

Advance Copy  
Not for Distribution  
**Christianity and Democracy**

**THE PIONEERING  
PROTESTANTS**

*Robert D. Woodberry and Timothy S. Shah*

**Robert D. Woodberry** is assistant professor of sociology at the University of Texas–Austin. Much of the research supporting this essay is available from him through bobwood@mail.la.utexas.edu. **Timothy S. Shah**, of the Ethics and Public Policy Center and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, is coeditor of a forthcoming Oxford University Press series on evangelical Protestantism and democracy in the global South.

“The authority of Christ,” wrote the Scots Calvinist divine William Graham in 1768, “removes all civil distinctions, and all superiority founded upon such distinctions, in his kingdom. All are upon a level equally, as they shall soon be before the awful tribunal of the great Judge.”<sup>1</sup> This stirring fusion of theology, eschatology, and politics not only characterizes Scottish Calvinism but also says much about the relationship between Protestantism and democracy. As an egalitarian religion profoundly opposed to hierarchy, Protestant Christianity would seem to enjoy a powerful affinity with democracy.

If the affinity between Protestantism and democracy is powerful, however, it is not automatic or uncomplicated. History and social science show that Protestantism has contributed to the development of democracy, yet they also show that the connections are often far from straightforward. After all, Protestantism has at times countenanced the establishment of brutal regimes and antidemocratic movements: The “righteous” dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell enjoyed the overwhelming support of English Puritans; the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa theologized in defense of apartheid; and while some German Protestants (especially in the Confessing Church) fought Nazism, many others gave Hitler their warm backing. Recently, Protestant evangelicals in the Third World have lent their support to “godly” authoritarians such as former Zambian president Frederick Chiluba.

In other words, opposing hierarchy and liberating individual consciences in religion does not automatically make one a foe of

authoritarianism and a friend of liberty in politics. In fact, some Protestants, including founding figures such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, favored authoritarian politics as a means of defending or extending the purity of Reformed doctrines and practices. As Michael Walzer argues, it was precisely a zeal for the comprehensive spiritual purification of society that led some Protestants—particularly Calvinists—to pursue a militant and authoritarian politics in seventeenth-century England, ending in Cromwell’s Protectorate.<sup>2</sup> By the same token, hierarchical and communal religions—such as Roman Catholicism—do not automatically support a hierarchical or authoritarian politics.<sup>3</sup>

We argue that there is nonetheless compelling cross-national evidence of a causal association between Protestantism and democracy. At the same time, we emphasize that the association is not direct or automatic but mediated and contingent. Among the major mediating influences or mechanisms, we number: 1) the rise of religious pluralism and what Alfred Stepan terms the “twin tolerations”<sup>4</sup> or the mutual independence of church and state; 2) the development of democratic theory and practice; 3) civil society and independent associational life; 4) mass education; 5) printing and the origins of a public sphere; 6) economic development; and 7) the reduction of corruption. These mechanisms help to explain how and why Protestantism tends, on balance, to promote democracy and democratization over time.

Protestantism’s contribution to democracy via such mediating mechanisms explains both the strength and the contingency of the relationship. These mechanisms *often* directly result from Protestant influences, and when present, *often* directly foster democratization. Yet “often” is different from “always.” Various factors, including not only changing material conditions but also the complex interests and motives of Protestant actors themselves, may disrupt the positive relationship and cause Protestantism to have neutral or even negative effects on democracy.

When Luther in 1521 defied an imperial order to recant by insisting that “my conscience is captive to the Word of God,” he stopped being the reformer of an old order and instead became the founder of a new stream of Christianity. He could flout the commands of popes, church councils, and emperors, but not those of his own individual conscience. Most Protestants follow his lead in a few large, defining ways. First, Protestants are Christians not in communion with Roman Catholicism or Orthodoxy. Second, they tend to believe that people can acquire saving faith only as they personally and individually appropriate God’s Word. They thus tend to make the Bible (and particularly Paul’s message of salvation by grace alone) the touchstone of faith and life, reject the independent salvific significance of most (if not all) sacraments, deny the necessary mediation of priests, and insist on the priesthood of all believers. Third, they tend toward separation and independence from ancient church structures and traditions as well as political authorities.

