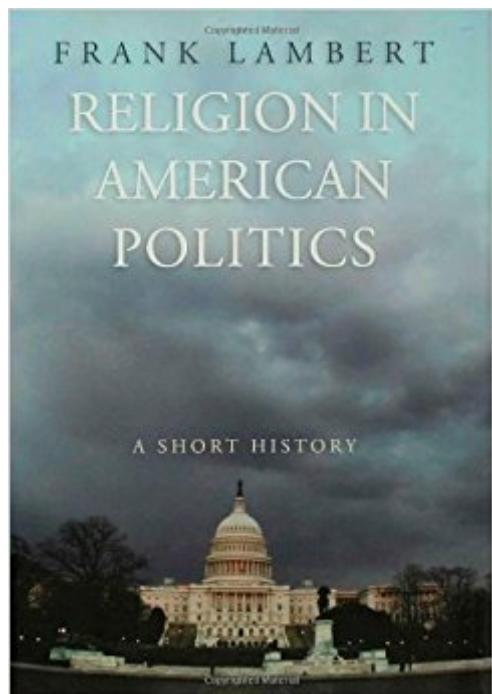


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# Religion In American Politics: A Short History



## **Synopsis**

The delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention blocked the establishment of Christianity as a national religion. But they could not keep religion out of American politics. From the election of 1800, when Federalist clergymen charged that deist Thomas Jefferson was unfit to lead a "Christian nation," to today, when some Democrats want to embrace the so-called Religious Left in order to compete with the Republicans and the Religious Right, religion has always been part of American politics. In *Religion in American Politics*, Frank Lambert tells the fascinating story of the uneasy relations between religion and politics from the founding to the twenty-first century. Lambert examines how antebellum Protestant unity was challenged by sectionalism as both North and South invoked religious justification; how Andrew Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth" competed with the anticapitalist "Social Gospel" during postwar industrialization; how the civil rights movement was perhaps the most effective religious intervention in politics in American history; and how the alliance between the Republican Party and the Religious Right has, in many ways, realized the founders' fears of religious-political electoral coalitions. In these and other cases, Lambert shows that religion became sectarian and partisan whenever it entered the political fray, and that religious agendas have always mixed with nonreligious ones. *Religion in American Politics* brings rare historical perspective and insight to a subject that was just as important--and controversial--in 1776 as it is today.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Of the writing of books about the rise and rumored fall of the religious right there is no end. But most

of these tend toward the genre of the rant, which is why Lambert's new book is important. It gives a history of the intertwining of evangelical faith and political engagement in America that displays no obvious agenda other than to illuminate. He lays religion alongside other competing influences in American politics and has an eye for fascinating (and quirky) fights over religion in early America: should the mail run on Sundays, as the religiously disinclined Thomas Jefferson preferred, or should the nation honor the fourth commandment? (Answer: the debate vanished once telegraphs could operate 24/7). Recent efforts to align Christianity and specific political positions are not without precedent in U.S. history, as Lambert makes clear. That early history is riveting, especially when it is counterintuitive: ironically, Massachusetts "the bête noir of evangelical voters now" was the last state to discontinue public funding for the Congregational Church in 1833. Lambert's treatment of more recent religious trends, from the Civil Rights movement to the rise of the religious right and left, feels a bit more boilerplate. Yet the whole book will be useful as a handy, clear and fair treatment of this most contentious subject. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Of the writing of books about the rise and rumored fall of the religious right there is no end. But most of these tend toward the genre of the rant, which is why Lambert's new book is important. It gives a history of the intertwining of evangelical faith and political engagement in America that displays no obvious agenda other than to illuminate.... The whole book will be useful as a handy, clear and fair treatment of this most contentious subject."--Publishers Weekly"Religion in American Politics . . . traces the interplay between pulpits and the public square through nearly two centuries of U.S. history. Some things, [Lambert] writes, never change."--Daniel Burke, Washington Post"For students of U.S. religion and religious history, this is a useful and very interesting book. Despite many attempts to understand the relations between religion and politics, there have been few efforts to trace these interrelationships throughout U.S. history. Lambert takes on such a task enthusiastically and successfully, in a 'short' survey of 250 pages."--J. F. Findlay, Choice"In this election season, with candidates often touting their plans to include religion in their political platforms, Lambert's richly-textured book provides a timely reminder of the divisiveness of religion and the wisdom of the Founding Fathers in keeping it out of national politics."--Henry L. Carrigan, Jr., ForeWord"Despite the constitutional separation of church and state, the two have in fact had a long, convoluted, intertwined history, as explored by Frank Lambert in his new book, Religion in American Politics: A Short History. While no official faith-based litmus test has ever been established for those running for elected office, Lambert, a history professor at Purdue University,

