

# Religion and Politics in the Anglican Rhetorical Tradition: The Rhetoric of John Danforth and the Challenge of a Political *Via Media*

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**Abstract:** This article contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation on religious rhetoric in American politics by focusing on the role of Anglicanism in promoting political compromise. Using the rhetoric of former U.S. Senator and U.N. Ambassador John Danforth, this article suggests that the dominant theories of religion and politics have failed to consider the significant influence of mainline Protestantism in shaping public discourse in the United States. In doing so, the extant literature has established a false dichotomy between political compromise and sincere religious belief. By turning to questions of underlying virtue, scholars can better understand the significant role of various religious traditions in American politics and political compromise.

## Introduction

*Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."*<sup>1</sup>

During his 18 years in the United States Senate, ordained Episcopal Priest John Danforth served as a champion of centrism and political compromise. By the time he retired from the senate in 1995, Danforth's name had become so synonymous with moderate conservatism that centrists in the GOP began to drop the dated moniker "Rockefeller Republicans" in favor of the timelier "Danforth Republicans."<sup>2</sup> Popular with both his Democratic and Republican colleagues, Danforth introduced the 1991 Civil Rights Act to restore protections against workplace discrimination vacated by the Supreme Court and pushed the legislation through the Senate despite opposition from many of his Republican colleagues.<sup>3</sup> While in the Senate, he broke ranks with his party as a vocal opponent of the death penalty and supporter of embryonic stem cell research. In 1993, Democratic President Bill Clinton asked Danforth to co-chair a commission on entitlements, and in 1999, he was tapped by Attorney General Janet Reno to serve as Special Counsel for the investigation into the 1993 siege of the Branch Davidians compound in Waco, Texas.<sup>4</sup> Danforth's dual status as an elected politician and ordained minister, as well as his support for compromise and reconciliation, set him apart from many of his colleagues and make his religiously-inspired political rhetoric a unique site for examining the intersection of religion and politics in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 13:33.

<sup>2</sup> Don Corrigan, "Whither the Danforth Republicans?," *South County Times*, September 29, 2006, <http://new.southcountytimes.com/1editorialbody.lasso?-token.folder=2006-09-29&-token.story=63362.113117&-token.subpub=#axzz53oaM7KXC>.

<sup>3</sup> New York Times Editorial Board. "Senator Danforth and the Snipers," in *New York Times*, July 10, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/07/10/opinion/senator-danforth-and-the-snipers.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Thomas, John King, and Jonathan Karl, "Reno Close to Naming Danforth to Head Independent Waco Probe," CNN, September 7, 1999, <http://www.cnn.com/US/9909/07/reno.waco.02/#2>.

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At present, theorizing on the rhetoric of religion in American politics is largely characterized by two scholarly traditions, referred to here as the *contract paradigm* and the *intransigence paradigm*. The first tradition finds its origins in the writings of Roderick Hart and presents religious rhetoric as serving a primarily ceremonial or ritualistic function in politics.<sup>5</sup> The second view is profoundly influenced by the reemergence of evangelical Christians in American politics in the 1970s and beyond. Thinkers in this tradition suggest that public debates over issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and sex education have adopted a decidedly religious tenor, and now, evangelicals and conservative Catholics have come to wield great influence over the apparatuses of coercive power.<sup>6</sup>

While there is much to be gleaned from both scholarly perspectives, this essay advances the argument that a shared assumption of these dominant theoretical perspectives obscures one of the most significant contributions that religion offers to politics: the rhetoric of political compromise. A focus on John Danforth's mainline Protestant rhetoric points to a different tradition of religion in American politics than either the ceremonial or the evangelical. Specifically, the Anglican rhetorical tradition calls into question a trend in both rhetorical criticism and post-positivism that equates radicalism with religiosity and intransigence with sincerity of belief. In examining the rhetoric of John Danforth, I argue that theories about the role of religion in politics have been limited by their focus on either extremism or ceremony and have neglected the large, moderating impulse of religious rhetoric in American politics.

### Debating the Role of Religion in American Political Rhetoric

In his 1977 book, *The Political Pulpit*, Roderick Hart proposed the metaphor of a contract between religion and politics as a framework for understanding how these two realms of American life interact.<sup>7</sup> The contract defines the nature of their relationship, carving out separate but complementary spheres for religion and politics. Hart argued that the contract allows religion to create "an ultimate meaning system for adherents," while only the government can exert coercive power.<sup>8</sup> In Hart's contract, religion's power is confined to the realm of the rhetorical.<sup>9</sup> Religious leaders and institutions are limited in their political rhetoric and political leaders are limited in their religious rhetoric. If religious leaders engage in overly political rhetoric, they will begin to find themselves shut out of the national conversation and lose access to direct political engagement altogether.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, if political leaders engage in overly religious rhetoric, they will see themselves characterized as radicals and be booted from office.<sup>11</sup> Most importantly

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<sup>5</sup> Roderick Hart, *The Political Pulpit* (West Lafayette: The Purdue University Press, 1977), 87-98.

<sup>6</sup> John Danforth, *Faith and Politics: How the Moral Values Debate Divides America and How to Move Forward Together* (New York: Viking, 2006), 4-14 & 7; David Domke and Kevin Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America: Updated Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-10. Brian T. Kaylor, *Presidential Campaign Rhetoric in an Age of Confessional Politics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 25-33; Martin J. Medhurst, "Forging a Civil-Religious Construct for the 21st Century: Should Hart's 'Contract' Be Renewed?" *Journal of Communication and Religion* 25, no. 1 (2002): 89 & 91; Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers?: The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 59-96.

<sup>7</sup> Hart, *The Political Pulpit*, 1-6; 45-48.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-51.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-64.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

for Hart's contract, the illusion of complete separation between religion and politics is supposed to be maintained, and neither party is permitted to acknowledge the existence of the contract.<sup>12</sup> For Hart, the clearest distinction between the two realms is what Ronald Lee would later call the *transcendent* and the *pragmatic*.<sup>13</sup> Government, Hart argued, is not concerned with religious dictates but with an efficient political system. In Hart's reading, government must be divorced from the spiritual or transcendent in order to maintain its sense of objective pragmatism.