The main reason for this is the important role of individual conscience. Because saving faith must be uncoerced and individual, it requires in practice a diversity of independent churches to satisfy the inevitable diversity of individual consciences.

The importance of Luther's latter-day descendants to democracy becomes clear from demography. Not only do Protestants presently constitute 13 percent of the world's population—about 800 million people—but since 1900 Protestantism has spread rapidly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. According to the most extensive survey of religious demographics available, in 1900 about 2 percent of Africans were Protestant; by 2000 more than 27 percent were. In Latin America, the figures for those dates are 2.5 and 17 percent, while in Asia they are 0.5 and 5.5 percent.<sup>5</sup> Taking these three continents together, then, Protestants went from an average population share of just 1.66 percent in 1900 to a share of 16.5 percent in 2000—a stunning increase of almost 1,000 percent in just a hundred years. Much of the growth, moreover, has occurred quite recently, meaning since post–World War II decolonization across Africa and Asia, and since the historically Catholic countries of Latin America lifted restrictions on Protestant activities a few decades ago.<sup>6</sup>

To the extent that Protestantism facilitates democratic transitions, its recent and dramatic expansion may have important implications for many societies in the global South. Also of significance may be the reality that much of this intense recent growth has not been among older Protestant denominations, but rather among groups that are charismatic or Pentecostal in nature, and which may now be able to count as many as 400 million adherents across the whole of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The full array of social and political effects that will flow from this remains a matter of disagreement and speculation even among experts.

Yet cross-national statistical research suggests a strong and consistent association between a society's proportion of Protestants and its level of political democracy. This association is consistent over time and across regions, and does not change with the application either of various statistical controls or of various ways to define and measure political democracy. Furthermore, Protestantism has a strong statistical association with the durability of democratic transitions. Neither the proportion of “nonreligious” people in the population nor the proportion of adherents of any other religious tradition seems to have a similar association with democracy.<sup>7</sup>

Some scholars, however, argue that the association between Protestantism and democracy is merely an association between European influence and democracy and, furthermore, that the original association between Protestantism and democracy in Europe is spurious. Perhaps preexisting social or economic conditions determined where Protestantism would emerge in Europe, and perhaps they—and not Protestantism—facilitated the later spread of democracy.

But the association between Protestantism and democracy is also found where Protestantism spread through later settlement or missionary activity. For example, a comparison across former colonies whose populations are mostly of European-settler stock reveals that democracy has fared better in historically Protestant-settler societies such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States than it has in Catholic-settler societies such as Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. British colonialism may be a factor in these cases, but the pattern extends beyond European-settler colonies. Protestantism is associated with democracy outside of Europe and its daughter countries, so whatever causes the association must be portable.

Moreover, religious tradition remains a statistically significant predictor of democracy even when one controls for the identity of the former colonial power, the number of years when that power was in control, the number of years (if any) when that power was a democracy, the penetration of the English language, and the percentage of European descendants in the population. Thus, whatever causes the association seems to be distinct from European influence, British influence, or indirect exposure to democracy. Given the variety of regions in which the association between religious tradition and democracy can be observed, and the broad range of statistical controls used in previous analyses, an alternative explanation is more difficult to imagine.

### **Religious Pluralism and Democratic Theory**

In identifying the mechanisms that explain why Protestantism has contributed to democracy, we begin with religious pluralism. Pluralism was built into the nature of Protestantism. From the beginning of the Reformation, the Protestant movement kept dividing in an endless ecclesial mitosis because it lacked a clear mechanism for settling doctrinal disagreement.<sup>8</sup> This pluralism fostered the “twin tolerations” that Alfred Stepan argues are essential to democracy—that is, the independence of the state from religious control and the independence of religion from state control.

