

Politics and Church: Byproduct or Central Mission?

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One of the more intriguing paradoxes that has developed in mainline Protestantism over the last 30 years is that mainline clergy have become more politically active. Since the public politicking of mainline clergy in the late 1960s generated storms in the churches, why would clergy become more politically active over time? In this article, we adopt the theoretical structure of a benefit exchange between leaders and members initiated by Mancur Olson. We seek to determine the extent to which church members' appetites for political action by the clergy are shaped by a satiating selective benefit exchange or are driven largely by political compatibility. We propose that because of continued political disagreement between clergy and church members and considerable disapproval of clergy involvement in politics by church members, clergy politicking is allowed largely by the satisfaction of a selective benefit exchange.

One of the more intriguing paradoxes that has developed in U.S. mainline Protestantism over the last 30 years is that mainline clergy have become more politically active. Conventional wisdom recalls the 1960s as the height of church-based activism, though more systematic study casts doubt on this premise and, in fact, suggests the opposite (Djupe and Gilbert 2003). Regardless, the consequent "storms in the churches" that resulted from mainline clergy's public politicking in the 1960s, centered on civil rights and the Vietnam War, led to significant, permanent reductions in mainline membership (Hadden 1969; Kelley 1972; Quinley 1974; Reichley 1985; Roof and McKinney 1987; Wald 1997; Wuthnow 1988). Given this history, why would mainline Protestant clergy have become more politically active over time?

First, did clergy become more active? Several sources suggest that they did, as Djupe and Gilbert summarize and show themselves (2003:95–96). Studies using a variety of samples and a variety of methods find an increase in the number of issues addressed (Koller and Retzer 1980) and the frequency of addressing them (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Guth et al. 1997) since Stark and colleagues (1971) first asked a sample of clergy about their political speech. In their study, Djupe and Gilbert find that clergy show a 33 percent increase in political speech over their careers compared to denominational clergy in Stark et al.'s study (roughly two-thirds in 1968 to about 90 percent in 1998). But some would argue that the dominant modes of political activism have changed since the 1960s, when protests seemed more commonplace. If true, the fact that 1998 clergy reported the same level of involvement in protest marches and civil disobedience (Djupe and Gilbert 2003:30) compared to clergy in 1968 (Quinley 1974:119) suggests a greater response today to available opportunities and more involvement across the board.

Several possible explanations have been advanced to illuminate this trend. First, it is possible that the desires of congregation members may have shifted to include political activism as an accepted and/or necessary aspect of what the church is charged to do in the world. By most accounts, across the U.S. religious spectrum member acceptance of clergy political involvement is greater than ever before (Kohut et al. 2000). Whether members are driving that change or are

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simply following clergy or other actors is not well understood. The changing face of mainline Protestant clergy relates to this explanation as well, as newly ordained second- and third-career clergy—older, more diverse, now including women—bring their developed political lives with them to their congregational posts.

Second, if clergy politicking did indeed cause declining mainline Protestant membership trends, the result could be a membership that now finds clergy activism acceptable (Djupe 2001; Johnson 1996). However, in most mainline denominations, widespread evidence suggests clergy and their congregants continue to experience significant disagreement over salient local and national political issues, with mainline clergy considerably more liberal than their membership (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Guth et al. 1997; Hertzke 1988; Hofrenning 1995). The disconnect between mainline clergy and most congregants at the start of the war in Iraq sharply highlights this divide. Moreover, mainline church members continue to disapprove of clergy becoming involved in political activities (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Guth et al. 1997), save for civic activities such as encouraging the congregation to register and vote. At least within mainline Protestantism, therefore, it seems unlikely that increased clergy political activity is the result of membership decline creating a more amenable setting for liberal clergy to engage in political activism.

Another explanation asserts that heightened clergy political activism in mainline Protestantism can be construed as a response to the rise of the Christian Right, whose key organizations have used congregations and clergy as avenues for mobilization on spiritual (e.g., the Promise Keepers movement) as well as political (e.g., voter guides) initiatives (Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson 1999:79–83, 137–73). From this perspective, mainline clergy have either been forced to respond—the political gap between more liberal clergy and more conservative congregants does not at all imply that mainline congregants embrace the Christian Right agenda on abortion, school prayer, and other social issues—or have used the more visible (hence more acceptable) interrelationships between religion and politics in contemporary U.S. politics to their own advantage. The use of religious language from the political center and left in the 1990s, principally the rhetoric of President Clinton and the writings of Stephen Carter, has assisted mainline clergy in finding and exercising their own political voice (Allen 2003). However, we find this explanation lacking as well, considering the dearth of explicit countermobilization. Beyond the Interfaith Alliance and a few other groups, the religious left has not coalesced politically to confront the electoral strength of Christian Right groups and affiliated churchgoers (Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson 1999:67; Manza and Brooks 2002).

Contrary to these hypotheses, we argue that mainline Protestant clergy have become more politically active as a byproduct of satisfying the primary desires of members of their congregations. These primary congregant concerns are not political at all; rather, they are religious and spiritual, at the very least encompassing meaningful worship services and personal opportunities for spiritual development. We assert that if the primary expectations of members are met, clergy are then free to pursue other activities, including (but not limited to) political activities, regardless of member approval or disapproval of such activities.

To explain and demonstrate this claim empirically, we will draw on the interest group literature, which has analyzed at length how the multifaceted relationship between leaders and members shapes the public presence of an organization. Specifically, church member perceptions of the benefit exchange (Salisbury 1969) between clergy and congregants provide an opportunity to test the efficacy of this explanation for heightened mainline clergy political activism, as well as to address directly a question of fundamental importance to American religion: What role does politics play in the organizational maintenance of churches?

In his path-breaking work on interest group formation and maintenance, Mancur Olson (1965) asserted that people join interest groups to receive the selective benefits accessible only to members. Interest groups then pursue political activities, such as lobbying government, as a byproduct of member satisfaction with the selective benefits provided. Salisbury (1969) added, among other things, that groups would not form without leaders—whom he terms entrepreneurs—and

would only exist as long as the entrepreneur could profit. Entrepreneurs, therefore, are engaged in an exchange with members, providing varied types of benefits in return for material support from members.