More recent scholarship has suggested that the terms of Hart's contract have either changed or been renegotiated. Kaylor argues that since 1977, the year *The Political Pulpit* was published, there has been a shift to a new form of *confessional politics*, in which officials are expected to publicly acknowledge their faith.<sup>14</sup> Kaylor points to the rise of the religious right, the insistence that political leaders openly divulge their views on religion, and public polling data to suggest that religion has begun to permeate politics in a manner that it did not prior to 1976.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Medhurst claims that the contract does not account for the rise in explicitly religious political organizations like the Moral Majority, the Family Research Council, and the Christian Coalition.<sup>16</sup> Medhurst convincingly argues that such a contract, if it existed, occupied only brief authority in American history and that the relationship between religion and politics has been redesigned and renegotiated throughout the history of the republic. Both Kaylor and Medhurst note that the rise of evangelical politics in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has reshaped the relationship between religion and politics.

The scholarly conversation on the union between evangelical Christians and conservative politics has been robust but has also portrayed religious conservatives as part of a homogenous, evangelical movement seeking to return prayer to school and restrict access to abortion.<sup>17</sup> Appel's examination of the rhetoric of Jerry Falwell demonstrates well the distinction between rhetoric consistent with Hart's contract and what Hart's critics see as a new rhetoric of the religious right, which challenges the dominance of political expediency in favor of enacting God's will on specific policies.<sup>18</sup> Appel notes how Falwell characterized liberal and moderate congregations as "compromisers" and "pussyfooters" undeserving of respect.<sup>19</sup> Falwell and others make a point of proclaiming their disdain for political compromise. Rhetors in this tradition frame the state as subservient to the will of God, and Hart's critics are quick to point to such proclamations as evidence that the contract no longer holds suasive power.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Lee, "The Force of Religion in the Public Square," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 25, no. 1, (2002): 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Kaylor, *Presidential Campaign Rhetoric*, 223-227.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 18, 176.

<sup>16</sup> Medhurst, "Forging a Civil-Religious Construct for the 21st Century," 91-93.

<sup>17</sup> Edward C. Appel, "The Perfected Drama of Reverend Jerry Falwell," *Communication Quarterly* 35, no. (1987): 27; Charles Conrad, "The Rhetoric of the Moral Majority: An Analysis of Romantic Form," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69, no. 2 (1983): 159-160; Kaylor, *Presidential Campaign Rhetoric*, 223; Medhurst, "Forging a Civil-Religious Construct for the 21st Century," 91, 95; Frederick Stecker, *The Podium, the Pulpit, and the Republicans: How Presidential Candidates Use Religious Language in American Political Debate*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011): 7.

<sup>18</sup> Appel, "The Perfected Drama," 33-37.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 32-34.

<sup>20</sup> Kaylor, *Presidential Campaign Rhetoric*, 223; Lee, "The Force of Religion," 12-13, 17-18; Medhurst, "Forging a Civil-Religious Construct for the 21st Century," 88-89.

Alabama State Auditor Jim Ziegler made the intransigent evangelical position plain in his defense of the outspoken evangelical Senate candidate Roy Moore, saying that Moore's accused crimes were neither immoral nor illegal because they were in accordance with the laws of the Bible.<sup>21</sup> The same sentiment was echoed by Moore in his refusal to accept the Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* and a federal court order to remove a statue of the Ten Commandments from the Alabama Supreme Court.<sup>22</sup> Kaylor argues that this type of explicitly religious rhetoric came to dominate political campaigns in the years after Hart authored *The Political Pulpit*.<sup>23</sup>

The emergence of a religiously motivated, conservative voting-bloc since the late 1970s certainly challenges the view of religion in politics put forth by Hart that confines religion to largely ceremonial purposes. A new generation of scholars suggest that if the religious right is unwilling to engage in political compromise, then Hart's contract must have been altered. The absence of compromise, they argue, is a demonstration that the terms of the contract have been set aside and religion has been permitted to take on a more dominant role in the political realm.<sup>24</sup>

In 2005, Hart and Pauley published a new work analyzing the contractual metaphor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> The authors insist that Medhurst and others are wrong about the role that religion plays in American politics, even in an era of overt religious appeals from Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Ralph Reed.<sup>26</sup> Hart and Pauley argue that American politics is still built around a pragmatic rhetoric of political compromise rather than an intransigent rhetoric of religion.<sup>27</sup> This foundation of compromise places political pragmatism and cooperation above deeply held religious beliefs. Hart pushes back against critics' claims that the rise of fundamentalist Christian Republicans means that the contract is no longer in effect, stating, "Political compromise, not sectarian screeds, is the dominant language of American politics. *The Political Pulpit* described, and celebrated, that language twenty-five years ago. Its author still finds it descriptive."<sup>28</sup> Hart and Pauley's insistence on compromise as the dominant language of American politics illustrates the distinction they hope to establish between the politically expedient world of governance and the idealistic clamoring of the religious right. In this view, where political pragmatism is dominant, there is no room for religion. Hart seems to echo Falwell's characterization of religious leaders who are active in politics, including Martin Luther King Jr., calling them "accommodationistic."<sup>29</sup> Hart argues that when these leaders moved into the political realm they shed their religious mantels and dawned those

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<sup>21</sup> Dana Milbank, "Roy Moore and Republicans, Taking the Bible Literally but not Seriously," *The Washington Post*, November 10, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/roy-moore-and-republicans-taking-the-bible-literally-but-not-seriously>

<sup>22</sup> Joan Biskupi, "Roy Moore: The Judge Who Fought the Law," *CNN Politics*, September 27, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/27/politics/roy-moore-judicial-fight/index.html>

<sup>23</sup> Kaylor, *Presidential Campaign Rhetoric*, 175-179.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>25</sup> Roderick P. Hart and John Lester Pauley, II, *The Political Pulpit Revisited*, (West Lafayette: The Purdue University Press, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Roderick P. Hart, "God, Country, and a World of Words," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 25, no. 1 (2002): 138-141.

of political pragmatists.<sup>30</sup>

Lee offers what is perhaps the most compelling critique of Hart's contract, noting that religion functions in unique and complex ways above and beyond its ceremonial use by elected officials.<sup>31</sup> Lee argues that Martin Luther King Jr. used religion to advance an agenda clearly outside of the political establishment, that Dan Quayle used religion to make the case for a "Family Values" platform, and that Bill Clinton used religion to craft a public confession of his sins.<sup>32</sup> Lee even claims that religion can foster normatively desirable outcomes but stops short of blurring the line between the transcendent and the pragmatic. Lee argues that Hart's approach to his texts may have contributed to his understanding of the limited role of religion in politics.<sup>33</sup> My criticism echoes Lee's, who suggested that, "Because [Hart] works so much with the surface of texts (especially with word choice), he minimizes the importance of religion to the narrative/ideological underpinnings of American political rhetoric."<sup>34</sup> This essay adds to Lee's critique by focusing on a new set of texts that serve as representations of a distinctly Anglican rhetorical tradition, at odds with the ceremonial tradition analyzed by Hart but also the intransigent tradition of the religious right.

