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ARTICLE

MASTERPIECE CAKESHOP AND THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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Abstract

Last term, the Supreme Court decided Masterpiece Cakeshop, one of several recent cases in which religious believers have sought to avoid the application of public accommodations laws that ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The Court's decision was a narrow one that turned on unique facts and did relatively little to resolve the conflict between anti-discrimination laws and religious freedom. Yet Masterpiece Cakeshop is significant, because it reflects broad cultural and political trends that drive that conflict and shape its resolution: a deepening religious polarization between the Nones and the Traditionally Religious; an expanding conception of equality that treats social distinctions—especially religious distinctions—as illegitimate; and a growing administrative state that enforces that conception of equality in all aspects of our common life. This article explores those trends and offers three predictions for the future: conflicts like Masterpiece Cakeshop will grow more frequent and harder to resolve; the law of religious freedom will remain unsettled and deeply contested; and the judicial confirmation wars will grow even more bitter and partisan than they already have.

I. *Introduction*

Last term, the Supreme Court decided *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, one of several recent cases in which religious believers have sought to avoid the application of public accommodations laws that ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.¹ Like most such disputes, the case involved a small business that declined, because of the owner's religious convictions, to provide a service for a same-sex wedding—in this case, Colorado

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¹ *Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 138 S.Ct. 1719 (2018). For other recent cases, see, for example, *Telescope Media Group v. Lindsey*, 271 F.Supp. 3d 1090 (D. Minn. 2017); *Elane Photography, LLC v. Willock*, 309 P.3d 53 (2013) (New Mexico), *cert. denied*, 572 U.S. 1046 (2014); *State of Washington v. Arlene's Flowers, Inc.*, 389 P.3d 543 (2017) (Wash.), *vacated*, 138 S.Ct. 2671 (2018); *Brush & Nib Studio, LC v. City of Phoenix*, 244 Ariz. 59 (2018).

cake designer Jack Phillips's convictions against designing and baking a cake for a gay couple, Charlie Craig and Dave Mullins.² In most of these cases, courts have been unwilling to allow the businesses religious exemptions from the anti-discrimination laws and have ruled in favor of the customers. One might have thought that Jack Phillips would lose in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* as well. Indeed, many observers were surprised that the Court had granted cert in his case at all.³

Somewhat surprisingly, though, the Supreme Court ruled in his favor, on the basis of an argument few observers had credited before the Court heard the case.⁴ In a 7-2 opinion by Justice Kennedy, the Court held that, in deciding that Phillips's refusal to create a cake for a same-sex wedding violated the state's anti-discrimination laws, the Colorado Civil Rights Commission had violated Phillips's free exercise rights.⁵ The Commission, the Court wrote, had failed to treat Phillips's religious convictions in a neutral and respectful way.⁶ At least two of the commissioners had publicly disparaged Phillips's religious convictions and none of the other commissioners present had objected.⁷ Moreover, the Commission had acted inconsistently in at least three prior cases involving other bakers who had refused, from conscience, to create cakes with anti-gay marriage sentiments. The Commission had ruled that those bakers had acted lawfully in refusing service. This inconsistency suggested that the state had not been neutral with respect to the substance of Phillips's convictions. Punishing Phillips for refusing, on grounds of conscience, to create a *pro*-gay marriage cake, while failing to punish other bakers who declined, on grounds of conscience, to create *anti*-gay marriage cakes, suggested that the state simply disfavored the content of Phillips's convictions.⁸

Because the Commission had failed to treat Phillips's religious convictions in a neutral and respectful way, the Court held, its action against him violated the Free Exercise Clause of the U.S. Constitution.⁹ The Court stressed that future cases, in which state authorities had not demonstrated overt hostility to a claimant's religious convictions, might well reach a different result—a fact that Justice Kagan stressed in a concurring opinion.¹⁰ *Masterpiece Cakeshop* thus does relatively little to resolve the conflict between

² *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1724.

³ See Amy Howe, *Argument preview: Wedding cakes v. religious beliefs?*, SCOTUSBLOG (Nov. 28, 2017, 3:14 PM), <http://www.scotusblog.com/2017/11/argument-preview-wedding-cakes-v-religious-beliefs/>

⁴ See Robert W. Tuttle and Ira C. Lupu, *Masterpiece Cakeshop—A Troublesome Application of Free Exercise Principles by a Court Determined to Avoid Hard Questions*, Take Care Blog (June 7, 2018), at <https://takecareblog.com/blog/masterpiece-cakeshop-a-troublesome-application-of-free-exercise-principles-by-a-court-determined-to-avoid-hard-questions> (“[M]ost observers believed that the Free Exercise Clause issues would not be crucial to the disposition of the case.”).

⁵ *Id.* at 1724.

⁶ *Id.* at 1729.

⁷ *Id.* at 1729-30.

⁸ *Id.* at 1730-31. I discuss the Court's reasoning on this point further below. See *infra* xx-xx.

⁹ US CONST. AMEND 1. See *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1731-32.

¹⁰ See *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1732; *id.* at 1732-34 (Kagan, J., concurring).

anti-discrimination laws and the right of business owners to decline, from sincere religious conviction, to provide services in connection with same-sex weddings.¹¹

Masterpiece Cakeshop is nonetheless important for what it reveals about deeper cultural and political trends, all related, that will affect the future course of the law. Two cultural trends are important: religious polarization and an expanding concept of equality. Over the past two decades, American religion has become polarized between two groups, the Nones, who reject organized religion as authoritarian and hypocritical, especially with respect to sexuality, and the Traditionally Religious, who continue to adhere to organized religion and to traditional religious teachings, especially with respect to sexuality.¹² Each group views the other’s values as threatening and incomprehensible. Neither is going away, and neither seems in a mind to compromise—including in commercial life.¹³ This religious polarization has figured very prominently in the public’s response to *Masterpiece Cakeshop* and controversies like it.

Masterpiece Cakeshop also reflects a second cultural trend, one that Alexis de Tocqueville—whose work runs like a red thread through our story—saw long ago: an expanding notion of equality.¹⁴ Increasing numbers of Americans endorse a capacious concept of equality—“equality as sameness”—that treats social distinctions, especially religious distinctions, as arbitrary and unimportant.¹⁵ Asserting the importance of religious boundaries, as Jack Phillips did, seems unreasonable to increasing numbers of our fellow citizens. Asserting such boundaries strikes them—as it did Charlie Craig and Dave Mullins, and at least some of the Colorado commissioners—as deeply insulting, an affront to human dignity. The fact that so many of the actors in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* could not credit Jack Phillips’s assertions of good faith explains much of what happened in the case, and much of what is likely to happen in future cases.