To be sure, there are disagreements in the interest group literature about how crucial an entrepreneur is to the formation of groups, or what weight to assign to different kinds of benefits. However, our research question highlights the components (leader, members, and benefits) involved in organizational formation and maintenance, and we offer detailed explanations for how these components interrelate. There is no reason to believe that the classic formulation of interest group creation and maintenance cannot apply to churches and other noneconomic groups (Knoke 1988; Salisbury 1969; Walker 1983).

CHURCHES AS ORGANIZATIONS, CLERGY AS ENTREPRENEURS

Considering churches as interest groups is hardly a radical conceptualization; in fact, social scientists have long used an organizational approach to the study of churches. For example, a 1942 study of millhands and preachers suggests that individuals are important to study “only insofar as they represent institutions” (Pope 1942:ix; see also Ammerman 1997; Finke and Stark 1992; Lenski 1961; Wind and Lewis 1994; Young 1997). Moreover, our approach echoes one of the notable recent developments in the study of American religion: the depiction of competition among religious organizations as a market system (e.g., Finke and Stark 1992; Iannacone 1994; Young 1997). The religious marketplace framework is clearly compatible with our conception of clergy as entrepreneurs within their congregations, and it implies that individual congregations are likely to have considerable impact on member attitudes and actions within and beyond religious life.

Previous analyses using this framework have focused on denominational membership shifts in the religious economy over long periods of time. But the primary organizational unit involved in this market is the local church, often with considerable assistance and direction from the denomination, especially within mainline Protestantism (Finke and Stark 1992). The essential reason to use individual churches rather than denominations as the units of analysis is that churches within the same denomination often vary considerably in their theology, worship styles, member ethnicity, small group activities, and political leanings (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Gilbert 1993:5–6; Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988, 1990). A recent study finds that three-fifths of ELCA Lutheran and Episcopal clergy claim the worship style of their own congregation to be different than others in their denomination; clergy perceive more modest differences in other religious practices, demographic composition, and civic engagement levels (Djupe and Gilbert 2003:77–80). Moreover, while many American churchgoers identify strongly with their denominational family, a substantial share of church members derives a primary religious identity from the local church (Newman 1993). Within the ELCA—the product of a three-body merger in 1988—the old divisions remain salient predictors of diverse views on denominational issues (Djupe and Gilbert 2003:194–96); hence two ELCA churches in the same small town (a very common situation in upper Midwestern states) may not share the same perspectives on contentious religious or political issues, an interesting example of diversification and “niche marketing” in the religious sphere. Numerous other Protestant denominations have similar, enduring rifts (Finke and Stark 1992; Newman 1993). Clearly, an appropriate level at which to examine the benefit exchange between clergy and congregants is inside congregations, specifically asking members to describe what they receive from their church and clergy and whether they believe it to be satisfactory.

The other crucial aspect of our formulation is the idea that clergy are organizational actors (Campbell and Pettigrew 1959; Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Hadden 1969; Olson 2000; Pope 1942; Quinley 1974)—clergy have a primary responsibility to maintain and serve their congregation. While denominations often play a significant role in generating interest and providing startup capital for new congregations, similar to what Walker (1983) found occurring in interest group

formation, clergy are responsible for maintaining the local franchise. With the growth of non-denominational churches, more and more clergy are driven to resemble entrepreneurs in the religious market, responsible for startup costs and member recruitment. In a now famous example, Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Church in suburban Chicago, went door to door to ask people why they did not attend church and then built Willow Creek to cater to the responses he received; approximately 18,000 people now attend Willow Creek Church on a typical weekend (Towns 1990).

From the organizational point of view, if clergy pursue political action, it is largely because the congregation allows or encourages it. Hence clergy can be viewed as entrepreneurs engaged with members in a benefit exchange: clergy (and their denominations) provide members with selective benefits, most of which are available only to church members, in exchange for tacit or explicit member support of the clergy's (and denomination's) activities in politics and other secular realms. Spiritual benefits can readily be subsumed within the traditional exchange theory categories of purposive, expressive, solidary (i.e., social), and material (Clark and Wilson 1961; Salisbury 1969; Wilson 1995). The specific list of what churches and clergy have to offer is extensive: religious doctrines that help to interpret contemporary and personal circumstances and events; formal, ritual celebrations of significant life milestones (baptisms, weddings, funerals); counseling services; comfort, inspiration, and challenges for members trying to live faithful lives; the maintenance of tradition and the development of community through worship and social gatherings, which are frequently targeted to specific subgroups (youth, singles, retired members); coordination of volunteer opportunities by and for members; religious and secular education; information about and involvement in politics; and musical performance opportunities and other artistic endeavors, often but not always in the context of worship (Berger 1967; Truehart 1996).

Clergy play a prominent role in worship services, usually delivering the sermon and planning most if not all aspects of the service. Clergy perform a number of other key functions, such as visiting members in the hospital, leading classes, participating in church groups and activities, and being available for personal counseling. Because of the strong tradition of democratic polity that infuses much of American religion, meaning considerable lay involvement in church governance, one could not claim that clergy are the single key to keeping churches functioning. Without the focused attentions of clergy, however, the benefits provided by the church would certainly suffer in quantity and quality. Further, with such an extensive array of activities to attend to, any time clergy spend on politics is likely to affect the extent to which clergy can pursue other essential pastoral activities.

This is precisely the point that many scholars of American religion have made to explain the declining membership trend in mainline Protestant denominations since the 1960s: "If the minister goes against the expectations of his congregation . . . , he faces the possibility of losing members from his congregation, financial resources, and even his job" (Hadden 1969:187). Other scholars claim that mainline Protestantism has lost its relevance in attempting to provide what other secular organizations, such as political parties and interest groups, are better equipped to supply (Reeves 1996). A third, related point of view asserts that mainline churches have become politically quiescent because their clergy are distracted: "[C]lergy themselves are frequently unable to provide strong and effective leadership in working for social justice. They too may be preoccupied with other things" (Wuthnow 1997:209).