Compromise provides a useful heuristic device for examining the relationship between religion and politics, in part, because religious conviction is regarded as a deeply held belief above and beyond political ideology. This article advances the limitations of this dichotomous view of compromise and conviction. Seltser notes the paradox in the societal distaste for forcing one's religion on another person as a matter of law, alongside our willingness to accept religious values like equality or social justice as foundational to legal remedies even when such values are framed in explicitly religious terms.<sup>35</sup> Rhetorical theorizing currently reads this paradox as politics forcing religion into compliance with normatively desirable outcomes, but such thinking overlooks the theological foundations for political compromise dating back centuries. The task of this criticism is to reveal what happens when the value of political compromise is framed religiously and does so by examining the rhetoric of former U.S. Senator and U.N. Ambassador John Danforth.

### **The Religious Rhetoric of John Danforth**

Danforth's rhetoric of religion in politics is built around two books, the first published in 2006 entitled *Faith and Politics* and a second published in 2015 entitled *The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People Can Change Politics*. In addition to these two works, this analysis looks to Danforth's interviews with Alan Colmes (2015) and Diane Rehm (2015) as well as two *New York Times* opinion editorials written by Danforth in 2005 in response to the ongoing Terri Schiavo controversy and legal battle concerning medically assisted suicide and the right to die.<sup>36</sup> Each of these pieces by Danforth is joined by a common objective

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Lee, "The Force of Religion," 18-19.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 9-16.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Barry Jay Seltser, *The Principles and Practice of Political Compromise: A Case Study of the United States Senate* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984): 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Colmes interview with John Danforth, "Alan Colmes and John Danforth," *Fox News Video*, Fox News, October 13, 2015, <http://video.foxnews.com/v/4556158352001/?#sp-show-clips>; Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 1-238; John Danforth, "In the Name of Politics," *The New York Times*, March

of responding to the religious right from the perspective of a religious and political leader.

Danforth's rhetoric is characterized by two major themes. First, Danforth argues in favor of an active role for religion in politics. Second, Danforth defines the nature of religion's role as advocating for compromise through openness to difference. Both themes are presented by Danforth in opposition to the current *issues-focus* of the more commonly explored manifestations of the religious right.<sup>37</sup> An issues-focus is often concerned specifically with wedge issues such as same-sex marriage, medically assisted suicide, school prayer, or abortion, and seeks to build a religious movement around support or opposition to a specific issue agenda. Danforth argues that this issues-focus is an improper role for religion in politics.<sup>38</sup> This position is most clearly demonstrated in the structure of Danforth's first book: *Faith and Politics*. The first three chapters of the book are grounded in personal narrative and provide insight into Danforth's dual roles as a political and religious figure.<sup>39</sup> From this three-chapter foundation, Danforth turns to specific *wedge issues*, or issues designed to divide citizens based on religion.<sup>40</sup> For each issue, Danforth rejects the polarizing positions of many of his fellow religious Republicans, and in the final six chapters, Danforth lays out a new role for religion in politics founded on the guiding principle of compromise through openness to difference.<sup>41</sup>

The first major theme of Danforth's rhetoric is advocating an active role for religion in politics. Unlike many prominent opponents of the religious right, Danforth sees an indisputable role for religion in the political realm, which extends well beyond ceremony, to the core foundations of political engagement. Danforth often frames political involvement as a religious duty.<sup>42</sup> For example, Danforth told Alan Colmes that the problem with the religious right is not that religion has too large of a role in politics but that many religious people are not outspoken enough about how religion guides their politics generally.<sup>43</sup> Danforth invokes the specific example of *virtue*, which he identifies in the rhetoric of America's first four presidents, "What is the source of virtue? Who are the people who would call us to look beyond our own personal interests, our self-interests, to the good of the whole? And I think that's a very religious message. It would come naturally from people of faith."<sup>44</sup> In the Colmes interview, Danforth was critical of those Republicans who believe that they can voice God's perspective on a given issue. But Danforth maintains a religious perspective even in his criticism, calling the

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30, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/30/opinion/in-the-name-of-politics.html>; John Danforth, "Onward, Moderate Christian Soldiers," *The New York Times*, June 17, 2005, [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/17/opinion/onward-moderate-christian-soldiers.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/17/opinion/onward-moderate-christian-soldiers.html?_r=0); John Danforth, *The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People Can Change Politics* (New York: Random House, 2015): xi-253; Diane Rehm interview with John Danforth, "John Danforth: The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People Can Change Politics," *Diane Rehm Show*, WAMU 88.5, October 15, 2015, <https://dianerehm.org/shows/-2015-10-15/john-danforth-the-relevance-of-religion-how-faithful-people-can-change-politics>.

<sup>37</sup> Martin J. Medhurst "Evangelical Christian Faith and Political Action: Mike Huckabee and the 2008 Republican Presidential Nomination," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 32, no. 1 (2009): 199-239.

<sup>38</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 127-128.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-53.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-127.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-233.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>43</sup> Colmes interview with John Danforth, "Alan Colmes and John Danforth."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

assumptions of the religious-right “idolatrous.”<sup>45</sup> Simultaneously, Danforth advocates that those making appeals to virtue or tone in American politics do so in explicitly religious terms.