First, as G.W.F. Hegel pointed out in 1821, the end of Catholic hegemony and the rise of religious pluralism facilitated state autonomy.<sup>9</sup> In societies with a significant Protestant presence, religious pluralism both made it harder for any single religious body to control state and society and gave the state a sharper incentive to exert its own autonomous control over the potentially destabilizing realm of religion. Eventually this made the rise of free government more feasible because states enjoyed an exclusive jurisdictional sway over their territories, a sway that could later be distributed democratically. The contrasting situation in predominantly Catholic societies underscores the importance of religious pluralism: In such societies, the state and the Catholic Church

either combined to enforce repressive religiopolitical unity, or else fell into power struggles that reduced state autonomy and undermined the stability and liberality of democratic transitions.<sup>10</sup>

Second, Protestant pluralism helped to foster the other of Stepan's "twin tolerations," religious liberty. While Calvinists often took Old Testament Israel as the model for the ideal state and thus sometimes established theocracies, they also emphasized that true saving faith cannot be compelled by any earthly authority. So although a Calvinist such as Cromwell did not allow religious liberty in anything like the modern sense, he allowed more religious liberty than most of his secular, Catholic, or Anglican contemporaries. This relative freedom increased religious pluralism, as people formed new sects, and this increased pluralism in turn created greater pressure for religious liberty. For example, by the time Parliament restored the monarchy in 1660, Nonconformist sects had become too numerous to crush—a fact which impressed the young John Locke, causing him to revise his early absolutist views in favor of religious toleration. Eventually the sects forced the Crown to issue the Act of Toleration (1689). When transplanted to the New World, such sects (especially Baptists and Quakers) became major advocates of religious liberty in the colonies and the early American republic.

Beyond the Anglo-American world, the Protestant missionary movement played an important role in spreading religious liberty. Originally, the British banned missions in many colonial territories because officials feared that missionary activities would create turmoil and interfere with profits. But in 1813, Protestant missionary supporters forced the government to allow free access to all religious groups. The Protestant missions lobby also pressed for religious liberty in colonies of historically Catholic powers, but less successfully. Mission organizations collected international data on religious liberty and lobbied governments to insert religious-liberty clauses in international treaties, including the charter of the United Nations. This Protestant lobbying increased religious liberty in former British colonies and helped to spread it to other societies.

Moreover, Protestantism constituted one important source for early democratic theory. Robert A. Dahl rightly suggests that the antimonarchical and prorepublican thought of the English Puritans and Levellers arose from their understanding of Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Later, Calvinist families or schools produced many prominent democratic thinkers, including John Locke, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and John Adams. Among other things, scholars argue that the Calvinist "societal covenant" inspired the "social contract"; that the doctrine of original sin helped to motivate the concern for checks and balances in the U.S. Constitution; and that belief in the inviolability of the individual conscience fueled the urge to limit state power. Even the Presbyterian form of church governance—in which ministers are subject to elders elected

by congregations—influenced the organizational form of modern representative democracy.

The New Testament and the example of the early church also eased Protestant experimentation with democracy. Jesus said “my Kingdom is not of this world,” and set up no political or legal system. The Apostle Paul declared that much of Jewish law does not apply to Christians. The lack of a mandatory political or legal model in the Bible permitted Protestants to develop their own. When Protestant beliefs in freedom and equality demanded a democratic politics, the Bible did not seem to stand in the way.

### **Civil Society and Mass Education**

According to many scholars, a robust civil society is crucial for democracy. Here too, Protestants played a central role. As already noted, Protestant groups kept dividing, and not every denomination could be the state church. Governments generally discriminated against nonstate churches, which in turn drove such churches to fight for their own rights. This activism helped to establish the principle that organizations could exist outside state control—a principle that developed only later in societies with thinner nonstate religious sectors.