Finally, *Masterpiece Cakeshop* reflects an important political trend: the steady growth of an activist state committed to the idea of equality as sameness. At both the federal and state level, administrative agencies work to promote equality in all areas of life. Their actions increasingly impinge on the Traditionally Religious, who face an expanding set of rules and policies, backed by serious sanctions, which promote new understandings of equality, particularly with respect to sex and gender. The actions of the Colorado Civil

¹¹ See Leslie Kendrick and Micah Schwartzman, *The Etiquette of Animus*, 132 HARV. L. REV. 133, 133 (2018) (noting that the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* Court “ducked central questions” in the case).

¹² On the Nones generally, see Mark L. Movsesian, *Defining Religion in American Law: Psychic Sophie and the Rise of the Nones*, EUI Working Paper RSCAS 2014/19 (2019), available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2399470.

¹³ See Paul Horwitz, *The Hobby Lobby Moment*, 128 HARV. L. REV. 154, 183 (2014) (observing that, with respect to LGBT issues, “the marketplace itself has become a site of social contestation rather than a refuge from the culture wars”).

¹⁴ On Tocqueville and equality, see *infra* at xx-xx.

¹⁵ See Samuel Gregg, Equality in Democracy: Tocqueville’s Prediction of a Failing America (Feb. 6, 2017), <https://www.cnsnews.com/commentary/samuel-gregg/equality-democracy-tocquevilles-prediction-falling-america> (“equality as sameness”).

Rights Commission offer a very good example. Although state officials will not likely demonstrate the same overt hostility to traditional religious beliefs in future cases, they will likely remain committed to the same expansive view of equality. As a result, conflicts between our anti-discrimination laws, on the one hand, and the religious beliefs of millions of American citizens, on the other, will continue.

As Tocqueville famously observed, American political questions inevitably become judicial ones.¹⁶ Conflicts like the one in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* will continue to find their way into our courts. How will the courts resolve them? The law with respect to religious accommodations is currently something of a “patchwork.”¹⁷ Different jurisdictions employ different tests in different circumstances. Nonetheless, the leading test remains the so-called “compelling interest” test, which holds that the government may impose a substantial burden on a person’s religious exercise only if the government has a compelling interest in doing so and has chosen the least restrictive means.¹⁸ Notwithstanding *Masterpiece Cakeshop*’s somewhat unusual resolution, the compelling interest test will probably determine the outcome in most future cases.

But the compelling interest test presents significant difficulties.¹⁹ The test makes controversies about religious accommodation judgment calls, the outcomes of which depend, practically speaking, on the intuitions of the people doing the judging.²⁰ In a polarized society like ours, with deeply divergent understandings about the nature and value of religion and the scope of equality, intuitions about “substantial burden” and “compelling interest” vary widely from person to person—and from judge to judge.²¹ The test makes it very hard to predict what result will obtain in any particular case and makes the identity of the judges—their background and prior commitments—of signal importance.²² In short, the

¹⁶ TOCQUEVILLE, *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* I:iii:8, at p. 257 (Mansfield & Winthrop ed. 2000) [hereinafter *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA*] (“There is almost no political question in the United States that is not resolved sooner or later into a judicial question”).

¹⁷ MICHAEL W. MCCONNELL ET AL., *RELIGION AND THE CONSTITUTION* 149 (2016).

¹⁸ See, e.g., the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, 42 U.S.C.A. § 2000bb-1. On the current status of the compelling interest test, see MCCONNELL ET AL., *supra* note xx, at 198; see also W. COLE DURHAM, JR. & BRETT G. SCHARFFS, *LAW AND RELIGION: NATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL, AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES* 231 (2010). I discuss the compelling interest test further below. See *infra* pp. xx-xx.

¹⁹ See, e.g., *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990) (rejecting the compelling interest test for purposes of the Free Exercise Clause); see also William P. Marshall, *Bad Statutes Make Bad Law*, 2014 Sup. Ct. Rev. 71 (2014) (reviewing problems with the compelling interest test).

²⁰ Mark L. Movsesian, *The Powerful Headwinds Confronting Religious Freedom*, Law and Liberty (May 2, 2018), at <https://www.lawliberty.org/2018/05/02/masterpiece-cakeshop-religious-freedom-ones/>.

²¹ In a related context, David Bernstein has written that the compelling interest test may only serve as “an empty vessel for the justices’ moral intuitions.” David E. Bernstein, *Sex Discrimination Laws versus Civil Liberties*, 1999 U. CHI. LEGAL F. 133, 167 (1999) (discussing freedom of association).

²² See Stephen M. Bainbridge, *Student Religious Organizations and University Policies against Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation: Implications of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act*, 21 J.C. & U.L. 369, 393-94 (1994) (observing that the balancing contemplated by the compelling interest test “invites judges to put their personal values onto the scale”).

cultural and political trends I have identified—growing religious polarization, an expanded concept of equality, and an activist state—suggest that conflicts between anti-discrimination norms and the religious beliefs of millions of Americans will, if anything, grow more frequent and bitter and that courts will continue to have to resolve them. And the vague nature of the compelling interest test suggests that the ultimate legal resolution will remain unclear for a long time to come.

This article proceeds as follows. Part II describes the Court's decision in *Masterpiece Cakeshop*. Part III explores the cultural and political trends I have identified and shows how the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* litigation reflects them. Part IV offers concluding comments and ventures three predictions: conflicts like *Masterpiece Cakeshop* will grow more frequent and harder for our society to negotiate; the law in this area will remain unsettled and deeply contested; and the judicial confirmation wars will grow even more bitter and partisan than they already are.

One clarification at the start: This article is analytical rather than normative. For what it's worth, *Masterpiece Cakeshop* struck me as a difficult case. But my goal here is not to argue the merits. Rather, I seek to illuminate the issues and make some predictions about the future course of the law. Those predictions may turn out to be wrong. But their correctness does not depend on one's views about which side should prevail in the clash of important values that *Masterpiece Cakeshop* represents: our society's commitments both to non-discrimination and to religious freedom.

II. *The Masterpiece Cakeshop Decision*

Masterpiece Cakeshop presents what has become a familiar pattern in American commercial life. A gay couple asks a vendor to provide services in connection with the couple's wedding—photography, flowers, invitations—which the vendor refuses on the basis of his religious convictions.²³ Providing services for a gay wedding, he explains, would make him complicit in conduct he considers sinful.²⁴ The couple objects that the vendor is denying service in violation of state public-accommodations laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The vendor responds that he is willing to provide services to all customers, including the couple, whether they are gay or straight. But he declines to participate in gay weddings, since gay weddings violate his religious beliefs.

In *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, a gay couple, Charlie Craig and Dave Mullins, asked a Colorado cake designer, Jack Phillips—the owner of *Masterpiece Cakeshop*—to create a cake for their wedding celebration.²⁵ The couple didn't specify exactly what they wished the

²³ See Kendrick and Schwartzman, *supra* note xx, at 133-34 (discussing cases).