These perspectives all imply some tradeoff for clergy between proclaiming the gospel and pursuing politics (or any other agenda); in its own way, each perspective argues that the pursuit of politics may come at the expense of the religious benefit exchange. This raises a central question: To what extent does the pursuit of politics by clergy weaken the religious benefits offered by the congregation to its members?

The byproduct framework posits a slightly different relationship between selective benefits and political action. Instead of the pursuit of politics weakening the benefit exchange, the byproduct theory suggests that the satisfactory provision of desired and expected benefits *allows*

politicking by the leadership. In the particular case of congregations, *when church members are satisfied with the religious and spiritual benefits the church offers to them, clergy then have more latitude to pursue political action.*

One study in particular has employed this framework, identifying few short-term negative consequences for a religious leader pursuing politics. Examining the differences between New York City lapsed and practicing Catholics in 1990, Djupe (2001) finds essentially no difference in their opinions on salient political issues (both groups are quite liberal), but large differences in their evaluations of Cardinal John O'Connor, with lapsed Catholics far more negative. Djupe asserts that differences in expected benefits drive the different evaluations—lapsed Catholics desired more expressive political benefits and their fundamental disagreements with Cardinal O'Connor on many political issues drove their negative evaluations of him. Practicing Catholics favored spiritual benefits from the church and deemphasized the importance of political pronouncements, leading to favorable evaluations of the cardinal despite the same level of policy disagreement with O'Connor as lapsed Catholics. Thus, the expected exchange and its satisfactory accomplishment (or lack thereof) drives the type of information church members use to evaluate their churches and clergy. A natural corollary is that, as a result, members will only respond to cues they want and expect to receive, which may weaken severely the efficacy of unexpected and unwanted political mobilization (Djupe 2001; Djupe and Gilbert 2002a; Djupe and Grant 2001; Pollock 1982).

This is not to say that some members do not value the political activism of their clergy and church; in byproduct theory terms, they value purposive and/or expressive benefits. As we will see, some active members express frustration that the church is distracted by “internal maintenance” issues from offering a more robust witness to society. Over time, such frustration could lead to pursuing a political mission in more overtly purposive organizations, some voice of dissent within the church, or even, in protracted situations, exit.

Using the byproduct theory, we will analyze how mainline Protestant church members view the benefit exchange coming from clergy and the church, and how member satisfaction with the primary missions of the church relates to the political agenda and activities clergy choose to pursue. Indeed, “the core controversy . . . is the importance of selective material benefits in explaining [interest group] membership” (Brown 1989:33). At issue is whether the successful provision of selective benefits leads members to have more support for the clergy’s political activities—that is, as a byproduct (Olson 1965)—or whether members judge the clergy’s political activities solely based on political criteria.

Understanding clergy political activity as a byproduct of a benefit exchange has several important implications. Evidence affirming the byproduct theory would provide a plausible explanation of the seeming paradox that mainline Protestant clergy have become more politically active since the 1960s, despite empirical evidence of member disapproval of most political activities clergy might pursue and substantial policy disagreement between clergy and church members (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Guth et al. 1997). This investigation will also comment on the potential political influence clergy hold within their congregations: Are members open or immune to the prophetic voice of clergy? Moreover, this analysis showcases the efficacy of extending the benefit exchange framework into another setting not initially conceived for its use (Olson 1965:159–62).

DATA AND DESIGN: ELCA AND EPISCOPAL CHURCH CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONS

The information necessary to explore benefit exchange in mainline Protestant congregations is not typically collected in U.S. national surveys. To address the questions posed here, we undertook a two-stage study of clergy and congregations in two mainline Protestant denominations: the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). In the first stage (conducted in 1998 and 1999), we surveyed 2,400 clergy from the two denominations,¹ asking detailed questions about their political activities and beliefs, as well as their perceptions of congregational political views and activism. The ELCA and Episcopal Church had not previously

been included in recent research on the political activities of U.S. clergy (Guth et al. 1997). With a combined membership of 7.5 million, similar worship styles, and a formal agreement on aspects of theology and worship practices, the ELCA and Episcopal Church remain significant in U.S. mainline Protestantism (Djupe and Gilbert 2003).

Following the clergy surveys, in 1999 we surveyed members in 60 congregations (38 ELCA) whose clergy had responded to our initial survey. Mail surveys were sent to a random set of members from each congregation; approximately 1,050 ELCA and 550 Episcopal congregation members responded.² The congregation survey instrument paralleled the clergy survey, asking about: personal, religious, and political beliefs, participation, and behavior; characteristics of the congregation, clergy political activities, and the denomination's political activism; interactions with political discussion partners in and out of the congregation; and comparison questions about the respondent's community. The survey also inquired about member satisfaction with several aspects of the clergy, congregation, and denomination, including satisfaction with the time clergy devote to political activities in and outside of church.

This rich data set allows us to test our hypotheses about the nature of the benefit exchange between clergy and congregants in order to understand mainline Protestant clergy political activism today. Because this research design is conceived specifically to connect clergy reports about political beliefs and actions with congregant perceptions of what their clergy think and do politically, we have a unique opportunity to assess the sources of member opinion about their clergy's political activism. Our ability to assess the nature of the benefit exchange within congregations leads to generalizable propositions about the interplay between clergy and congregation members, particularly the political consequences of these interactions. Thus our cross-sectional "snapshot" of late 1990s religious and political life in these 60 participating congregations will focus on the processes through which members' needs are addressed and the clergy's ability to pursue political ends are enhanced or impeded.