Moreover, because nonestablished churches received no money from the state, they needed to instill habits of voluntarism and giving in their congregants. The laypeople who ran religious organizations affiliated with these churches learned leadership skills, built wide geographical networks, and accumulated other resources helpful in organizing non-governmental organizations and social movements. Nonstate churches were especially prominent in training women, then commonly excluded from much of life outside the home. In the early nineteenth century, Protestants from nonestablished churches were central to founding and supporting a plethora of voluntary organizations and social movements for causes such as combating slavery or alcohol use.

Michael Young has argued that modern social-movement organizations and tactics developed in the United States when the lay-focused revival movements of upstart sects such as the Methodists and the Baptists linked up with transnational organizations developed by Calvinists to promote missions and orthodoxy.<sup>12</sup> However, the 1820s and 1830s saw parallel social movements flower in England, the United States, and India—a phenomenon for which traditional state- or economy-centered explanations of the rise of such movements cannot account. What these politically and economically diverse areas had most saliently in common was the presence of activist Protestants from outside any state-sponsored church.

In fact, Protestant missions have been central to the development of organized civil society across much of the non-Western world. For in-

stance, there is a clear link between Protestant missionary activity and the appearance of indigenous NGOs in India. Protestant missionaries tried to convert Hindus and to promulgate controversial social reforms such as outlawing widow-burning and improving the treatment of “untouchables.” Both sorts of activity spurred Hindu groups to form in response. Such organizations were new in Indian history and later facilitated the development of the Indian National Congress and other anticolonialist, prodemocratic groups (as well as groups that advocate more problematic ideologies such as Hindu nationalism).

A similar pattern—Protestant activism followed by a local reaction imitating Protestant organizational forms in order to counter Protestant aims—can be traced throughout the histories of places as diverse as China, Egypt, Japan, Korea, Palestine, and Sri Lanka, to give a partial list. Protestant missionaries came to win souls and reform social customs, and both Christians and non-Christians organized in response. Religious competition among Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists had gone on for centuries or even millennia across India, the Middle East, China, Japan, and elsewhere, yet no widespread budding of voluntary organizations happened in these lands until Protestant missionaries from nonestablished churches appeared on the scene.

Research also shows a consistent association between mass education and democracy. Mass education fosters democracy by increasing exposure to democratic ideals, promoting economic growth and the rise of a middle class, and dispersing influence beyond a small elite. Both historical and quantitative evidence suggests a close association between Protestantism and the spread of mass education, not least because of the Protestant emphasis on the need for all believers to read the Bible in their own languages. Calvinists especially made massive investments in education, building what today are many of the elite universities of the North Atlantic world. Lutheran Pietists first promulgated the ideal of universal literacy, and literacy campaigns spread rapidly through the Protestant world. Protestants started Sunday schools to teach reading to the poor, founded Bible and tract societies, and pressed governments to fund mass education.

Protestant missions were also central to expanding mass education outside the West, despite the resistance of local colonialists who feared the effects of widespread literacy among subject peoples. Other religious groups typically invested in mass education only when they had to compete with Protestants. Protestant missionaries lobbied so effectively that, for instance, British-run India had government-funded schools by 1813, twenty years before England did. Moreover, because the souls of all humans had equal value in the spiritual economy of the missionaries, they often provided the only formal education open to women and marginalized groups such as slaves, blacks in South Africa, or members of “untouchable” castes in India.

Areas of the non-Western world where Protestant missionaries had their strongest influence continue to have higher education rates. This is true both between countries and within countries. After statistical controls are applied to account for “Protestant missionaries per capita in 1925” and “percentage of the population evangelized by 1900,” the impact of Gross Domestic Product on primary-education rates in non-Western societies disappears. To the extent that education fosters democracy, then, we would expect higher levels of democracy in areas with more Protestants and where Protestant missionaries had more influence.