For Danforth, the ideal level of engagement is not to confine religion and politics to separate realms. Rather, in both books, Danforth contrasts religious engagement in the political with Old Order Mennonites’ decision to remove themselves entirely from politics.

That religion is now a divisive force in American political life doesn’t mean that in order to avoid fracturing the country, religious people should stay out of political controversies and attend only to the personal side of religion. Some faith groups—the Mennonites, for example—have chosen the course of disengagement from public life. But many people of faith believe that politics is a religious as well as civic duty.<sup>46</sup>

This topic of engagement recurs throughout Danforth’s challenge to the religious right. He told Alan Colmes, “I think that religious people have a lot to say that’s very constructive and can help bring us together.”<sup>47</sup> Danforth is insistent that religious people engage directly in politics but cautions against the issue-focus that has dominated engagement on the religious right.

Danforth encourages engagement on specifically religious grounds. In the first of two *New York Times* opinion editorials focused on the Terri Schiavo case, Danforth wrote, “Since Moses confronted the pharaoh, faithful people have heard God’s call to political involvement.”<sup>48</sup> He even titled the second *New York Times* op-ed, *Onward, Moderate Christian Soldiers*, a call for increased engagement from religious centrists.<sup>49</sup> Far from suggesting that religious people leave God out of politics, Danforth encourages them to use their religious values in determining how best to engage with others in the public arena.

The second major theme of Danforth’s rhetoric is an argument for compromise through openness to difference. Throughout the pieces analyzed, Danforth highlights the importance of the Love Commandment from the Gospel of Matthew, to love the lord, and in the same way, to love your neighbor as you do yourself.<sup>50</sup> Danforth sees the Love Commandment as foundational to the Christian approach to politics. In *Faith and Politics*, Danforth suggests that the Republican attempts to enact a specific social agenda have the effect of crowding out the centrality of love by foreclosing the possibility of accepting different perspectives.<sup>51</sup> Danforth repeatedly says that, “Compassion is religion’s gift to politics.”<sup>52</sup> In one of his *New York Times* opinion editorials, Danforth argues that any approaches to politics that serve to limit discussion and reconciliation

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.; Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 116. Danforth, *The Relevance of Religion*, 7-8.

<sup>46</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Colmes interview with John Danforth, “Alan Colmes and John Danforth.”

<sup>48</sup> Danforth, “In the Name of Politics.”

<sup>49</sup> Danforth, “Onward, Moderate Christian Soldiers.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.; Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 222-228; Danforth, *The Relevance of Religion*, 14; Matt. 22:37-39; Medhurst “Evangelical Christian Faith and Political Action,” 199-239.

<sup>51</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 28; Medhurst “Evangelical Christian Faith and Political Action,” 199-239.

<sup>52</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 181-182.

are antithetical to the Christian emphasis on love.<sup>53</sup> It is an openness to difference that should serve as the starting point for Christian engagement in the political realm, according to Danforth.

As an effect of this openness to difference, Danforth makes the case that religion should be viewed as an impetus for compromise. In *The Relevance of Religion*, Danforth claims, “Religion creates the environment where compromise can thrive. It warns us against turning political ideas into idols, and it teaches us to love and therefore respect our adversaries.”<sup>54</sup> Danforth told Diane Rehm, “I think religion fosters political compromise, which is now really nonexistent in Congress.”<sup>55</sup> Throughout the rhetorical exemplars, Danforth makes the case that compromise, rooted in the Love Commandment, may be religion’s most significant contribution to day-to-day governance. In those portions of Danforth’s rhetoric focused on specific issue positions like abortion and same-sex marriage, he rarely proposes a hard stance but, instead, foregrounds the possibility of mutually respectful alternatives that can be negotiated in a tone of appreciation for the beliefs of others.

Modesty and humility should guide a religious individual’s politics, Danforth argues. Danforth problematizes the hubristic assumption that humans are privy to God’s perspective on the political issues of the moment.<sup>56</sup> God, in this framing, does not tell Senators how to vote, but rather gives them the value system upon which they can decide. In *Faith and Politics*, Danforth includes a section entitled “Engaging the Enemy.”<sup>57</sup> In this section, Danforth praises Democrat David Boren as an exemplar of Christian engagement with the political out-group.<sup>58</sup> In the same section, Danforth lays out the biblical underpinnings of respect for those with whom Christians may disagree. He again turns to Paul’s letter to the Romans, and this time includes the command to, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”<sup>59</sup> Danforth told Alan Colmes, “There are very faithful people in both parties, and to try to translate religion into a particular political program is divisive, and, also I think it is idolatrous.”<sup>60</sup>

Danforth’s rhetoric clearly relies on different themes than either the merely ceremonial use of religion identified in *The Political Pulpit* or the intransigent religious right who believe that God has instructed them never to compromise on abortion, physician-assisted suicide, or same-sex marriage. The first question posed by Danforth’s rhetoric may be: to what extent is his rhetoric an isolated call to reimagine politics and unlikely to be of significant influence beyond one former U.S. Senator, or is Danforth’s rhetoric part of a broader rhetorical tradition, which has consistently framed religion as a powerful tool guiding politics in the direction of compromise? If such a tradition can be said to exist, what then can that tradition tell us about the complex relationship between religion and politics?

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<sup>53</sup> Danforth, “Onward, Moderate Christian Soldiers.”

<sup>54</sup> Danforth, *The Relevance of Religion*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Rehm interview with John Danforth, “John Danforth.”

<sup>56</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 14-17; Danforth, “Onward, Moderate Christian Soldiers.”

<sup>57</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 228-231.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-230.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 211; Rom. 12:14.

<sup>60</sup> Colmes interview with John Danforth, “Alan Colmes and John Danforth.”

### ***Via Media: Anglican Politics of the Middle Way***

The rhetoric of mainline Protestantism is often ignored in contemporary discussions of religion and politics. Both evangelicals and Catholics outnumber mainline Protestants in most of the United States and the percentage of religious individuals who identify with the mainline tradition has declined in recent years.<sup>61</sup> However, mainline Protestants remain a sizeable presence in American government and provide the cornerstone for American religion dating back to the founding of the country.<sup>62</sup> While Anglicanism represents only one branch of this tradition, similar rhetorical legacies can be identified in the political rhetoric of religious leaders in the Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Disciples of Christ traditions.