After further explication of the benefit exchange between clergy and congregants, we turn to empirical analysis of member attitudes toward the clergy and their work. We will examine how satisfied sample ELCA and Episcopal members are with worship and other aspects of their congregation and then move to a detailed consideration of the factors that explain member attitudes toward their clergyperson's time devoted to politics and member evaluations of the clergyperson's overall job performance. Through our analysis, we evaluate fully the byproduct theory's prediction that successful benefit exchange within congregations opens the way for greater clergy political activity.

SATISFACTION WITH THE BENEFIT EXCHANGE

Levels of member satisfaction with several facets of congregational life in our sample ELCA and Episcopal congregations are shown in Table 1. On every item—with the significant exception of the time clergy devote to politics (last entry in the table)—congregation members express substantial levels of satisfaction. The highest satisfaction rates are found in overall clergy job performance and the four items specifically addressing aspects of worship. Over 80 percent of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied on these five items, with a majority reporting they are "very satisfied" with the performance of their clergy in worship and just under 50 percent "very satisfied" with the overall job performance of their clergy.

Members are slightly less positive toward other, nonworship aspects of their congregation. Between 70 and 80 percent are satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of clergy for consultation and the church's opportunities for adult education, community outreach, and personal spiritual development. Neutral responses on these items are roughly twice as large as for the worship-related items, though the percentage reporting these aspects as unsatisfactory remains quite low, below 10 percent for all items. This indicates that reduced member awareness of nonworship church activities probably accounts for much of the reduction in member satisfaction.

TABLE 1
ELCA AND EPISCOPAL CONGREGANT SATISFACTION WITH BENEFITS
PROVIDED BY THE CHURCH AND CLERGY (PERCENTS)

Church Benefits	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Mean
Clergy's worship performance	50.2	38.3	6.6	4.9	4.3
Clergy's overall job	49.6	37.5	8.6	4.2	4.3
Worship style	40.5	47.2	6.2	6.0	4.2
Music quality	45.0	37.8	9.6	7.7	4.2
Sermon messages	44.5	40.1	9.3	6.1	4.2
Clergy available for consultation	42.3	35.3	17.6	4.7	4.1
Adult education opportunities	25.8	46.7	20.5	7.0	3.9
Community outreach opportunities	26.7	46.6	19.1	7.6	3.9
Spiritual development opportunities	24.8	48.1	19.9	7.4	3.9
Time clergy devote to politics	14.2	29.8	47.3	8.7	3.5

Note: Each item is coded 1 = very unsatisfied, 2 = unsatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = satisfied, and 5 = very satisfied. The "unsatisfied" column combines "unsatisfied" and "very unsatisfied" responses; means are calculated using the original scale.

Source: 2000 ELCA/Episcopal Church Congregational Study. $N = 2,809$.

The outlier in Table 1 is member satisfaction with the time clergy devote to politics. Less than half of sample ELCA and Episcopal respondents are satisfied or very satisfied, and almost half are neutral. This item also has the highest percentage of unsatisfied respondents, although the figure is not dramatically higher than for other items. The high level of neutral responses may indicate many things: members may be truly conflicted about their clergy's political activism, they may be unaware of how much time clergy spend on politics, or they simply may not care. We will examine these possibilities more closely when using this item as a dependent variable below.

Aside from the outlier item, Table 1 clearly identifies two distinct sets of benefits, corresponding to two different rates of satisfaction. A factor analysis confirms the existence of these two sets.³ The first can be described as facets of worship: the music, worship style, clergy's worship performance, and the sermon messages (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$). The second, which we label personal development opportunities, consists of the church's work in adult education, community outreach, and spiritual development, plus the clergy's availability for consultation (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$). In the multivariate analysis to follow, we use additive indices composed of the items in these two factors (see the Appendix for specific coding of all variables used in the analysis).

Common to batteries of evaluative questions, such as ours, respondents may evaluate objects uniformly, either across the board positive or negative. Wilcox, Sigelman, and Cook (1989), for instance, find a good deal of uniformity in feeling thermometer ratings of political groups. Because of this possibility in our battery, we transform the dependent variable, creating a relative satisfaction rating by subtracting the score of interest from the mean of all satisfaction scores (Knight 1984; Wilcox, Sigelman, and Cook 1989).

THE EFFECT OF POLITICAL DIFFERENCES

Having examined levels of member satisfaction with aspects of the clergy and church, we turn now to consideration of competing claims about the factors that affect member satisfaction. We begin with a more detailed examination of member satisfaction with the time their clergy spend on politics—the outlier result from Table 1. Numerous studies have verified that mainline Protestant clergy tend to be more liberal than their congregants (Hadden 1969; Hertzke 1988; Hofrenning

TABLE 2
CONGREGANT RELATIVE SATISFACTION WITH THE TIME THEIR CLERGY
SPEND ON POLITICS CORRELATED WITH CLERGY-CONGREGANT POLITICAL
OPINION DIFFERENCES AND CLERGY POLITICAL SPEECH FREQUENCY
(PEARSON'S *R*)

Issue	Opinion Difference	Clergy Speech Frequency
Government provides too many services	0.101***	—
We need to prohibit abortion	0.059***	0.056***
Policy should discourage gun use	0.050**	-0.004
Blacks need special government help	0.050**	—
U.S. should spend more on defense	0.037*	0.102***
Welfare reforms are too harsh	0.022	—
We need prayer in schools	0.010	0.091***
Abolish capital punishment	0.003	0.051**
Federal government should do more on social problems such as poverty	-0.002	—
We need national health insurance	-0.008	—
Should give tax credits for private school	-0.015	0.079***
More environmental protection needed	-0.045**	-0.015
Homosexuals should have same rights	-0.074***	0.094***
Number of cases	2,421	2,114

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Source: 1998–2000 ELCA/Episcopal Church Clergy and Congregational Studies.

1995; Reichley 1985; Roof and McKinney 1987; Wuthnow 1988). Data from this study reveal that 60 percent of Episcopal clergy and 68 percent of ELCA clergy believed their own political views were more liberal than the views of their congregants; fewer than 10 percent reported being more conservative than their membership (Djupe and Gilbert 2003:38). A political explanation for this phenomenon would suggest that members are more dissatisfied with their clergy person when political disagreements are present. In contrast, the benefit exchange framework predicts the *absence* of strong relationships between member-clergy political differences and member satisfaction rates, which would indicate that other factors besides political disagreement are driving member evaluations of their clergy's activities.