²⁴ On complicity claims generally, compare Douglas Nejaime & Reva Siegel, *Conscience Wars: Complicity-Based Conscience Claims in Religion and Politics*, 124 YALE L.J. 2516 (2015) with Joshua J. Craddock, *The Case for Complicity-Based Religious Accommodations*, 12 TENN. J.L. & POL'Y 233 (2018).

²⁵ *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1724.

cake to say, or, in fact, whether they wanted an inscription on the cake at all.²⁶ But they did want a custom cake that Phillips would design especially for their wedding. They were not interested in the off-the-shelf baked goods Phillips offered to sell them.²⁷

Phillips, a conservative Christian with traditional views about marriage, declined to fill their order, explaining that creating a cake for a gay wedding would violate his religious convictions. Creating such a cake, he said, would amount to his “participat[ing] in” and “personally endors[ing]” a relationship he considered unbiblical.²⁸ Indeed, the subsequent investigation by the state civil rights authorities revealed that Phillips had a policy against creating cakes for gay weddings and had declined to do so several times in the past.²⁹ He had also refused, from religious conviction, “to bake cakes containing alcohol, cakes with racist or homophobic messages, cakes criticizing God, and cakes celebrating Halloween.”³⁰

Shortly after Phillips rejected their order, Craig and Mullins began an administrative action against him (and Masterpiece Cakeshop) by filing a complaint with the Colorado Civil Rights Division, the state agency responsible for enforcing Colorado’s Anti-Discrimination Act, or CADA.³¹ Like many similar laws across the country, CADA prohibits places of public accommodation from refusing customers equal service on the basis of sexual orientation, among other things.³² The Division investigated Phillips, found probable cause that he had violated CADA, and referred the case to another state agency, the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, which in turn referred the case to an Administrative Law Judge, who held a hearing and determined that Phillips had violated CADA by discriminating against Craig and Mullins on the basis of sexual orientation.³³

Phillips appealed the ALJ’s ruling to the Commission itself, which held two public meetings in his case. At both meetings, but especially the second, individual commissioners made remarks dismissing and disparaging Phillips’s religious convictions.³⁴ One commissioner suggested that, if Phillips’s religious beliefs prevented him from complying with Colorado’s anti-discrimination law, Phillips might find another place to do business.³⁵ Another likened Phillips’s stance to historical episodes in which religion had been used to

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.* at 1726.

³⁰ *Id.* at 1745 (Thomas, J., concurring in part and concurring in the judgment).

³¹ *Id.* at 1725.

³² Colorado Rev. Stat. § 24-34-601(2)(a) (2017).

³³ *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1726.

³⁴ *Id.* at 1729.

³⁵ The “commissioner suggested that Phillips can believe ‘what he wants to believe,’ but cannot act on his religious beliefs ‘if he decides to do business in the state.’ A few moments later, the commissioner restated the same position: ‘[I]f a businessman wants to do business in the state and he’s got an issue with the—the law’s impacting his personal belief system, he needs to look at being able to compromise.’” *Id.* (citations omitted).

justify violent acts of oppression, including slavery and the Holocaust.³⁶ This commissioner described Phillips’s religious objection to same-sex marriage as “one of the most despicable pieces of rhetoric people can use”—simply a way to injure gay people.³⁷ As we shall see, the Supreme Court made much of these remarks in its subsequent decision in the case.

The Commission agreed with the ALJ that Phillips should lose.³⁸ It ordered him to stop refusing orders for wedding cakes from gay couples and to provide his staff with “comprehensive training” on CADA and on the requirements of the Commission’s ruling against him.³⁹ In addition, it required him to file compliance reports with the Commission on a quarterly basis for two years. The reports were to provide the Commission with details, among other things, about how many people Phillips had refused to serve and the reasons for his refusals.⁴⁰

When the Colorado Court of Appeals rejected his appeal of the Commission’s order, Phillips sought review in the United States Supreme Court, arguing that requiring him to create wedding cakes for gay couples violated both his free speech and free exercise rights under the First Amendment.⁴¹ When the Supreme Court granted review, most observers thought the Court would focus on Phillips’s free speech claim. His free exercise claim seemed precluded by the Court’s landmark decision in *Employment Division v. Smith*,⁴² which held that the Free Exercise Clause is not violated by a neutral, generally applicable law that incidentally burdens a citizen’s religious exercise. CADA certainly seemed to be such a law: it amounted to a blanket prohibition on discrimination in places of public accommodation, whether the motivation for the discrimination was religious or not.⁴³ And the Court’s Civil Rights Era jurisprudence suggested that, at least with respect to racial discrimination, religious objections would not exempt public accommodations from anti-discrimination laws.⁴⁴ To most observers, Phillips’s chance of succeeding on a free exercise claim seemed remote.⁴⁵

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.* at 1726.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ Brief for Petitioners, *Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Comm’n*, no. 16-111, at 14 (2017).

⁴² 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

⁴³ In relevant part, CADA provides:

“It is a discriminatory practice and unlawful for a person, directly or indirectly, to refuse, withhold from, or deny to an individual or a group, because of disability, race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, or ancestry, the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of a place of public accommodation.”

Colorado Rev. Stat. § 24-34-601(2)(a) (2017).

⁴⁴ E.g., *Newman v. Piggie Park Enterprises*, 390 U.S. 400, 402 n.5 (1968) (per curiam). *Cf.* *Bob Jones University v. US*, 461 U.S. 574 (1983).

⁴⁵ *See supra* text accompanying note xx.

Somewhat surprisingly, however, the Court ruled, 7-2, that the Commission had violated Phillips's free exercise rights, not so much in its ultimate decision against him, but in its decision-making process. Writing for the Court, Justice Kennedy explained that the Free Exercise Clause gave Phillips the right to a neutral decision-maker.⁴⁶ But the Commission had not been neutral at all. In fact, it had shown a clear bias against him, that is, against his sincere religious beliefs. As evidence, Justice Kennedy adduced the commissioners' official comments in the case, especially the remark about the "despicable" nature of Phillips's religious convictions against same-sex weddings.⁴⁷ In addition, he noted that the Commission had in prior cases allowed bakers to decline, on the basis of conscience, customers' orders for cakes with messages opposing gay marriage. This disparate treatment suggested that the Commission had ruled against Phillips simply because the Commission was hostile to the substance of Phillips's religious views.⁴⁸

Because the Commission had not shown neutrality with respect to Phillips's sincere religious beliefs, Justice Kennedy concluded, its decision against him violated the Free Exercise Clause.⁴⁹ This conclusion, too, was a bit of a surprise, since it seemed to leave out a step. Most commentators had understood the Court's 1993 decision in *Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah* to require application of the compelling-interest test in circumstances where the state had not been neutral with respect to religion.⁵⁰ Under *Lukumi*, most understood, a state could burden religion in a non-neutral way if it had a compelling reason for doing so and had chosen the least-restrictive means.⁵¹ Indeed, Justice Gorsuch assumed as much in his concurring opinion, which applied the compelling interest test to invalidate the Commission's decision.⁵² But Justice Kennedy skipped the compelling interest analysis altogether.