Beyond Danforth's rhetoric, the legacy of Anglicanism is closely connected to the ideas of compromise, compassion, and reconciliation. Unlike evangelical and Catholic theology, Anglicanism is grounded in what the early Anglican theologian Richard Hooker called the *via media* or "middle way," between Protestantism and Catholicism.<sup>63</sup> The *via media* approach was intended as a theologically-grounded compromise between radical Puritans and the Roman Catholic Church in the late sixteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth I saw the necessity of rebuilding an English church that would offer an alternative to both Catholicism and Puritanism.<sup>65</sup> The task of articulating a coherent ideology for Anglicanism in a post-Henry VIII England fell to Hooker and his contemporaries. While the claim is not without controversy, a significant body of scholarship points to Hooker as the theological architect of the *via media* approach.<sup>66</sup> Hooker defended the theology of the middle way, suggesting that true hermeneutics occupied a space somewhere between the textualism of Luther and the traditionalism of Catholicism.<sup>67</sup>

In the four centuries since the publication of Hooker's *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, Anglicanism has advocated a middle ground between more extreme theological and political positions.<sup>68</sup> With time, centrism became a cornerstone of Anglican theology. The British comedian Eddie Izzard famously satirized this *via media* approach to religion in the Anglican Communion noting, "But you can't do that in Church of England. You can't say, 'You must have tea and cake with the vicar or you die!' You can't have extreme points of view. You know, the Spanish Inquisition wouldn't have worked with Church of England."<sup>69</sup> Anglican theology of compromise and reconciliation has extended well

<sup>61</sup> Michael Lipka, "Mainline Protestants Make Up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults," Fact Tank: News in the Numbers, Pew Research Center, May 18, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>; Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Survey," in *Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life*, last modified 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

<sup>62</sup> David Hein and Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr., *The Episcopalians*, (Praeger, 2004): 15-155.

<sup>63</sup> Lee W. Gibbs, "Richard Hooker's *Via Media* Doctrine of Justification," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 2 (1981): 211-220.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-212.

<sup>65</sup> Hein and Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, 3-10.

<sup>66</sup> Lee W. Gibbs, "Richard Hooker's *Via Media* Doctrine of Scripture and Tradition," *The Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 2 (2002): 227-235.

<sup>67</sup> Gibbs, "Richard Hooker's *Via Media* Doctrine of Justification," 220.

<sup>68</sup> Gibbs, "Richard Hooker's *Via Media* Doctrine of Scripture and Tradition," 227; Hein and Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, 70-71; John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Via Media of the Anglican Church Illustrated in Lectures, Letters, and Tracts* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891).

<sup>69</sup> Eddie Izzard, *Dress to Kill*, VHS, Directed by Lawrence Jordan (New York: HBO, 1999).

beyond the divide between Catholics and Protestants. Many of the same theological foundations utilized by Hooker have made their way into Anglican political engagement.

Globally, Anglicanism has often been associated with moderation, compromise, and reconciliation. In post-Apartheid South Africa, Anglican primate Desmond Tutu was selected to chair the Truth and Reconciliation Commission tasked with healing the wounds of Apartheid and restoring cooperation in a deeply divided country.<sup>70</sup> In the United States, independently-minded leaders have long had ties to Anglicanism. Prior to the Revolution, George Washington was active in the Church of England and remained a regular attendee in the Episcopal Church after independence.<sup>71</sup> Washington's Farewell Address made plain his belief that religion was essential to the work of governance. In the address Washington wrote, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."<sup>72</sup> Indeed, American history is inseparable from the legacy of the Episcopal Church and the Church of England in the American colonies.

Continental victory in the American revolution left Anglicanism, which had been an official state religion, to orient itself theologically and rhetorically toward the secular American government. From this task emerged a rhetorical tradition built on the concept of a *via media*, which was handed down through generations of Episcopalians. From the beginning, Anglicans were an integral part of the nation's founding.<sup>73</sup> Many of the nation's most famous statespersons were part of the Anglican tradition. *The Great Compromiser* Henry Clay converted to Anglicanism later in life and the story of his conversion and baptism are described in detail in Calvin Colton's *The Last Seven Years of the Life of Henry Clay*.<sup>74</sup> The appeal of the *via media* approach reached its way into Clay's political life just as it has for thousands of public servants who remained devout Anglican adherents.

It is in accordance with this history of compromise that rhetors like Danforth have advanced theological positions for political engagement.<sup>75</sup> Medhurst writes of Danforth specifically, noting that, "Danforth is a mainstream Protestant centrist of the kind that dominated the Republican Party prior to 1980, and he longs for a return to those days when decorum and tolerance were the rule rather than the exception."<sup>76</sup> Political moves such as Danforth's are often read as merely pragmatic, and the tendency of scholarship is to frame compromisers as accommodationists rather than as peacemakers, but the rhetoric of Anglicanism in the United States is littered with examples of a *via media* approach to politics rooted in the long-standing theology of the Anglican Communion.

Both Kaylor and Hart briefly discuss the Anglican tradition. Kaylor notes the difficulties faced by Episcopalian Gerald Ford against the outspoken evangelical Jimmy

<sup>70</sup> Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (Doubleday Books, 1999), 3-32.

<sup>71</sup> Hein and Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, 42.

<sup>72</sup> George Washington, "Washington's Farewell Address 1776," The Avalon Project at Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, accessed October 3, 2017, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp).

<sup>73</sup> William Warren Sweet, "The Role of the Anglicans in the American Revolution," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1947): 52.

<sup>74</sup> Calvin Colton, *The Last Seven Years in the Life of Henry Clay* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1856): 52-53.