In Table 2, we evaluate whether differences in political opinions between sample ELCA and Episcopal congregants and their clergy affect member satisfaction with the time clergy spend on politics.⁴ The first column of Table 2 presents correlations between member satisfaction and the absolute value of clergy-member opinion differences; the second column presents correlations between member satisfaction and the frequency of clergy public speech on the issue (not all issues were included in both the clergy and the congregant survey instruments, thus some correlations are missing in Column 2).

If political disagreements drive member satisfaction levels, then the correlations in both columns should be negative—larger opinion differences should lead to more dissatisfaction with the time clergy spend on politics. Yet in the first column we find weak correlations (one r has an absolute value over 0.1) and no consistent pattern; in fact, eight of the 13 correlations are positive (five of these are statistically significant), and only four issue items show the expected negative correlation with member satisfaction (and only two are significant—environmental protection and gay rights).

We might expect more consistent relationships in Column 2, since it is a measure of exposure—how often clergy report talking about the issue. More frequent clergy discussion of an

issue should both highlight clergy opinions and signal that clergy consider the issue significant; both outcomes likely open the door to greater member acceptance of clergy activism. Of the eight issues listed in Column 2 of Table 2, only two correlations are negative and neither statistically significant. Six other correlations are positive and significant—in other words, more clergy discussion of politics produces *heightened member satisfaction* with clergy politicking. As in the first column, there are no strong correlations between clergy speech on any specific issue and member satisfaction.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF MEMBER SATISFACTION

Given the findings in Table 2, there seems to be little evidence to support the hypothesis that congregation members structure their assessment of clergy politicking based on political considerations. If anything, a typical ELCA or Episcopal congregant seems more inclined to have weak *support* for his or her minister's political actions the more the congregant disagrees with his or her minister's political views. More important, having more exposure to the minister's political views (measured by frequency of clergy speech about specific issues) slightly intensifies member satisfaction with clergy politicking; members may tend to be less suspicious of an overt clergy agenda and hence more supportive. The clear implication here is that there is room for a nonpolitical explanation of members' evaluation of clergy politicking, which we test in two multivariate analyses. Table 3 models congregant satisfaction with the time their clergy devotes to politics, and Table 4 estimates factors relating to overall member satisfaction with the job performance of the clergy. Again, both dependent variables are relative to the mean for all satisfaction measures, corrected for a potential positivity bias. In both models we incorporate aspects of the benefit exchange between the clergy/church and church members, as well as issue difference measures and other aspects of the community and denominational context.

Satisfaction with the Time Clergy Spend on Politics

Table 3 tests the effects of six sets of independent variables on member satisfaction with clergy politicking. Three sets deal with benefits offered by the clergy or the church. *Nonpolitical selective benefits*, the focus of this study, are represented by the two indexes suggested by the factor analysis of the Table 1 items—member satisfaction with the worship experience and satisfaction with the personal development opportunities offered by the church. The central tenet of the byproduct theory is that more satisfaction with these core desires of church members will lead to greater satisfaction with other clergy activities, including political activities.

The church also offers *solidary benefits* through small group memberships and the chance to befriend other members (captured here by having a political discussion partner who is a fellow church member). We expect the provision of solidary benefits to be positively associated with member satisfaction with clergy politicking.

Political expressive benefits are driven by a calculation of the desired amount of specific political messages delivered in church. The political interest levels of members offer one general measure; better yet, we ask if members wish their denomination to be more politically active. More interest and a desire for more denominational activism should lead to *less* member satisfaction, as members hoping for more politicking at the local and denominational level are more likely to criticize its perceived absence. On the other hand, lower interest levels and a desire for less denominational politicking should lead members to criticize what they perceive as an excess of politicking. The magnitude of church-based politicking is captured by the frequency of the clergyperson's political speech, while the substance of political messages delivered is measured by the opinion difference between the clergy and church member.

To provide a fully specified model, two other sets of factors test related or competing explanations for member satisfaction rates. First, *external threats* to the congregation have been shown

TABLE 3
ESTIMATED CONGREGANT SATISFACTION WITH THE TIME THEIR CLERGY
SPEND ON POLITICS (OLS REGRESSION ESTIMATES)

Independent Variables	Coeff. (SE)	Effect
<i>Nonpolitical selective benefits</i>		
Satisfaction with worship experience	0.795 (0.034)***	0.92
Satisfaction with church personal development opportunities	0.780 (0.036)***	1.10
<i>Solidary benefits</i>		
In church small group	0.141 (0.065)**	0.09
Discussant is a church member	−0.051 (0.041)	
<i>Political expressive benefits</i>		
Political interest	−0.045 (0.017)***	−0.11
Denomination should be more politically active	−0.221 (0.024)***	−0.38
Clergy-member ideological difference	−0.002 (0.018)	
Clergy public speech index	−0.042 (0.052)	
<i>External threats</i>		
Church activity isolation	0.614 (0.203)***	0.13
Church belief isolation	0.192 (0.103)*	0.08
<i>Denominational effects</i>		
Episcopal Church member	0.024 (0.053)	
Denominational brand loyalty	0.032 (0.057)	
<i>Other controls</i>		
Clergy is female	−0.159 (0.066)**	−0.11
Clergy has a doctorate	−0.002 (0.049)	
Clergy's tenure length	0.003 (0.003)	
Male	−0.021 (0.044)	
Education	0.045 (0.021)**	0.09
Religious commitment	0.000 (0.010)	
Constant	−4.169 (0.276)	

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Model statistics: $N = 1,845$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.560$; S.E.E. = 0.871.

Note: "Effect" records the difference in estimated value of the dependent variable by varying individually each significant variable plus/minus one standard deviation from the mean.