Justice Kennedy also deferred to another day the question of what would happen if a state agency did not demonstrate overt bias against a claimant's religion. Presumably, in many cases in which state agencies apply anti-discrimination laws to vendors, officials do not make on-the-record comments disparaging the vendors' sincere religious convictions, and do not have a record of ruling inconsistently in prior disputes.⁵³ The Court would decide any such future cases, Justice Kennedy said, on the basis of the particular circumstances.⁵⁴ About the only guidance the Court was willing to give was this: courts would have to strike

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 1732.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 1729. For an argument that the Court misinterpreted these comments, see Kendrick and Schwartzman, *supra* note xx, at 135.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 1730-31.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 1731-32.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Christopher C. Lund, *Exploring Free Exercise Doctrine: Equal Liberty and Religious Exemptions*, 77 TENN. L. REV. 351, 375 (2010).

⁵¹ *Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 (1993).

⁵² *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1734 (Gorsuch, J., concurring).

⁵³ Cf. Kendrick and Schwartzman, *supra* note xx, at 150 ("Going forward, state civil rights enforcement agencies have the chance to try again, while avoiding the mistakes of the [Colorado] Commission.").

⁵⁴ *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1732; see also *id.* at 1724.

a balance between the right of religious persons to have their beliefs respected and the right of gay persons to obtain goods and services in the marketplace without suffering affronts.⁵⁵

Masterpiece Cakeshop ultimately settled fairly little. And the fight over future cases already has begun.⁵⁶ Indeed, the separate opinions in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* suggest something about battle lines and the many complicated issues future cases will raise.⁵⁷ Still, although it did not resolve matters, the decision reveals important cultural and political trends that will likely drive future cases. I turn to those trends now.

III. *Cultural and Political Trends in Masterpiece Cakeshop*

a. *Religious Polarization: The Nones vs. the Traditionally Religious*

Masterpiece Cakeshop reflects two important cultural trends. The first is a growing polarization between two groups in American religious life: the Nones and the Traditionally Religious. The second is an expanding notion of equality, one that goes beyond the anti-discrimination norms of the Civil Rights Movement, which opposed the state's differential treatment of persons on the basis of race and other characteristics, to a more general rejection of social distinctions, including, especially, religion. I will address each of these trends in turn.

The Rise of the Nones is perhaps the most talked-about development in American sociology in the last decade.⁵⁸ “Nones” are those people who describe their religion in surveys as “none” or “nothing in particular”—people who say they have no religious affiliation at all.⁵⁹ According to the most recent Pew Research Center study, in 2014, more than a fifth of the adult population, about 23% of Americans, now falls within this category, which represents a rise of about seven percent from the most recent previous survey, in 2007.⁶⁰ In historical terms, this percentage is extremely large. In the 1950s, only three percent of Americans said they had no religious identity.⁶¹ According to the Pew survey, Nones now qualify as the second largest “religious” group in the country, after Protestants

⁵⁵ See *id.* at 1732.

⁵⁶ Only two weeks after the Court ruled in *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, the Colorado Civil Rights Commission sanctioned Jack Philips for refusing to create a cake for a transgender celebration. See Amy B. Wang, *Baker Claims Religious Persecution Again—This Time after Denying Cake for Transgender Woman*, WASH. POST (Aug. 15, 2018), at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/08/15/baker-claims-religious-persecution-again-this-time-after-denying-cake-for-transgender-woman/?utm_term=.37c4c0a61a4a. I discuss this case below. See *infra* at xx.

⁵⁷ *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1732 (Kagan, J., concurring); *id.* at 1734 (Gorsuch, J., concurring); *id.* at 1740 (Thomas, J., concurring in part and concurring in the judgment); *id.* at 1748 (Ginsburg, J., dissenting).

⁵⁸ Much of this discussion of the Nones derives from my earlier work. Movsesian, *supra* note 12.

⁵⁹ Movsesian, *supra* note xx, at 1.

⁶⁰ Pew Research Center, “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious” (Nov. 3, 2015), at <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.

⁶¹ MARK CHAVES, AMERICA RELIGION 19 (2011).

and ahead of Catholics—though, when aggregated, Christian faiths still claim the large majority of Americans, about 70%.⁶²

Among Millennials, the percentage of Nones is significantly higher than in the general population. Pew divides Millennials into two cohorts, “Older Millennials,” born between the years 1981 and 1989, and “Young Millennials,” born between the years 1990 and 1996.⁶³ Among Older Millennials, the percentage of Nones is 34%, up nine points from 2007. Among Young Millennials, the percentage is even higher—36%.⁶⁴ These numbers are significant because of what sociologists refer to as the “generational replacement” effect.⁶⁵ As older Americans with relatively strong religious commitments die off, younger, less affiliated Americans gradually will take their place. As a result, over time, Nones will make up an increasingly large percentage of the population. It’s true that people often become more religious as they age, and today’s Millennials may do so as well. At the moment, though, they are not following that pattern. In terms of things like church attendance and prayer, older Millennials “are, if anything, less religiously observant today than they were” just seven years ago.⁶⁶

To be sure, some sociologists question whether the percentages are really as high as these surveys indicate.⁶⁷ Baylor University sociologist Rodney Stark, for example, believes that surveys overstate the numbers of Nones in America today; some respondents apparently list their religion as “None” to indicate that “they do not belong to a specific church”—that is, when they are non-denominational Christians.⁶⁸ (Some anecdotal evidence: When I presented an earlier version of this essay at a conference at the Notre Dame Center on Ethics and Culture, one audience member approached me afterwards to say that he would describe himself as a “None,” even though he was a Christian, precisely because he had never formally joined any church congregation). Whatever the precise numbers may be, most sociologists take the rise of the Nones to be a “highly reliable” statistical finding” with implications for the future of American religion.⁶⁹

Most Nones do not reject religious belief as such. The majority of them in the 2014 Pew survey, 61%, say they believe in God or a universal spirit—though that percentage represents a sharp decline from the 2007 survey, which showed that 70% of Nones believed in God.⁷⁰ About a third of Nones say that religion is very important in their life—though, again, that percentage is down a great deal since 2007, which suggests that Nones are

⁶² Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape” (May 12, 2015), <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

⁶³ *Id.* at 7/14.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ Pew Report (Nov. 3, 2015), at 20/34, 22/34.

⁶⁷ Movsesian, *supra* note xx, at 1.