<sup>75</sup> Medhurst "Evangelical Christian Faith and Political Action," 211-212.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

Carter.<sup>77</sup> Kaylor also refers to Episcopalians as “a mainline Protestant denomination whose membership is often considered reserved in publicly discussing their faith” and notes a similar struggle for Episcopalian George H.W. Bush when compared with his evangelical son.<sup>78</sup> Hart mentions Episcopalians only briefly to note that Episcopal leaders recused themselves from the debate over Watergate in the 1970s.<sup>79</sup> Hart does mention other non-evangelical denominations including Unitarians, saying, “At best, the American civil religion is a political version of Unitarianism.”<sup>80</sup> While perhaps intended as a brief, pointed remark, the relationship between the theology of more inclusive religious movements and American politics desperately requires further examination. After all, Unitarianism, like Anglicanism, was common among the nation’s founders.<sup>81</sup> Hart argues that the form of religion exercised in politics is non-denominational and attempts to be as encompassing as possible. What Hart fails to acknowledge is that this very question of inclusivity and acceptance is at the heart of the largest split among American Protestants: the divide between evangelicals and mainline Protestants. What Hart sees as the split between religion and politics may indeed be evidence of the powerful influence of mainline Protestant theology.

The themes of active engagement, compromise and openness to difference in Danforth’s rhetoric present direct challenges to Hart’s contract and much of the extant literature on religion in politics. The difference in the function of Danforth’s rhetoric is related to its emphasis on religion as a source of shared and uniting values and its direct focus on the process of governing. Kaylor argues that a rhetoric of pragmatic compromise may exist in governing but not in campaign discourse.<sup>82</sup> Kaylor’s focus is limited specifically to campaigns, which are by their nature divisive. While this approach sheds a light on how religion is used by candidates to secure political victories, it does little to directly address the process of day-to-day governing. This same shortcoming can be levied against Bellah, who focuses on Kennedy’s inaugural address and Hart who focuses on bicentennial celebrations.<sup>83</sup> It is unsurprising for rhetorical critics who analyze ceremonial discourse to find ceremonial functions in rhetoric, but to treat ceremonial rhetoric as representative of the larger division of powers between religion and politics is done in haste. None of the previously analyzed forms of discourse is directly focused on the day-to-day process of governing. Medhurst comes the closest to discussing religious discourse concerned with governing but maintains an issue-focus that Danforth frames all of his rhetoric in opposition to.<sup>84</sup>

Most importantly, Danforth justifies his centrist approach to politics, not in the language of political expediency, but in the explicit language of Christianity. Framing compromise and public engagement in politics as a ministry turns the political-religious power relationship proposed by Hart on its head. For Hart, religion bows to the state’s need for expediency and pragmatism. For Danforth, Christianity enters politics to save

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<sup>77</sup> Kaylor, *Presidential Campaign Rhetoric*, 32.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>79</sup> Hart, *The Political Pulpit*, 61.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>81</sup> David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006):73-98.

<sup>82</sup> Kaylor, *Presidential Campaign Rhetoric*, 145.

<sup>83</sup> Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* (Winter 1967): 1-21.  
Hart, *The Political Pulpit*.

<sup>84</sup> Medhurst, “Forging a Civil-Religious Construct for the 21st Century,” 89.

it from destructive polarization and to witness about the values of compromise, compassion, and reconciliation. Danforth's rhetoric affords the unique opportunity to examine the discourse of governing when the issue-focus is stripped away, and the faithful are left only with guiding principles to govern political engagement. If religion still has a role in this form of rhetoric, as the *via media* tradition suggests that it does, then this role is yet unexamined by the extant scholarship. The following sections explore the distinctions between Danforth's rhetoric and the rhetoric of those movements and ceremonies that have occupied so much of the scholarly discussion to date.

### Danforth's Rhetoric as a Direct Challenge to the Contract Metaphor

On its face, Danforth's participation in both the political and religious realms, seems to call into question the accuracy of Hart's prediction that religious leaders would be shut out of the conversation as a consequence of becoming overly political and that political leaders would be rejected as radicals if they engaged in overly religious discourse.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Danforth's experience seems to be precisely the opposite. Even though Danforth engaged in explicitly religious justifications for his political positions, his name became synonymous with centrism and he was embraced by members of both parties. Although Danforth engaged directly in politics, his name continued to top lists for public prayers, significant religious ceremonies, and eulogies, including for a former President of the United States.<sup>86</sup>

Throughout Hart's writings, he has remained insistent that the contract is enforced through norms in both religion and politics that exclude or ostracize those who venture too far into the other realm.<sup>87</sup> Hart argues that the parties to the contract, namely religious and political leaders, enforce its precepts, but the compassion and openness themes in Danforth's rhetoric suggest that Hart's contract is not enforced evenly. While fundamentalist Christians like Todd Akin or Roy Moore, who view stopping abortion as their ultimate religious obligation, might be denied access to governing power, religious ministers like Danforth, dedicated to Christian virtues of compromise and compassion are considered government's most honored members. Danforth's flagrant violation of the terms of the contract suggests that the contractual metaphor may not be an exhaustive mechanism for understanding the complex relationship between religion and politics.

According to Hart, the contract forbids overly political, religious rhetoric and vice versa. The contract also mandates that the illusion of complete separation be maintained by both parties. The consequences, as outlined in Hart's contract, are that religious leaders will be, "labeled radical and denied an opportunity to offer the benediction at political gatherings."<sup>88</sup> And political leaders who deny religion's power to create ultimate meaning systems or become overly religious will be declared un-electable. Even if Danforth's dual identity as a religious and political figure does not, in and of itself, defy the terms of the contract, his direct rhetorical focus on these issues and defense of active religious engagement in politics is a clear violation. His use of compromise rhetoric as an elected official was more than mere political prudence. It was,

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<sup>85</sup> Hart, *The Political Pulpit*, 61-64.

<sup>86</sup> Hanna Rosin, "John Danforth, Churchman for a State Occasion" *The Washington Post*, June 11, 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A32779-2004Jun10.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Hart, "God, Country, and a World of Words," 137-138; Hart, *The Political Pulpit*, 61-64.

<sup>88</sup> Hart, *The Political Pulpit*, 43.

in his words, “a ministry.”<sup>89</sup> Despite this violation of the contract as a religious leader, Danforth is universally labeled a political moderate. Even though he explicitly emphasizes religious rhetoric in politics, Danforth is regularly invited to political functions to serve as a priest, offering benedictions, eulogies, and bestowing blessings on attendees.