Source: 2000 ELCA/Episcopal Church Congregations Study.

to increase levels of clergy political activism as a prophetic response to minority status, both inside the congregation and outward to the surrounding community (Djupe and Gilbert 2002b, 2003; Olson 2000; see also Walker 1991). We use two measures of the congregation's minority status, which we reframe as isolation from its community—perceived differences between the congregation and community in activity levels and differences in beliefs. We expect that greater isolation, meaning greater differences with the community, which sparks more clergy political activism, should also spark more member support for such activism.

Second, general *denominational effects* are captured by a dummy measure for Episcopal membership (Episcopalians appear somewhat more comfortable with mixing religion and politics—Djupe and Gilbert 2003:27–32), and an assessment of whether the member is a lifelong Lutheran or Episcopalian—more brand loyalty combined with greater clergy activism should lead to more member satisfaction (the dissatisfied members having left the denomination already).

The Table 3 and Table 4 models also include several control variables assessing clergy traits and individual member attributes. In particular, women clergy may engender more dissatisfaction

because they are more political and more liberal (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Olson, Crawford, and Deckman 2005) or because they are seen as less legitimate leaders (e.g., Chaves 1997).

Table 3 offers strong support for the hypothesis that a satisfactory exchange of core non-political benefits in church leads to greater member satisfaction with clergy politicking. Members who express satisfaction with worship and personal development opportunities are more likely to be satisfied with their clergy's time devoted to politics. These two variables have the strongest overall impact on satisfaction rates compared with other included explanatory variables.

The Table 3 model also reveals that the isolation of church members from the community, in terms of congregational beliefs and activity levels, leads to increased member satisfaction with the clergy's time spent on politics. The effects of minority status within the local community are modest (the combined first differences generate about one-fifth of an index point increase in satisfaction), though congregational isolation would probably have a stronger relationship with member satisfaction if the particular threatening circumstances and/or groups in a community could be incorporated explicitly. Regardless, these results confirm the interest group literature findings that the presence of external threats acts to build support for an institutional leader taking on political roles (Bentley 1995; Hansen 1985; Hofrenning 1995; Key 1949; Moe 1981; Truman 1951; Walker 1991). Clergy become more politically active under these conditions, in effect filling a representation gap for their congregants (Djupe and Gilbert 2002b, 2003; Olson 2000).

In contrast to the other nonpolitical benefits, only the solitary benefit of being a small group member is related to member satisfaction levels, according to Table 3. As we would predict, small group membership, host to a significant portion of the life of the church, boosts satisfaction. Denominational attachments are not significant predictors.

A desire for the denomination to be more politically active leads to less satisfaction with clergy pursuing politics. General political interest also leads to less satisfaction with clergy politicking. Demands for clergy to be more politically active come primarily from members who wish to see more political involvement from their denomination. This viewpoint is fairly widespread among our sample respondents; just over 50 percent would like to see more political involvement from their denominations, and only 8 percent desire less involvement.

Table 3 offers even less support for the political disagreement hypothesis than did Table 2. More clergy public speech is not related to member satisfaction with the time clergy spend on politics; ideological differences between clergy and congregants also have no effect. Though Table 2 results indicate that the salience of clergy speech depends on the issue being discussed, it is noteworthy that more political speech in general makes little difference, though it points in the expected negative direction. With the absence of these direct measures of clergy politics, the results strongly confirm the efficacy of the benefit exchange framework.

Among the other control variables, a few effects are noteworthy. Interestingly, higher religious commitment does not lead to greater support for clergy politicking; in fact, it has no effect. Also, more highly educated members have higher satisfaction rates and female clergy are more likely to receive lower evaluations. In part, one might think gendered evaluations result from the greater conservatism of male clergy, though the model controls for this effect. Instead, we may be witnessing some vestige of the separate sphere some members reserve for women, which traditionally has not included political activism (Chaves 1997; Elshtain 1981; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998).

In summary, the dominant factors in the Table 3 model are member satisfaction with the church's worship experience and personal development opportunities, both of which heighten member satisfaction with the time clergy spend on politics. If members see the church as satisfying their primary needs, which are not political in nature, then they will implicitly consent to greater clergy political activity. The Table 3 results directly support the byproduct framework as an explanation of member evaluations of clergy politicking.

OVERALL MEMBER SATISFACTION WITH THE CLERGY'S JOB

Our second multivariate analysis (Table 4) explains how ELCA and Episcopal congregants evaluate the overall job performance of their clergy, using nearly the same set of explanatory variables as in Table 3. The only addition is member satisfaction with clergy politicking as an independent variable, included in the political expressive benefits category and anticipated to be positively associated with overall satisfaction.

The Table 4 model highlights again that, first and foremost, church members desire a meaningful worship experience and opportunities to grow personally and spiritually. These two indices have the greatest impact on member evaluations of clergy job performance, far outweighing any other explanatory factor. There is a sharp contrast between these specific indicators, which offer direct measures of congregational life and its meaning for members, and the summary measure of respondent religiosity captured by the religious commitment index. Religious commitment does not affect member satisfaction with clergy. The limitations of religious commitment as an

TABLE 4
ESTIMATED CONGREGANT SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL CLERGY JOB
PERFORMANCE (OLS REGRESSION ESTIMATES)

Independent Variables	Coeff. (SE)	Effect
<i>Nonpolitical selective benefits</i>		
Satisfaction with worship experience	1.189 (0.027)***	1.38
Satisfaction with church personal development opportunities	0.703 (0.027)***	1.00
<i>Solidary benefits</i>		
In church small group	0.069 (0.049)	
Discussant is a church member	-0.041 (0.031)	
<i>Political expressive benefits</i>		
Satisfaction with time clergy spend on politics	0.133 (0.020)***	0.23
Political interest	-0.023 (0.013)*	-0.06
Denomination should be more politically active	-0.044 (0.018)**	-0.08
Clergy-member ideological difference	0.014 (0.014)	
Clergy public speech index	0.074 (0.039)*	0.06
<i>External threats</i>		
Church activity isolation	0.253 (0.152)*	0.05
Church belief isolation	-0.008 (0.077)	
<i>Denominational effects</i>		
Episcopal Church member	0.016 (0.039)	
Denominational brand loyalty	-0.246 (0.043)***	-0.18
<i>Other controls</i>		
Clergy is female	-0.118 (0.049)**	-0.08
Clergy has a doctorate	-0.052 (0.037)	
Clergy's tenure length	0.000 (0.002)	
Male	-0.037 (0.033)	
Education	-0.027 (0.016)*	-0.06
Religious commitment	0.008 (0.008)	
Constant	-5.679 (0.210)	

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Model statistics: $N = 1,842$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.772$; S.E.E. = 0.651.