⁶⁸ Conversations: Rodney Stark, LAW AND RELIGION FORUM BLOG (Aug. 5, 2013), at <https://lawandreligionforum.org/2013/08/05/conversations-rodney-stark/#more-13283>.

⁶⁹ Movsesian, *supra* note xx, at 1 (quoting FRANK NEWPORT, GOD IS ALIVE AND WELL 13 (2012)).

⁷⁰ Pew Report, *supra* note 62, at 5/34.

becoming more secular over time.⁷¹ What most characterizes Nones is a rejection of institutional religion. The Nones are spiritual “Independents” who refuse to join formal, authoritative religious communities, which they see as coercive and stifling.⁷² Instead, Nones believe they can fashion their own, personal religions from a variety of different traditions—indeed, from traditions which present themselves as opposed to one another. As Ross Douthat writes, the memoirist Elizabeth Gilbert, whose bestseller, *Eat Pray Love* helped popularize the concept of “spiritual but not religious” in the first decade of this century, created her own, personal spirituality by combining elements from Hindu polytheism, Christian monotheism, and Buddhist non-theism.⁷³

Nones believe they can do this sort of thing for two reasons. First, they reject the idea that any one religious tradition can be uniquely true to the exclusion of all others. Exclusive claims of religious authority strike them as an affront to reason and good sense, as well as human freedom.⁷⁴ Second, they believe that the individual has the right to pick and choose among various traditions and forge a spiritual path that works for him, because the individual has God within him.⁷⁵ Spiritual enlightenment and peace come, not from submitting to external religious authority, which inevitably squelches spiritual authenticity, but from discerning and accepting the divine guidance that exists within oneself.⁷⁶ The individual, not the religious community, has the right to judge what is true—or, at least, what is true for him.

Religious Independents have always been part of American life.⁷⁷ In the eighteenth century, Thomas Paine wrote, “My own mind is my own church,” a sentiment many twenty-first century Nones would definitely share.⁷⁸ And the nineteenth-century Transcendentalists sound, to today’s ears, a great deal like Nones.⁷⁹ But, in the past, this sort of religious idiosyncrasy was a more or less fringe phenomenon.⁸⁰ Not now: as I have explained, Nones now make up the second largest religious group in America, and roughly a third of Millennials. For large numbers of our fellow citizens, the conventional understanding of religion “as a distinctive body of beliefs, a moral and ritual set of practices, and the organizational structures surrounding ideas and ideals of the sacred,” no longer represents the norm.⁸¹ In fact, for these citizens, traditional religion represents a

⁷¹ See *id.* at 15/34.

⁷² See Chaeyoon Lim et al., *Secular and Liminal: Discovering Heterogeneity Among Religious Nones*, 49 J. SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION 596, 597 (2010) (“Independents”).

⁷³ ROSS DOUTHAT, *BAD RELIGION* (2012) [loc. 4334].

⁷⁴ See Movsesian, *supra* note 11, at 2.

⁷⁵ See DOUTHAT, *supra* note xx, loc. 4291.

⁷⁶ See Movsesian, *supra* note 11, at 2.

⁷⁷ Movsesian, *supra* note xx, at 8.

⁷⁸ KERRY S. WALTERS, *THE AMERICAN DEISTS* 213 (1992).

⁷⁹ See DOUTHAT, *supra* note xx, at loc. 4354 (comparing Ralph Waldo Emerson with contemporary spiritual guides like Deepak Chopra, Paulo Coelho, and Oprah Winfrey).

⁸⁰ See Movsesian, *supra* note 12, at 8.

⁸¹ James Davison Hunter, *Law, Religion, and the Common Good*, 39 PEPPERDINE L. REV. 1065, 1065 (2013).

malign force that stifles authentic spirituality, creating inner turmoil and preventing individuals from attaining their true potential.

Why should the Rise of the Nones occur now, at the start of the twenty-first century? Many factors exist, but three merit special attention. First, there are demographic explanations. Changes in family structure, and in particular high rates of religious intermarriage and divorce, have an important role. About half of Americans who marry today choose a spouse of a different religion;⁸² more than a quarter of Millennials say they were raised in a religiously mixed family.⁸³ As one would expect, children from such families more often become Nones when they grow up than children whose parents shared the same religion.⁸⁴ Moreover, Nones are themselves having and raising children. Roughly one-quarter of Millennials in the Pew survey report being raised by at least one parent who was a None; about six percent say both their parents were Nones.⁸⁵ A large percentage of these children also become Nones when they reach adulthood—62% where both parents were Nones.⁸⁶ Parental divorce also appears to have a role. Children of divorce are significantly less like to identify with a religion than children from intact families, perhaps because they “have less trust in institutions and authority figures generally.”⁸⁷

Second, the Rise of the Nones seems to be associated with the Sexual Revolution, especially with changing views on homosexuality. According to the 2014 Pew report, a solid majority of Americans, about 62%, now say that society should accept homosexuality.⁸⁸ Among Nones, however, the percentage is strikingly high—83%.⁸⁹ Here again, Millennials are key. Young adults are driving the changing social consensus on homosexuality, including among Nones. Millennials generally have more positive views of homosexuality than older Americans, and nearly 90% of Millennial Nones say that society should accept homosexuality.⁹⁰ The Pew report thus offers support for what sociologists have been saying for years: young Nones dislike organized religion because they associate it with traditional, negative views about homosexuality, and because they believe organized religion’s rejection of homosexuality masks hypocrisy about sexual sins generally.⁹¹

Finally, the Rise of the Nones in the twenty-first century may reflect the gradual, but inevitable, working-out of the inner logic of liberalism, America’s dominant political ideology. In the nineteenth century, Tocqueville wrote that escaping the hold of habit,

⁸² PUTNAM & CAMPBELL, *AMERICAN GRACE* (2010).

⁸³ The figures in this paragraph come from a recent Pew report, “One-in-Five US Adults Were Raised in Interfaith Homes” (Oct. 26, 2016).

⁸⁴ See Movsesian, *supra* note 11, at 9.

⁸⁵ Pew Report (Oct. 26, 2016), *supra* note xx, at 4.

⁸⁶ Pew Report (Oct. 26, 2016), *supra* note xx, at 5.

⁸⁷ Movsesian, *supra* note 11, at 9.

⁸⁸ Pew Report (Nov. 3, 2015), at 29/34.

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 30/34.

⁹¹ See PUTNAM & CAMPBELL, *supra* note xx, at 130.

family, and tradition were among the principal features of the American mindset.⁹² More recently, Patrick Deneen has observed that liberalism has always opposed received authority, which it views as arbitrary and accidental, in favor of individual autonomy and choice. Loosening the bonds of family, community, and religion is necessary, liberalism teaches, in order to release the full potential of human beings.⁹³ Liberalism encourages the person to think of himself “primarily a free chooser” with respect to “all relationships, institutions, and beliefs.”⁹⁴ Over time, the ethos of choice extends to more and more subjects. It is no surprise, then, in a society where liberalism dominates, that many people eventually come to see choice as extending to religious institutions and beliefs, along with all the others.