posits that the influence of religion is, and has been, both foreground and background in American politics.... Perhaps Lambert's most successful achievement with his book is the correction of the perception that this phenomenon is anything new, or that it will go away any time soon."--In the *Fray Magazine*"Among other things, Lambert shows how the American sons of the Enlightenment were drawn to secularism, at least politically but, in the case of Jefferson and some others, in terms of personal belief as well. The representatives who met in 1787 to write the Constitution (replacing the Articles of Confederation, the looser document that sprang directly from the revolution) ensured that Christianity was not the nation's official state religion. We learn that Adams was hardly alone in his reaction to Jefferson's victory over him. Religious leaders connected to Adams' party, the Federalists, called Jefferson unfit to lead 'a Christian nation', even one that was unofficially so."--George Featherling, *Seven Oaks Magazine*"The book's fine scholarly grain allows several sides of the story to shine through at once, yet *Religion in American Politics: A Short History* also paints a welcome big picture. . . . The book's most encouraging aspect is its sensitive treatment of diversity within religious traditions. . . . [T]o read his history is to sense how much poorer American public culture would be without the active participation of people of faith. Imagine the civil rights movement without the spirituals."--Marion Maddox, *Australian Review of Public Affairs*"It's hard to have a conversation or argument about religion and politics in America without dragging history into it. At the very least, many of us feel compelled to invoke the Founders on behalf of a vision of America either as some sort of 'Christian nation' or as the first and most successful secular republic. In his brief but generally judicious *Religion in American Politics*, Purdue historian Frank Lambert demonstrates that this is nothing new: Proponents of both visions have been arguing back and forth since the time of the founding. Since his is a 'short history,' Lambert doesn't exhaustively document every intersection of religion and politics. Rather, he picks his moments, showing how they reveal particular versions of our hardy perennial debate."--Joseph Knippenberg, *Weekly Standard*"Lambert's subtle and learned exposition of the evolution of religion within American culture is admirably clear and engaging."--Andrew Preston, *Ecclesiastical History*"*Religion in American Politics* is one of those rare scholarly books that actually manage to deliver more than it promises. In charting the relationship between politics and religion in American life, Lambert manages to provide an elegant, even-handed, and comprehensive account of the role religious faith has played in shaping the nation's destiny."--Shawn Francis Peters, *Journal of Church and State*"*Religion in American Politics* is a useful survey, not least because Lambert seeks to probe beyond some of the shopworn examples of religious and political entanglements."--Randall Balmer, *Cambridge Journals*"Lambert's clear and well-conceived analysis is framed within his understanding

of religious culture as a competitive marketplace. . . . Students and scholars interested in church-state issues in the United States will not regret reaching [this] book. Lambert's judicious treatment of sources and his attention to context give his work an authority that quotation warriors usually lack. Religion in American Politics may not be edgy, but it is wise."--Chris Beneke, *Journal of Southern History*"The reader is introduced to important actors and arguments and, after reading this volume, will have enough direction to pursue further investigation. The book is also a joy to read; Lambert not only has a felicitous style, but often finds just the right quotation from a protagonist or scholar to make a particular point without belaboring it. For general readers, or as a starter for an undergraduate course in American religion and politics, this book would be a fine choice."--James L. Guth, *Cambridge Journals*

"Religion in American Politics" is a well-written and educating history of the arguments over the role of religion in the politics of the United States. The book is tightly written and strays little from its chosen pathway and the chapters can be comfortably read in a single sitting. Thus, one can move through the lessons, era by era and develop a comprehensive picture of our constant discussions over the role of religion in the political life of the United States. Three important points stand out: (1) the book documents the fact that the arguments over the place of religion have been with us since the colonization of Americas and likely will remain with us, (2) the impact of religion has risen and fallen through the years, and (3) secularism or the religious left may have great difficulty in providing a strong alternative to the religious right, as their constituents do not share common ground. A thought-provoking trip through the history of the United States.

interesting history about a fascinating subject

Living in the 21st century, it is easy to forget how overwhelmingly Protestant the United States was at its beginning. The desire by some believers to declare our country a "Christian" nation has always existed and continues to this day. Frank Lambert has dealt with this particular aspect of our history extremely well.

This is a very good source to answer questions about the role religion plays in U.S. Politics.

This was a good book and it came in great condition. Recommend this for anyone who wants to read an interesting historical book.

Religion in American Politics is a disappointing book. It lacks the sharpness and clarity to serve as a good introduction, and lacks the nuance and depth to be of service to anyone familiar with the subject.

How can a book about religion and politics only have one short reference about Quakers? No story about how Quakers controlled Pennsylvania and how they all had to quit. No reference to the Friends Committee on National Legislation, which lobbies on Quakers concerns about peace, social justice and prison reform? Only one small reference? And based on the index nothing about pacifism? What kind of book is this?

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