## **Printing, Economic Development, and Corruption**

While democratic theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and David Zaret emphasize the importance of printing for the development of a democratic public sphere, they underestimate or ignore the role of religion in facilitating this process.<sup>13</sup> Printing technology appeared in the West in the late 1400s. But the public debates that fostered a democratic public sphere in England did not develop until the mid-1600s—during the religious controversies surrounding the English Revolution. Similarly, in Germany religious controversies between Pietists and other Protestant groups spurred printing and lively public discourse before the coffee houses and salons of Habermas’s account.

Because of the divisions within Protestantism and also because no one person or group had clear authority to decide theological questions, Protestantism spurred public religious debate and widespread printing more than other religious traditions. Protestants also believed that God’s Word was uniquely available in the Bible, and that the Bible was translatable into vernacular languages without losing its core meaning. The mass literacy that Protestants promoted made widespread reading of petitions and newspapers possible and mass printing economically viable. While printing may have made possible the development of a public sphere, Protestantism not only promoted the early development and diffusion of such printing technologies as the steam press but also fostered the public theological debates that resulted in the emergence of a public sphere in Europe and North America.

Outside Western Europe and North America, the impact of Protestantism in spreading mass printing is especially clear. Protestant missionaries emphasized vernacular printing so that people could read the Bible in their own language. Wherever Protestant missionaries went, they rapidly gave local tongues a written form, translated the Bible into them, brought in printing presses, designed vernacular fonts, and began printing Bibles, tracts, textbooks, and even newspapers. Protestant missionaries often viewed newspapers as encouraging literacy, creating good will, and providing opportunities to discuss social reforms and religious issues. No other sizeable religious group placed comparable

emphasis on literacy and the mass availability of religious texts. The Muslims of the Ottoman Empire, for example, had access to printing from 1493 onward, but made little use of it until spurred by Protestant missionary printing in the nineteenth century.

Like a vibrant public sphere, economic development and a large middle class are robust predictors of the level of political democracy and the durability of democratic transition, and Protestantism may have helped to promote both these predictors. Max Weber famously argues that Protestantism (particularly Calvinism) spurred the rise of modern capitalism. Others counter that this causal claim is spurious, and that both Protestantism and economic growth grew out of the same set of conditions in early-modern northwestern Europe. If this is so, however, one would not expect to see a robust association between Protestantism and economic development in non-European countries, where Protestantism is a transplant. Yet such an association exists.

Statistical research suggests that both in Africa and in other former colonies, areas with more Protestants have greater postcolonial economic-growth rates.<sup>14</sup> Ethnographic and statistical evidence also confirmed the association between Protestantism (or sometimes Christianity in general) and intergenerational improvements in the economic status of individuals—for example, in Latin America, New Guinea, Nigeria, Indonesia, and India. In Latin America, Protestantism has spread disproportionately among poor and marginalized people, yet Protestantism seems to foster moderate improvements in their incomes. Although Protestantism may not remove people's marginalized status, the children of Protestants tend to do better economically than other children in their original community. Protestantism may foster prosperity by reducing drinking and drug-taking, extramarital sex and child-bearing, and spending on communal festivals, while promoting education and a male sense of commitment to stable family life.

Protestantism seems to have fostered economic development even in societies where few people actually converted to Protestantism. This is because of the massive transfer of resources that accompanied the missionary movement, the impact that missionaries free of state affiliation had on moderating colonial abuses, and the changes that Protestant missionary presence induced in the behavior of other religious communities. Of course, Catholics also made major missionary efforts and transferred resources to colonies. But in historically Catholic countries and their colonies, Church-state pacts to bar religious competition also boosted state control and limited both resource transfers and the ability of Catholic missionaries to fight colonialist abuses.

Nonstate missionaries' reform campaigns also indirectly promoted economic development. Missionaries and their supporters were the main lobbyists for the immediate abolition of slavery and other forms of forced labor in the colonies, and were also often in the front rank of opposition

to the officially sanctioned opium trade, the violent excesses of some colonial officials, and the tendency of European settlers to expropriate native lands. Because missionaries in historically Protestant colonies usually enjoyed more independence than their Catholic counterparts, the former could fight abuses more effectively. The British Empire banned slavery and forced labor earlier, punished abusive colonial officials more regularly, and on the whole managed to arrange more peaceful decolonization processes than did other European colonial powers—even when these were relatively democratic states such as France and Belgium. Historical evidence suggests that Protestant missionaries and their backers initiated these British reforms, which were not only generally humane but aided prosperity.