Source: 2000 ELCA/Episcopal Church Congregations Study.

explanatory measure become clear when detailed assessments of congregational life can be collected and incorporated into the analysis.

Controlling for the provision of nonpolitical selective benefits, the Table 4 model also shows modest effects from several other factors. Satisfaction with clergy politicking leads to more favorable overall member evaluations of the clergy, as does an objective measure of the time clergy spend on politics (the frequency of their political speech) once ideological differences between clergy and church members are controlled.

Table 4 also shows that greater political interest and a desire for the denomination to be more involved with politics leads to a more dissatisfied membership, mirroring the results in Table 3. Moreover, greater brand loyalty to the denomination also decreases satisfaction. The ties between these three effects lie in tradition and institutional investment. Lifelong members and those with church social ties are invested in the institution and then expect the institution to engage in public witness. The brand loyalty effect belies a tension over providing traditional versus contemporary church experiences. Traditionalists (generally members with more brand loyalty, perhaps lifelong members of the same denomination) tend to eschew “watering down” the faith to appeal to new or returning members (members with less brand loyalty), who are more likely to expect nontraditional worship along with a wide range of other selective benefits. Members newer to the denomination find more reason to like what they are receiving, in effect validating and reinforcing their choice to join. All of these effects, however, are limited in affecting member evaluations of clergy compared to the influence of the other nonpolitical selective benefits.

Lastly, women clergy again receive lower satisfaction ratings, just as they did in Table 3. Since the models control for many other explanations, including political differences, amounts of clergy political involvement, and satisfaction with the performance of church-related activities, we are left with the discomfiting conclusion that these evaluations are based on gender stereotypes. Supporting this conclusion, church members see women clergy as less able to influence the views of church members (Djupe, Sokhey, and Gilbert 2007) and men, at least, appear to downplay political messages from women clergy and view them more stereotypically (Djupe and Olson 2006).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

ELCA and Episcopal clergy are politically active in private as well as public ways, often expressing opinions that are not widely shared among church members. But the satisfactory provision of spiritual and other selective benefits to congregants acts as a considerable buffer, serving to insulate clergy somewhat from the effects of political opposition in the congregation. Church members may disapprove of what the clergy say and do politically from time to time, but our analysis demonstrates that disapproval does not threaten the integrity of the organization if the primary benefits are provided adequately to members. Whether congregants ignore the political intonations of the clergy or take them to heart is another question, though the priority of benefits desired by these church members suggests more of the former than the latter.

Our research design was constructed to explain in greater detail how congregation members perceive their church experiences, why political activity among mainline Protestant clergy has increased over time, and what this implies for mainline Protestants—and other religious traditions—in the future. Our findings strongly endorse a byproduct theory explanation of the relationship between clergy, their church, and their congregants in the scope and details of clergy political beliefs and actions. Satisfying the worship needs and development opportunities of members—the basic elements of the church benefit exchange—creates member satisfaction with the amount of time clergy spend on politics. Greater clergy political activity, though not political opinion differences, reduces member satisfaction with the time clergy spend on politics but has no effect on overall evaluations of the clergy.

Whether by conscious assent or indifference, ELCA and Episcopal clergy may gain latitude to undertake political activities due to their effective actions in other spheres of congregational

life. This finding offers a credible explanation for why mainline Protestant clergy have become significantly more politically active than they were in the 1960s, the supposed height of clerical (and/or denominational) involvement in politics (Wuthnow 1997:207–09). Evidence that church members have become more accustomed to the mixing of religion and politics over the last 40 years shows that the baseline desire for a benefit exchange from an organization varies over time; however, in general, mainline church members still disapprove of clergy political stances and activism. Further, if mainline Protestant churches did indeed put religious life secondary to political activism on civil rights and Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s (Friedland 1998; Verter 2002), our study gives solid evidence that this is no longer true today: sample ELCA and Episcopal respondents are quite satisfied with their church experience. Moreover, political differences between clergy and congregants (which continue to be sizable) cannot account even for congregant approval of clergy politicking, let alone for membership decline. Our results indicate that the unintended byproduct of providing meaningful worship services and outlets for spiritual growth may have been the increased political activism of ELCA and Episcopal clergy over the long run.

As interesting as mainline Protestant membership decline may be, the most important findings here raise a broader set of questions about American religion and the political goals of clergy across the religious spectrum. African-American churches are correctly singled out as institutions that refuse to strictly separate religion and politics, often mixing the two enthusiastically in clergy-led activism (Day 2001; Sawyer 2001). Evangelical Protestant churches have also been fertile ground for movement organizing by Christian Right organizations, often fusing religious and political messages within and beyond church walls. While the two mainline Protestant denominations studied here have adopted a different model, where clergy political activism is allowed by tending to religious needs effectively, there is little reason to suspect that the byproduct theory only applies in the mainline Protestant setting. To what extent might activism among Catholic priests be derived from parishioner satisfaction with mass and other social outlets? Does the pursuit of political goals within evangelical congregations depend to any extent on member assessments of sermon quality or religious education programs? Clearly, our findings directly challenge the idea that the political implications of American religious life can be fully understood without measuring and assessing the religious activities of congregations.