While serving in the U.S. Senate, Danforth invoked his deeply held religious belief in reconciliation to push back against his colleagues’ call for mandated school prayer and other issue-focused invocations of God in politics.<sup>90</sup> During that same period, Danforth delivered the homily at the funeral of his colleague H. John Heinz who was killed in an aviation accident. In 2004, while awaiting confirmation as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Danforth performed the funeral of President Ronald Reagan in full vestments. Senators Jim Jeffords, Joe Biden, and John Warner would all mention Danforth’s role as a priest as a unique qualification in their speeches supporting his nomination for the U.N. post.<sup>91</sup> Danforth’s positioning in both worlds seems to suggest that there is something more complex happening in the relationship between religion and politics than permitted by Hart’s contract.

### **Religiously Motivated Engagement as a Challenge to Hart’s Contract**

A single sentence in Danforth’s second *New York Times* opinion-editorial reveals a fissure in Hart’s contractual metaphor on the question of religious engagement in politics. Danforth says, speaking about moderate people of faith, “We think that efforts to haul references of God into the public square, into schools and courthouses, are far more apt to divide Americans than to advance faith.”<sup>92</sup> It would be a mistake to understand Danforth’s argument against invoking religion in public debate as evidence of their complete separation. Danforth’s argument still maintains that the locus of power rests squarely with religion and Danforth routinely uses religious rhetoric in promoting democratic engagement. The absence of these public displays of faith is, in the Anglican tradition, motivated by religious conviction. It is in the absence of overt expression that Danforth sees the power of religion’s influence on politics. The extant literature treats Anglican reticence as a lack of conviction, when such reticence is at the heart of a centuries old dispute between evangelicals and mainline Protestants.<sup>93</sup> Religious rhetoric in the political sphere does not only occur at the moments when God is invoked as the justification for policy. Such rhetoric manifests when religious people, motivated by their faith, engage in a rhetoric of compromise born from that faith.

Danforth’s discussion of Old Order Mennonites is intended to represent the ultimate form of political disengagement.<sup>94</sup> From a rhetorical perspective, however,

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<sup>89</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 14-17.

<sup>90</sup> Steven V. Roberts, “Congress; Fervant [sic] Debate On School Prayer,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 1984, <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/09/us/congress-fervant-debate-on-school-prayer.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Senator Biden, speaking on the Nomination of John Danforth, on June 24, 2004, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 150, pt. 89: S7351; Senator Jeffords, speaking on the Nomination of John Danforth, on June 24, 2004, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 150, pt. 89: S7354; Senator Warner, speaking on the Nomination of John Danforth, on June 24, 2004, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 150, pt. 89: S7355.

<sup>92</sup> Danforth, “Onward, Moderate Christian Soldiers.”

<sup>93</sup> Kaylor, *Presidential Campaign Rhetoric*, 32.

<sup>94</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 11.

those who have withdrawn from politics in accordance with the dictates of their faith are taking the ultimate political position. Disengagement, when demanded by religious conviction, is itself the most extreme invocation of God in politics. Just as Danforth privileges political compromise over ideology, the Old Order Mennonites privilege their abstention in favor of the laws of God. In neither the case of Danforth's religious compromises crafted on the floor of the U.S. Senate, nor in the Mennonite's refusal of direct engagement, does Hart's contract concerning the overt invocation of God or religion speak meaningfully to the political rhetoric of religion. The intransigence paradigm similarly focuses on overt expressions of faith and denies the significance of rhetoric imbued with religious virtue. To understand these components of religious rhetoric requires a turn toward the examination of virtue in rhetoric.

The case of political abstention represents the ultimate paradox of religious references in the public sphere. The absence of overt religious expression, when motivated by faith, can and does communicate a religious perspective. It would be an error to dismiss this paradoxical rhetoric as an attempt by either Danforth or the Old Order Mennonites to hold to the conditions of the contract. Even in giving politics the power it requests, religion frames itself as the ultimate source of power and authority. Authority in this view is granted by God, in a manner akin to the divine right of kings that characterized early Anglican rhetoric. To dismiss this perspective as only feeding the mandates of the contract bypasses the larger point that political rhetoric has no realm from which to escape religious justification. For the faithful, religion permeates every level of political discourse. Religious perspectives like Danforth's might serve the functional purpose of secularizing government, but to treat the rhetoric as political prudence rather than deeply held religious conviction is to discount the sincerity of such beliefs and to dismiss one of religion's most powerful manifestations in politics.

### **Accommodationists or Peacemakers: The *Via Media* as a Challenge to Hart's Contract and the Rhetoric of the Religious Right**

To understand the rhetoric of religion in politics, critics must look deeper to questions of underlying virtue. Virtuous political engagement in the Anglican tradition is undergirded by the representative anecdote of leaven found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.<sup>95</sup> In the parable Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to leaven, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."<sup>96</sup> In the parable, a small amount of leaven is hidden by the magnitude of the meal but permeates and dramatically transforms it. In the same way, religious virtues may imbue politics with a rhetoric of compromise, compassion, and prudence.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the tendency of rhetorical scholarship to foreground individual issue positions, virtues that promote compromise and compassion have a long, theological, and rhetorical legacy in Christianity. Long before the formation of the Church of England, Aquinas explored virtue as central to Christian theology. In *Summa Theologica*,

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<sup>95</sup> Luke 13:20-21; Matt. 13:33

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> H. Knute Jacobson "A Homily on Religious Virtue in Public Engagement," Sermon, Calvary Episcopal Church, Columbia, MO, August 20, 2017.

Aquinas specifically makes the case for prudence.<sup>98</sup> Aquinas' theological justifications for prudence and other virtues should give critics pause in their dichotomous view of religion and compromise. Numerous biblical passages have been interpreted by Anglicans and other mainline Protestants as a call for compromise and compassion. Danforth focuses on Paul's letter to the Romans and the command "to live peaceably with all," but also includes reference to the Beatitude's saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."<sup>99</sup> Danforth cites the High Priestly Prayer in John 17, that prays for Christians, "That they all may be one," a sentence included in the liturgy of the Episcopal Church and reaffirmed in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, which outlined Anglican identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>100</sup> Danforth further identifies calls for reconciliation in Paul's epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians.<sup>101</sup> Anglican rhetors could also point to the oft cited command in the Gospel of Matthew: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."<sup>102</sup> Each verse represents a command for Christians when engaging with others and reaching across the infinite divide that separates the self from the other.