Nonetheless, the Rise of the Nones does not mean that religion is simply disappearing from American life. The increase in the number of the religiously unaffiliated is occurring simultaneously with an increase in religiosity among Americans who *do* maintain a religious identity—a group one might call the Traditionally Religious. According to the 2014 Pew survey, religiously-affiliated Americans “appear to have grown more observant in recent years,” if one considers things like Bible study and prayer groups.⁹⁵ Another recent survey shows that the percentage of “intensely religious” Americans, with intensity being measured in terms of things like church attendance and frequent prayer, has remained remarkably stable over decades.⁹⁶ The percentage of Americans with a “strong” religious affiliation has remained steady, at a little less than 40%, since 1989.⁹⁷

In other words, America is experiencing a deepening religious polarization rather than a systematic falloff from religion. The growing percentage of Nones does not result from a general decrease in religious observance, but “a dramatic decline” in the numbers of the “moderately religious”— people who formally identify with a religion, but who show only modest levels of commitment.⁹⁸ As in so many areas of American life, the middle is dropping out in favor of the extremes on either end. The moderately religious are rapidly ending their affiliations and becoming Nones, while the Traditionally Religious are maintaining their affiliations or even increasing their intensity. And we appear to be reaching a point of rough parity. More than a fifth of Americans, and more than a third of younger Americans, are now Nones, while something like two-fifths of Americans are among the Traditionally Religious.

This deepening polarization will exacerbate conflicts like the one in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* and make it harder for our society to negotiate them. Compromise requires an

⁹² DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, *supra* note xx, II.i.1, at 403.

⁹³ See PATRICK DENEEN, WHY LIBERALISM FAILED 28 (2018).

⁹⁴ *Id.* at 77.

⁹⁵ Pew Report (Nov. 3, 2015), at 6/34 (emphasis omitted).

⁹⁶ Landon Schnabel & Sean Bock, *The Persistent and Exceptional Intensity of American Religion: A Response to Recent Research*, 4 SOCIOLOGICAL SCIENCE 686, 687 (2017).

⁹⁷ *Id.* at 688.

⁹⁸ Schnabel & Bock, *supra* note xx, at 689.

ability to sympathize with the other side, to understand, even if one does not share, the commitments that motivate one's interlocutor. It requires some common base of experience. Americans have not always shown such sympathy for minority religious communities, of course. At various times, Catholics, Jews, and Mormons all have experienced hostility, among other religious groups. But a general sympathy for religion and religious claims has always marked American culture. In the past, someone like Jack Phillips might have counted on a widespread, if thin, sympathy with the idea of traditional religious commitments. The vast majority of Americans would have understood why he thought it so important to follow the tenets of his religion, for the simple reason that the vast majority of Americans would have had some connection with institutional religion. Even if they were only nominally religious, and even if they disagreed with his particular convictions, most Americans would have understood why Phillips insisted on acting as he did.

But this wider social sympathy for traditional religion is fading. Large numbers of Americans no longer have experience with traditional, organized religion—and, to the extent they do have such experience, they reject it. Nones are unlikely to respond sympathetically when the Traditionally Religious seek exemptions from legal requirements.⁹⁹ Indeed, Nones are likely to see such exemptions as an unfair advantage for organized religion. For their part, the Traditionally Religious are unlikely to sympathize with the worldview of the Nones. And disagreements between the two groups will likely be amplified by the fact that Nones overwhelmingly reject traditional teachings on sexuality, which they see as psychologically damaging and essentially unjust, while the Traditionally Religious continue to endorse them as necessary for human dignity.¹⁰⁰ In short, we now have two fairly sizable, competing groups with sharply divergent understandings of the beneficence of traditional religious commitments, especially with respect to sexuality—and neither group seems especially interested in compromise.¹⁰¹

The public response to controversies like *Masterpiece Cakeshop* reflects this religious polarization. In the summer of 2016, while the Court was considering Jack Phillips's cert petition, the Pew Research Center surveyed Americans' opinions on whether a business should have to provide services for a gay wedding notwithstanding the owner's religious objections.¹⁰² The responses closely tracked America's religious divide. About two-thirds of the religiously unaffiliated—the Nones—said that a business should be required by law to provide services for a gay wedding even if the owner had religious objections.¹⁰³ And about two-thirds of Americans who attend religious services frequently—the Traditionally

⁹⁹ See JOHN INAZU, CONFIDENT PLURALISM 23 (2015).

¹⁰⁰ See Mark L. Movsesian, *Of Human Dignities*, 91 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1517, 1529 (2016).

¹⁰¹ On the unwillingness of both the LGBT community and the Traditionally Religious to compromise in the marketplace, see, for example, Mark L. Movsesian, *Markets and Morals: The Limits of Doux Commerce*, 9 WM. & MARY. BUS. L. REV. 449, 472 (2018).

¹⁰² Pew Research Center, "Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty vs. Nondiscrimination" 4 (Sept. 28, 2016).

¹⁰³ *Id.* at 16.

Religious—said that a business owner should *not* be required to do so.¹⁰⁴ Only a relatively small number of Americans, 18 percent, found it possible to sympathize with both sides' points of view.¹⁰⁵ This sharp religious divide suggests that achieving social consensus on cases like *Masterpiece Cakeshop* will be extremely difficult.

b. *Equality as Sameness*

Masterpiece Cakeshop also reflects a second cultural trend: our society's expanding conception of equality. Equality has been central to the American worldview ever since Jefferson enshrined the concept in the Declaration of Independence. But equality can mean different things. On one understanding, it refers to legal equality—to the fair and uniform application of the law to all citizens.¹⁰⁶ In the twentieth century, America gradually extended legal equality to racial and other minorities against whom it had discriminated, in law, for centuries. This has been one of the great achievements of our time.

Equality can also refer, though, to a broader unwillingness to accept any distinctions among groups and individuals, whether “material, social, or personal.”¹⁰⁷ On this view, equality means a rejection of the idea of “difference per se.”¹⁰⁸ All boundaries that distinguish one group of people from another—for example, beliefs and practices that mark out a religious community and exclude non-members—are presumptively suspect because of the implicit judgments they suggest. Some groups, apparently, think their beliefs and ways of life are superior to others. Such judgments seem impolite, ungenerous, and inconsistent with the spirit of true equality, which requires that each community acknowledge the basic correctness and good will of all others. Suggesting that one finds others' beliefs and practices morally inferior is, on this view, a grave affront to human dignity. Notwithstanding our claims to respect diversity, it is this second concept of equality—“equality as sameness”¹⁰⁹—that pervades our culture today, especially with respect to religion.