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NOTES

1. Surveys were sent to 3,000 clergy in each denomination, selected randomly. We received responses from 1,450 ELCA clergy (47.5 percent response rate) and 930 Episcopal clergy (31 percent response rate). The survey cover letter indicated a clear affiliation with an ELCA college located in the upper Midwest (where the majority of ELCA congregations and clergy reside); this factor accounts for the higher response rate among ELCA clergy.
2. Surveys were mailed to approximately 80–100 members of each of the 60 congregations. The congregations from which we sampled members are representative of the congregations included in the clergy sample. In mid-sized to large congregations, respondents were selected at random from the congregation's current mailing list; for congregations with fewer than 200 adult members, surveys were mailed to one adult member from each household on the mailing list, alternating women and men in households with more than one adult member. Two waves of surveys were sent to each selected respondent. The overall response rate was approximately 27 percent (30 percent for ELCA, 25 percent for Episcopal Church).
3. The results of the factor analysis, varimax rotated, are as follows:

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2
<i>Worship experience</i>		
Clergy's worship performance	0.805	0.316
Sermon messages	0.759	0.276
Worship style	0.630	0.038
Music quality	0.586	0.137
<i>Personal development opportunities</i>		
Adult education	0.128	0.843
Spiritual development	0.209	0.828
Community outreach	0.151	0.822
Clergy available for consultation	0.367	0.563

4. The church member survey contains a significant question battery about the respondent's social network (see the Appendix for discussant generator question). Rather than attempt to combine or average overall attributes of a social network (up to three people), we use dyads (each respondent-discussant pair is one case), meaning that respondents may be included up to three times. This choice increases the sample size, decreases estimates of the proportion naming a church member discussant (considering the falloff in naming one across the three discussants), and does not add particular kinds of church member discussants to the sample (which would affect the analysis). That is, the proportion of church member discussants who are also church small group members with the respondent is constant across the three discussants named. Similar strategies have been employed in other data sets using discussion dyads (Gilbert 1993; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995).

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APPENDIX: VARIABLE CODING

Satisfaction Measures, Nonpolitical Selective Benefits

Described in text.

Solidary Benefits

In church small group: 1 = respondent is a member of a church small group, 0 = no.

Discussant is a church member: discussant names were generated with the following probe: “From time to time, people discuss government, elections, and politics with other people. Looking back over the last year, we would like to know more about the people you talked with about these matters. These people might be spouses, relatives, friends, coworkers, members of your congregation, or others. We would like you to think of and list the names of THREE such persons;” respondents were then asked, among other things, if each discussant was a church member; 0 = no, 1 = yes.

Political Expressive Benefits

Political interest: “Some people don’t pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you: Were you”: 1 = not much interested, 3 = somewhat interested, 5 = very much interested.

Denomination should be more politically active: “Do (Lutherans/Episcopalians), as a denomination, need to be more or less involved with political and social issues?” 1 = much less, 2 = somewhat less, 3 = same as now, 4 = somewhat more, 5 = much more.

Clergy/member ideological difference: the absolute value of clergy political ideology minus church member political ideology; ideology scale coded 1 = most liberal, 2 = liberal, 3 = moderate, 4 = conservative, 5 = most conservative. The variable ranges in value from 0 (clergy has the same ideology as the congregant) to 4 (clergy is at the opposite end of the scale from the congregant).

Clergy public speech index (clergy data): average of clergy speech frequency in the past year on 16 issues: hunger and poverty, environment, education, civil rights, women’s issues, unemployment/economy, gay rights, government spending/deficits, family problems, gambling laws, homosexuality, current political scandals, capital punishment, abortion, prayer in public schools, national defense; speech frequency coded 1 = never addressed, 2 = rarely, 3 = seldom, 4 = often, 5 = very often.

External Threats

Church activity isolation (clergy data): index gains one point if the clergyperson's congregation was perceived to be less involved in the community, have a lower social status, or be less active in politics than other community churches; index is averaged because not all clergy answered all questions, thus the final index ranges in value from 0 to 1; higher scores indicate more perceived isolation from the community.

Church belief isolation (clergy data): index gains one point for each clergy report that a church has different theological beliefs, political beliefs, worship and music styles, levels of church activity, or more racial/ethnic minorities than other churches in the same community; index is averaged and ranges from 0 to 1; higher scores indicate more isolation from the community.

Denominational Effects

Episcopal Church member: 0 = ELCA member, 1 = Episcopal Church member.

Denominational brand loyalty: index composed of responding "yes" (=1) to "Were you raised in a Lutheran/Episcopal church?" and "No" (=1) to the following questions: "Have you ever regularly attended a NON-Lutheran/Episcopal church?" and "Have you ever stopped attending any church for more than six months?"; responses are averaged, range 0 to 1, with 1 indicating high brand loyalty.

Other Controls

Clergy is female (clergy data): 0 = male, 1 = female clergy.

Clergy has a doctorate (clergy data): 1 = clergy has D.Min or other doctoral degree, 0 = otherwise.

Clergy's tenure length (clergy data): length of tenure at present church, in years.

Male: 1 = respondent is male, 0 = respondent is female.

Education: 1 = less than high school; 2 = finished high school or GED; 3 = some college or associate's; 4 = four-year college degree; 5 = more than four years of college.

Religious commitment: index based on the measure used in Green et al. (1996:ch.10); index combines religious guidance (religious salience), ritual observance (church attendance), religious belief (view of the Bible), and religious activities (frequency of prayer); scale ranges in value from 1 to 7; 1 = respondent scores low on all included measures, 5 = respondent scores low on none of the included measures, 6 = respondent scores high on all but one measure, 7 = respondent scores high on all measures; "low" equates to the following: church attendance, "never" or "a few times a year"; view of the Bible, "The Bible was written by men so long ago that it is worth little today" and "The Bible is a good book because it was written by wise people, but God had nothing to do with it"; religious salience, religion provides "no guidance" or "some guidance" in daily life; frequency of prayer, "rarely or never" or "monthly."