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# Religion in American Public Life: Living with Our Deepest Differences

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## Preface

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The American Assembly commissioned this volume as part of its multi-year series entitled *Uniting America: Toward Common Purpose*, a project designed to help reverse some of the most difficult and divisive forces in our society. This book was for the second Assembly in the *Uniting America* series, which focused on “Matters of Faith: The Role of Religion in American Public Life.”

This Assembly sought to identify as wide a circle as possible of shared values among the many religions in the United States concerning how to manage their differences in the public square. It was designed to engender an atmosphere of mutual respect in public life in which their religious differences could be discussed in a less divisive way and in which those shared values could help resolve nonreligious issues, and thus lead toward a more united America.

Among the specific issues addressed were the following:

- How should we address religion in public education?
- How should the First Amendment guarantees apply to current controversies concerning religion in public life?
- Should state-religious institution partnerships be encouraged?

- How should we live with our differences on such issues as sexual orientation, abortion, and physician-assisted suicide?
- What role should religion play in business and corporate governance, not for profit organizations, academia, citizen action, and science and technology?

The book opens with an introductory chapter by Martin E. Marty, director of the Public Religion Project and professor, University of Chicago, who chaired this Assembly as well as a distinguished Leadership Council for the project. The council consisted of fourteen leaders of major religions in the United States, who helped to provide guidance. (Their names are listed at the end of this book.) The co-directors for this Assembly and authors of three individual chapters were Azizah Y. al-Hibri, professor, T.C. Williams School of Law, University of Richmond; Jean Bethke Elshtain, professor, University of Chicago Divinity School; and Charles C. Haynes, senior scholar, the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center. Additionally, the book contains a "charge" (memo urging action) from the chair to the participants and the text of an address to the participants by Os Guinness of the Trinity Forum.

Drafts of the chapters in this volume were used as background for an Assembly of fifty-seven leaders from American government, business, labor, law, academia, nonprofit organizations, the media, and different religious faiths and faith based organizations who gathered at Arden House, Harriman, New York, for the Ninety-sixth American Assembly, March 23–26, 2000. For three days the participants worked together to define policies and actions concerning the role of religion in American public life.

Following their discussions, the participants issued a report of their findings and recommendations. The text of the report is included in this book and is also available on The American Assembly's website ([www.americanassembly.org](http://www.americanassembly.org) or AOL keyword AmericanAssembly), along with information about other Assembly programs.

The American Assembly *Uniting America* series commenced with an Assembly on economic growth and opportunity (June 10–13, 1999), and resulted in the publication of the book *Updating America's Social Contract: Economic Growth and Opportunity in the New Century* by

economists Rudolph G. Penner, Isabel V. Sawhill, and Timothy Taylor. Other topics addressed in the overall series include family as the core unit of society (September 21–24, 2000), racial divisions (April 19–22, 2001), and improving intersector cooperation among business, government, and the nonprofit world (civil society) and citizens necessary to help move our society toward common purpose in the twenty-first century (fall 2001). A distinguished national Leadership Advisory Group helped to design this series, and will convene toward the end of 2001, after the fifth Assembly, to issue its own overview report of the principal findings and recommendations from the entire series. This leadership group is co-chaired by three trustees of The American Assembly, David R. Gergen, Karen Elliott House, and Donald F. McHenry, and by Paul H. O'Neill, chairman of ALCOA Inc. (A list of the members of the Leadership Advisory Group can be found at the end of this volume.) This series will undertake not only to make the necessary recommendations, but will also develop action plans and follow-on activities necessary to achieve the policy recommendations.

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As in all of our publications, the policy views expressed in this volume are those of its authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of The American Assembly, nor its funders or participants.

It is our hope and belief that this volume and the future Assemblies in the *Uniting America* series will help to stimulate a constructive national dialogue in the United States that will contribute toward a more united America.

Daniel A. Sharp  
President and CEO  
The American Assembly