More than sheer altruism, of course, lay behind these efforts. Colonial abuses sowed anti-Western and hence anti-Christian resentment, as missionaries well knew. Other Europeans on the scene might know of abuses, but often benefited from them and had little incentive to expose them. Indigenous peoples had scant power to defend their own interests in the colonizing state. Missionaries—especially if they had political influence back home—were the main group with the means, motive, and opportunity to advance reform.

Moreover, Protestant competition seems to have spurred other religious groups to make “human-capital” investments in mass education and social services for the poor. Once Protestant groups initiated these services, other religious groups had to follow suit or risk losing congregants. This probably explains why former colonies of Catholic powers (which typically restricted Protestant activity) display historically lower levels of investment in schooling and social services, while non-Catholic-majority lands with histories of free religious competition usually feature Protestant and Catholic populations that boast similar levels of educational and economic attainment: In the latter type of society the Catholic Church had to invest while in the former it did not, and that has made a difference.

One way in which Protestantism contributes to both a vibrant public sphere and economic development is by reducing corruption. Scholarly research suggests that political corruption inhibits the emergence and survival of democracy by hampering social organization, undermining trust, and undercutting support for the political system. Corruption also indirectly hampers democracy by stifling economic development, increasing economic inequality, and restricting education. These findings hold for countries with different growth experiences, at different states of development, and using various indices of corruption.

Published statistical analyses universally find that societies with more Protestants are less corrupt and have more efficient governments. These results remain strong when scholars control for multiple factors, including economic development and democratic experience. They also hold

for different regions of the world and for all societal subgroups scholars have tested so far: corruption by judges, policemen, politicians and bureaucrats; elite corruption and street-level corruption. Even in the few cases where corruption data exist for the city or province level, areas with fewer Protestants per capita tend to be more corrupt. Other religious traditions do not seem to similarly reduce corruption or increase the efficiency of government.

Seymour Martin Lipset and Gabriel Lenz suggest that Protestantism minimizes corruption through an ethical mechanism. Other possible mechanisms include the reduction of resources controlled by church leaders (meaning less scope for clerical corruption), the creation of small face-to-face accountability groups that monitor individual behavior, and an organizational civil society that monitors government elites.<sup>15</sup>

### **Other Traditions and Newer Protestantisms**

Our analysis suggests both that religion plays an important role in determining the political character of societies, and that religions other than Protestantism play a weaker role in promoting democracy—or may foster a different politics altogether. While the “democracy gap” between Protestantism and Catholicism is closing, this does not seem to be true of all other religious traditions. For example, quantitative research shows that predominantly Muslim societies are less democratic and have less durable democratic transitions. This is true across multiple regions and with multiple statistical controls. Claims that oil wealth allows elites to dodge democratization do not suffice, for majority-Muslim societies both with and without oil are consistently less democratic than their non-Muslim neighbors. Moreover, although the average Freedom House democracy score of non-Muslim societies has increased since the 1980s, the average democracy score of majority-Muslim societies has not.<sup>16</sup>

Yet just as the positive association between Protestantism and democracy is far from inevitable, so too is the observed negative association between Islam and that form of government. Religious traditions are multivocal; different groups and thinkers can and do interpret them differently in varying situations. Both Protestantism and Catholicism have shifted toward a stronger rapport with democracy over time, and other traditions—Islam included—may do so as well. To the extent that a religious tradition fosters the types of mediating mechanisms discussed above, it will be more likely to foster democracy. This is not to say that all the causal mechanisms enumerated above are prerequisites for democracy—a religious tradition that does not foster each and every one of them may still be compatible with liberal democracy. No religious tradition is either a necessary or sufficient cause of democratization, or an insuperable barrier to it.