Once again, Tocqueville saw this coming. Equality, he observed, was Americans' most fundamental moral commitment, the criterion by which we judged everything else.¹¹⁰ Equality required that social distinctions be ignored—between aristocrats and common

¹⁰⁴ *Id.*

¹⁰⁵ *Id.* at 18.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Jurgen Habermas, *Paradigms of Law*, 17 CARDOZO L. REV. 771, 778-79 (1996) (distinguishing between “legal equality” and “actual equality”).

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Deneen, “Alexis de Tocqueville,” *First Principles* (March 14, 2011), at <http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/print.aspx?article=911&loc=b&type=cbtp>.

¹⁰⁸ See Samuel Gregg, *Equality in Democracy: Tocqueville's Prediction of a Failing America* (Feb. 6, 2017), <https://www.cnsnews.com/commentary/samuel-gregg/equality-democracy-tocquevilles-prediction-falling-america>.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at 3/10.

¹¹⁰ See DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, *supra* note xx, I:Introduction, at 3 (“[A]s I studied American society, more and more I saw in equality of conditions the generative fact from which each particular fact seemed to issue.”); see also PIERRE MANENT, *TOCQUEVILLE AND THE NATURE OF DEMOCRACY* (John Waggoner trans. 1996).

men, the educated and the unschooled, man and woman, parent and child. In law, it called for uniformity;¹¹¹ in philosophy and religion, generality, rather than a focus on the particular.¹¹² In fact, with respect to religion, the preference for generality ultimately worked to minimize distinctions between particular faith traditions and promote pantheism, which not only denied the relevance of difference in the created order, but also the distinction between creation and the Creator himself.¹¹³

The emphasis on religious equality did not result in widespread pantheism in Tocqueville's time. Christianity had too powerful a hold on nineteenth-century Americans for that to happen.¹¹⁴ Today, though, his predictions seem to be coming true. Americans are remarkably broad-minded about the legitimacy of all religions. A 2010 study by sociologists Robert Putnam and David Campbell reveals that almost 90% of us believe that members of other religions, not only our own, can go to Heaven.¹¹⁵ Nuances exist, and much depends on how people understand the question. The percentage goes down, for example, when surveyors ask Christians whether non-Christians (as opposed to different kinds of Christians) can go to Heaven.¹¹⁶ And much depends on how respondents understand the question. Some Christians would say, for example, that Christianity is the unique path to salvation, but members of other faiths may be on the path without knowing it. Other Christians would say that it's possible for non-Christians to go to Heaven, but rare. Still, it is noteworthy that the large majority of American Christians, even those who belong to churches that teach that Christianity is the exclusive path to salvation, believe that non-Christians can in principle receive eternal life.

Putnam and Campbell ascribe this remarkable ecumenism to a number of factors, including the large number of mixed-religious families in America, which tend to mute religious distinctions (how could my saintly "Aunt Susan" not go to Heaven just because she's not a Christian?), and the inevitable social interactions between people from different religions in daily life ("My Friend Al" is an evangelical Christian, but he's not a bad guy).¹¹⁷ These explanations seem to have things backwards: it is the norm of tolerance that lets Aunt Sally marry into the family in the first place, and allows one to have a friend from a different faith tradition. Whatever the reasons, when it comes to perhaps the most important religious question of all, Americans show a remarkably latitudinarian attitude. With respect to attaining salvation, and with the qualifications I suggest above, most Americans seem to believe that all ways are equally good.

¹¹¹ See DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, *supra* note xx, at II:4:3, at 641, 645.

¹¹² See *id.* II:iv.2, at 640.

¹¹³ *Id.* at II:i:7, at 425-26.

¹¹⁴ An "innumerable multitude of sects" existed in America, he noted, but all were "within the great Christian unity." *Id.* at I:ii:9, at 278; see also *id.* at II.i.1., at 406 (In the United States, Christian sects vary infinitely and are constantly modified, but Christianity itself is an established and irresistible fact that no one undertakes either to attack or defend.).

¹¹⁵ ROBERT D. PUTNAM & DAVID E. CAMPBELL, AMERICAN GRACE 534 (2010).

¹¹⁶ See *id.* at 536.

¹¹⁷ *Id.* at 526 ("Aunt Susan"), 531 ("My Friend Al").

One the one hand, the concept of equality as sameness may make conflicts like the one in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* less likely. If people perceive all ways as equally good, they will not have problems participating in all sorts of celebrations, whatever their religious convictions. On the other hand, when such conflicts do occur, an expansive concept of equality will make them more bitter and harder to resolve. To refuse to participate in someone else's wedding on religious grounds is to erect a boundary that seems socially incomprehensible. It is to express a judgment that other citizens' life events are so opprobrious that one cannot take part in them. Such a judgment violates the principle of equality as sameness and, as a result, is likely to be taken as a deep insult to other citizens' dignity.

If I may offer a personal anecdote, I recently posed a hypothetical case in my law-and-religion class.¹¹⁸ Suppose, I asked the students, an observant Jew has a florist shop. One day, a customer, who is also Jewish, comes to the shop to say she's getting married and would like the florist to do the wedding. "That's wonderful," the florist says. "Where will you get married?" The customer replies that the wedding will be at a local nondenominational church, because her fiancé is Christian, and she, the customer, isn't very observant. The florist thinks about it and says, "I'm so sorry, but I can't do your wedding. It's nothing personal; I'm sure your fiancé is a fine person, as are you. It's just that as an observant Jew, I don't approve of interfaith weddings. For our community to survive, we must avoid intermarriage and assimilation. Please understand. There are many other florists who can do your wedding. I'll even suggest some. But I can't, in good conscience, participate." What result?

In posing this hypothetical, I was trying to show the students these are complicated questions and that they need to consider both sides. Much to my surprise, the students were uniformly unsympathetic to the florist. There should be no legal right to decline services in this situation, they told me: the florist was not acting reasonably and in good faith. I pressed them. Didn't they see that genuine religious diversity requires respect for difference, that difference implies boundaries, and that boundaries necessarily exclude? Couldn't a member of a minority religion believe, in good faith, that her community faced assimilation and decline to run her business in a way that promoted it? Wasn't that a concern worthy of respect? No, they told me. The florist in my hypothetical case should have no right to turn away the interfaith couple.

I have thought about the students' reaction, and it seems to me that it results from the students' sense that it is wrong to draw religious distinctions that exclude others and injure their dignity, no matter what the justification. That's what the florist did in my hypothetical case—and that, I think, was what bothered the students. The florist was

¹¹⁸ I related this anecdote in a blog post. Mark Movsesian, *Passion for Equality*, First Things Web Exclusive (July 10, 2017), at <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/07/passion-for-equality>.

violating the equality-as-sameness principle, and my students simply did not think her concerns justified her in doing so.