The Danforth example illustrates the point made by Seltser about the role of religion in crafting compromise.<sup>103</sup> Seltser rejects the framing that emphasizes the centrality of controversial issue positions insofar as it obscures religion's most dominant influence in politics, which is grounded in societal values.<sup>104</sup> Seltser cites the values of justice and equality, but we could add to these Danforth's values of openness and compromise.<sup>105</sup> The example of Danforth makes clear that the two dominant theories have little meaningful response to religious rhetoric motivated by one's faith when that rhetoric deals with issues of governance but is not politically divisive.

Even when narrowly defined, politics is subject to the power of religion's "ultimate meaning system."<sup>106</sup> It would be nearly impossible to confine a contractual party capable of creating an ultimate meaning system to a separate realm from politics. For religious adherents, politics is subsumed by religion. For political action to be taken it must pass the test of religious fidelity. Even for traditionally liberal mainline denominations, all decisions must be rhetorically justified in accordance with the dictates of their faith and not just their politics.

Both Hart and some of his critics are dismissive of the beliefs of mainline Protestants and liberal theologians, framing them as pragmatists and accommodationists rather than religious rhetors using their faith to engage in the work of politics. The lack of attention to religious virtues in political engagement obscures the true extent of religion's hold on politics. Critics must attempt to see beyond the quantity of explicit

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<sup>98</sup> Daniel Mark Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence: Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and the Implications for Modern Ethics*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992): xiv-164.

<sup>99</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 13-14 Matt. 5:9; Rom. 12:12.

<sup>100</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 19; John 17:21; J. Robert Wright, "Heritage and Vision: The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral," *Anglican Theological Review*, Supplementary Series, no. 10 (1988): 9-10.

<sup>101</sup> Danforth, *Faith and Politics*, 14.

<sup>102</sup> Matt. 5:38-48.

<sup>103</sup> Seltser, *The Principles and Practice of Political Compromise*, 13-14.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Hart, *The Political Pulpit*, 53.

religious invocations and identify the underlying narratives that characterize religious engagement in politics. Overarching theoretical foundations are unlikely to capture the full extent of religious engagement in a pluralistic society. As politicians and religious leaders from new and increasingly diverse faith traditions begin to engage in American politics, the task will fall to rhetorical critics to understand better the nature of their religious engagement in the political sphere. To characterize each of these traditions as dismissing religious conviction to engage in a politics of efficiency, will mask the significance of each faith tradition to the national conversation on politics.

### Conclusion

In responding to critics of Hart's contractual metaphor in 2005, Hart and Pauley argued, "Political compromise, not sectarian screeds, is the dominant language of American politics. *The Political Pulpit* described, and celebrated, that language twenty-five years ago. Its author still finds it descriptive."<sup>107</sup> Placing compromise at the center of American political discourse still begs the question of religion's role in shaping the rhetoric of compromise, compassion, and reconciliation. The rhetoric of John Danforth and of the broader Anglican tradition presents compromise as a religious virtue and one of religion's most important contributions to politics. This religious tradition, which is inextricably linked to American political history, presents new possibilities for understanding the complex nature of the relationship between religion and politics in the United States.

While this essay presents much of the Anglican tradition in the United States as prosocial, Anglicanism's rhetoric of political compromise should not be read as always more normatively desirable than the intransigence of other religious movements. Women's rights activist and Episcopalian Emma Willard used the rhetorical middle way in an 1862 essay suggesting a permanent compromise between North and South on the issue of slavery.<sup>108</sup> Willard advocated permanent slavery by benevolent masters and a prohibition on breaking up enslaved families.<sup>109</sup> For Willard, laws that governed how slaves could be treated were sufficient to create a lasting compromise between North and South and preserve what she argued was the rightful station of black men and women.

Read against the intransigence of the abolitionist movement, it is easy to see the deeply held conviction of the abolitionists, but it would be a mistake to read Willard's religious rhetoric as political pragmatism. While Willard's proposal was deeply unethical and characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> century white supremacy, it was imbued by the religious conviction of peacemaking and the middle way of Anglicanism. Even if the dominant impulse of Anglican civil engagement is compromise, it has not prevented Anglicanism or the Episcopal Church from being drawn into troubling social and political movements such as Willard's. Crosby provides a further example in noting the power of nativism in animating much of the Anglican rhetoric surrounding the Washington National Cathedral in the nineteenth-century.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Hart and Pauley, *The Political Pulpit Revisited*, 189.

<sup>108</sup> Emma Willard, *Via Media: A Peaceful and Permanent Settlement of the Slavery Question* (Washington: Charles H. Anderson, 1862): 1-10.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Richard Benjamin Crosby, "Civil Religion, Nativist Rhetoric, and the Washington National Cathedral," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 39, no. 4 (2017): 55

Rather than advocating for the Anglican approach to politics, I hope to have demonstrated the problems with a dichotomous view of religious engagement and political compromise. Political extremism and religious extremism rarely map neatly onto one another. At times, political prudence may be motivated by radical faith and radicalism may take on forms wholly beneficial to the interest of the state and the preservation of democracy. Forgiveness and reconciliation are prime examples of radical religious virtues that call for a suppression of the human impulse for vengeance; however, much of the extant scholarship treats such virtues as simple, political accommodationism. This dichotomous view is born of an emphasis on the ceremonial trappings of religion and the intransigence of the largely evangelical, religious right.

Overarching theories of religious rhetoric in American politics have failed to capture the significance of unique denominational traditions within Christianity. Rather than pointing to ceremony or evangelicalism as the cornerstones of religion in politics, scholars should turn their attention to the theories of democratic engagement within individual faith traditions. Within Anglicanism, I have suggested the dominance of a *via media* approach to politics and identified the ways in which the Anglican rhetoric of a middle way challenges extant theories of religion in politics. While Anglicanism has significantly shaped the American political landscape, so too have Unitarianism, Quakerism, and Presbyterianism. In addition, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and a variety of other faith traditions have shaped the political rhetoric of religion in the United States in unique and interesting ways. Without examining the virtues that underlie the rhetoric of political engagement in each of these traditions, we can only see a portion of the complex relationship between religion and politics in the United States.

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