Currently, newer strains of Protestantism—most often charismatic, evangelical, or Pentecostal—are growing rapidly across the global South. Will they, like older forms of Protestantism, exert a democratizing effect? Our analysis suggests the answer may depend on whether they foster the democracy-friendly mediating conditions enumerated above.

The ongoing paucity of democracy in Africa suggests at the very least that the impact of Protestantism is not immediate. Prior to 1900 there were very few Protestants and Catholics in Africa, but now many sub-Saharan African countries have Christian majorities. Although Catholic and Protestant leaders have condemned abuses by African governments and pressed for democracy, most African societies have poor democratic records. This also suggests that religious tradition is not the only factor that influences democracy; extreme poverty, a legacy of colonialist abuses, ethnic conflict, and other factors influence it as well. Moreover, religion may take generations to make its impact felt. The adoption of a new religious tradition does not instantly and completely transform all beliefs, practices, and social institutions. Change also takes resources. Protestants in poor countries may want universal literacy, but that will not pay for schools.

Nor is time the only issue. Some of Protestantism's contributions may be losing their distinctiveness as other religious traditions copy previously "Protestant" characteristics and as new forms of Protestantism—particularly Pentecostalism—develop and proliferate.

Over the past century, belief in mass education has spread well beyond Protestants. Increasingly, governments and other religious groups are willing to invest in it. Newer Protestant groups still advocate basic instruction, but the intensity of their stress on education does not match that of classical Calvinists. In many Pentecostal congregations, authority comes from spiritual gifts rather than higher study, making advanced schooling less important. Printing has also become widespread and commercially viable, so a distinction in print cultures between Protestant societies and others may disappear over time.

Some newer Protestant groups aggressively seek to insert religious symbols into the public sphere—such as declaring Zambia a "Christian nation" or organizing Christian prayers at government functions. This type of activity is of course not new and not unique to the global South. Moreover, such efforts are often designed more to serve evangelistic purposes than to restrict the religious liberty of others or to alter the character of the state. While Pentecostals and other evangelical Protestants may support particular policies or candidates based on their religious beliefs or even on putative special revelations, they lack an evangelical equivalent of Islamic *shari'a* to impose on society. The conviction that saving faith must come from within and cannot be compelled by the state is held firmly to by both the newer and the older Protestantisms. Structurally, the conditions for Protestants to impose a

new “Christendom” do not exist because of the religious diversity that prevents them from forming new state churches remains. As other religious traditions permit religious liberty, Protestant distinctiveness on this question may erode. But it does not appear that the newer Protestants pose a threat to religious liberty.

---

*Newer Protestant groups are likely in the long run to promote transitions to stable democratic government across the global South.*

---

Newer Protestant groups are still lay-supported voluntary organizations with weekly face-to-face meetings. They are likely to develop and promote organizations, skills, and resources among nonelite citizens and thus to foster civil society. In the long run, this should promote transitions to stable democratic government across the global South.

Where the newer Protestants may not be able to match their older counterparts or the Catholic Church is in the area of “speaking truth to power” and spurring rapid and overt regime change. The Catholic and Anglican churches, along with certain historic Protestant denominations, have a transnational presence and strong ties to Western societies that can offer resources, protection, and an identity that transcends sundry particularisms. Pastors of localized religious denominations are more vulnerable to both raw persecution and subtler pressures to make them trim religious principles with an eye to nearby realities. In addition, interviews with West African church leaders suggest that older denominations may be more adept “change agents” than their newer counterparts because the old-line groups have informational advantages—their church schools often count among their alumni many top government officials—that help church leaders know when to press an authoritarian regime and when to hold back.

Despite the consistent association between Protestantism and lower levels of corruption in cross-national statistical analysis, evidence from Africa and Latin America suggests that Protestantism is not a panacea. Over the past 75 years, Protestantism has spread rapidly—often among marginalized groups—in areas long troubled by high levels of corruption. Under these circumstances, some Protestants have arguably imitated more than firmly opposed dominant patterns of clientelist behavior. Concerns about corruption have regularly mobilized Protestants into politics and some Protestant politicians have vigorously fought corruption, but many vocally Protestant leaders (such as former president Kim Young-Sam of Korea) have fallen from grace precisely because of corruption in their administrations. While Protestants claim that such fallen politicians merely touted Protestant credentials to troll for votes, many new Protestant (and particularly Pentecostal) churches reproduce patron-client structures. Some also proclaim that God will materially bless

those who give money to the church—a pattern that has often led to corruption.

Substantial evidence suggests that Protestantism still moderately increases the wealth of people who convert. The scale of change remains modest, however, and it may take considerable time before the changes are large enough to substantially alter a country's democratic potential.

Protestantism has played an important role in fostering and diffusing democracy. Over time the special association between Protestantism and democracy seems to be waning because other religious traditions are fostering many of the democracy-friendly, Protestant-aided social processes noted above. In addition, many new varieties of Protestantism have developed in the twentieth century. In particular, Pentecostal varieties have spread in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Available evidence suggests that these new Protestant communities will on balance continue to foster democracy—although perhaps not as distinctively and dramatically as in previous generations.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

Robert D. Woodberry thanks the Louisville Institute General Grant, Lilly Endowment, for financial support. Both authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies' "Religion in Global Politics" project, funded by the Smith Richardson Foundation and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

1. Quoted in James E. Bradley, "The Religious Origins of Radical Politics in England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1662–1800," in James E. Bradley and D.K. Van Kley, eds., *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 215.

2. Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

3. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 72–85.

4. Alfred Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations,'" *Journal of Democracy* 11 (October 2000): 37–57.

5. Figures are for the year 2000. We drew them from David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). To arrive at our figures, we combine the *Encyclopedia's* "Anglican," "historic European Protestant," and "independent" categories.

6. Paul E. Sigmund, ed., *Religious Freedom and Evangelization in Latin America: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999). For global Protestant and particularly evangelical growth, see Donald Lewis, ed., *Christianity Re-Born: Evangelicalism's Global Expansion in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004).

7. Most of the arguments and citations for this and subsequent sections come from Robert D. Woodberry, "The Shadow of Empire: Christian Missions, Colonial

Policy, and Democracy in Postcolonial Societies" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, 2004); and Robert D. Woodberry, "Religion and Democratization: Explaining a Robust Empirical Relationship," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Religious Research Association, Boston, 5–7 November 1999.

8. Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 105.

9. G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 301–2.

10. For a discussion of the historically Catholic dynamic, see David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 15–27, 36–54.

11. Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 32.

12. Michael Young, "Confessional Protest: The Religious Birth of U.S. Social Movements," *American Sociological Review* 67 (October 2002): 660–88.

13. David Zaret, "Petitions and the 'Invention' of Public Opinion in the English Revolution," *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (May 1996): 1497–1555. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). For religious printing's impact on newspapers and secular printing, see David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

14. Robin Grier, "The Effect of Religion on Economic Development: A Cross-National Study of 63 Former Colonies," *Kyklos* 50 (February 1997): 47–62.

15. Daniel Treisman, "The Causes of Corruption: A Cross-National Study," *Journal of Public Economics* 76 (June 2000): 399–457; and Seymour Martin Lipset and Gabriel S. Lenz, "Corruption, Culture, and Markets," in Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington, eds., *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York: Basic, 2000), 112–24.

16. Christopher Clague, Suzanne Gleason, and Stephen Knack, "Determinants of Lasting Democracy in Poor Countries: Culture, Development, and Institutions," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 573 (January 2001): 16–41.

17. On the newer Protestant forms and democracy in the global South, see Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Timothy S. Shah, "Evangelical Politics in the Third World: What's Next for the 'Next Christendom'?" *Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs* 1 (Fall 2003): 21–30.