Something similar, I believe, occurred in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* itself. Craig and Mullins viewed Phillips's objection to creating their wedding cake as an insult, no matter how much he protested about the good will he bore them, and no matter how willing he was to sell them goods off the shelf.¹¹⁹ They experienced an affront so deep that, rather than obtain a cake somewhere else, as they easily could have done, they sought vindication by the state and pursued a lengthy litigation.¹²⁰ And the members of the Colorado Civil Rights Commission agreed with them about the depth of the insult, especially the one commissioner who compared Phillips's objections to historical episodes like slavery and the Holocaust.¹²¹ Like the florist in my classroom hypothetical, Phillips had violated the equality-as-sameness principle. His claim that he could not in good conscience participate in a gay wedding, because that would make him complicit in activity his religion regarded as sinful, erected a boundary that increasing numbers of Americans find rebarbative.¹²²

c. *The Activist State*

The third trend that *Masterpiece Cakeshop* reflects is a political one: the rise of activist administrative agencies at both the federal and state levels. The growth of government over the course of the twentieth century, starting with the Progressives in the early 1900s, picking up steam in the New Deal of the 1930s, and continuing in the Great Society of the 1960s, has been much discussed.¹²³ Notwithstanding occasional resistance by presidents and governors, the welfare state, "characterized by a high level of government action in all phases of economic and social life," is an inescapable fact of contemporary American politics.¹²⁴ Government rules affect virtually every aspect of our society, including commerce, communications, consumer transactions, education (at all levels), employment, food, health and safety, land use, and professional qualifications.

The expanding scope of the federal government illustrates the trend. Since the so-called "New Deal Settlement" of the 1930s, the federal government has had more or less plenary legislative power under the Constitution's Commerce Clause.¹²⁵ The Court has

¹¹⁹ See *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1724.

¹²⁰ See Transcript of Oral Argument at 62, *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 138 S.Ct. 1719 (2018) (No. 16-111) (Kennedy, J.) (noting availability of other bakeries to fill the couple's order).

¹²¹ See *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1729.

¹²² See *id.* at 1724 ("To Phillips, creating a wedding cake for a same-sex wedding would be equivalent to participating in a celebration that is contrary to his own most deeply held beliefs."). For sources on complicity arguments generally, see *supra* note xx.

¹²³ See, e.g., JOSEPH POSTELL, *BUREAUCRACY IN AMERICA* (2017).

¹²⁴ Richard A. Epstein, *Religious Liberty in the Welfare State*, 31 WM. AND MARY L. REV. 375, 375 (1990).

¹²⁵ On the "New Deal Settlement," see Lawrence B. Solum, *How NFIB v. Sibelius Affects the Constitutional Gestalt*, 91 WASH. U.L. REV. 1 (2013).

occasionally suggested, most recently in the first Obamacare case, some limits to the Commerce Clause power, but it has not reconsidered the basic understanding.¹²⁶ The Court has also allowed Congress effectively unlimited discretion in delegating authority to executive branch agencies, and has allowed those agencies considerable discretion in interpreting congressional mandates.¹²⁷ As a result, “[t]here is now virtually no significant aspect of life that is not in some way regulated by the federal government.”¹²⁸ Federal “agencies wield immense influence in shaping the conduct of individuals and organizations.”¹²⁹

Numbers tell part of the story. Consider federal government expenditures, which serve as a rough proxy for the state’s growing role in the American economy. If we focus on entitlement spending—programs like Medicare and Social Security—the increase since the New Deal is remarkable. Adjusting for inflation and population growth, the federal government spends about 15 times more today on entitlements than it did in 1940.¹³⁰ Federal spending on entitlements far outstrips spending on other government functions, such as national defense.¹³¹ Or consider another number, the page count of the Federal Register, “the daily repository of all proposed and final federal rules and regulations.”¹³² The Federal Register for the year 2016 came to almost 100,000 pages, “the highest level in its history,” about 20% higher than the previous year’s edition.¹³³ Page counts are an imperfect measure of government activity, of course.¹³⁴ But, as a rough guide, they do indicate the increasing activity of federal agencies. And, again, these numbers relate only to the federal government, not to state governments, which retain plenary legislative jurisdiction in our constitutional system.

To be sure, the current administration has announced a deregulation campaign at the federal level—“a fundamental shift” in policy which, among other things, directs “federal agencies to eliminate two regulations for each new one implemented and to reduce new regulatory costs to zero.”¹³⁵ As Adam White writes, however, this “very, very good

¹²⁶ *NFIB v. Sibelius*, 132 S.Ct. 2566 (2012). For a good overview of the doctrine, see *Solum*, *supra* note xx.

¹²⁷ On delegation, see Gary Lawson, *The Rise and Rise of the Administrative State*, 107 HARV. L. REV. 1231 (1994). On agency deference, see *id.* at 1247; Jeffrey A. Pojanowski, *Reason and Reasonableness in Review of Agency Decisions*, 104 NW. U. L. REV. 799, 802-04 (2010).

¹²⁸ Lawson, *supra* note xx, at 1236.

¹²⁹ Randy J. Kozel and Jeffrey A. Pojanowski, *Administrative Change*, 59 UCLA L. REV. 112, 114 (2011).

¹³⁰ WILLIAM VOEGELI, *NEVER ENOUGH: AMERICA’S LIMITLESS WELFARE STATE* 25 (2010). Voegeli’s figures exclude veterans’ programs and benefits, *id.* at 22, and measure the years 1940-2007.

¹³¹ *See id.* at 31-33.

¹³² Crews, “Ten Thousand Commandments: An Annual Snapshot of the Federal Regulatory State” 16 (Competitive Enterprise Institute 2017). *See generally* MCCONNELL ET AL., *supra* note xx, at 77 (using page count of Federal Register to illustrate growth of government).

¹³³ Crews, *supra* note xx.

¹³⁴ *Id.*

¹³⁵ Statement by OIRA Director Neomi Rao, “Introduction to the Fall 2017 Regulatory Plan” (Dec. 2017), <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/jsp/eAgenda/StaticContent/201710/VPStatement.pdf>.

start” faces substantial obstacles, including inevitable legal challenges.¹³⁶ Moreover, “the next Democratic administration could undo much of the Trump administration’s deregulatory effort every bit as quickly as the Trump administration undid the Obama administration’s regulatory actions.”¹³⁷ It will take more than a few years of deregulation to stop the expansion of government—and the current efforts at the federal level will have no impact at all at the state level. Claims that “the era of big government is over” have misled people in the past.¹³⁸

The growth of activist administrative agencies figures prominently in controversies like *Masterpiece Cakeshop*. In part, it’s simply a matter of volume. The more regulations, and the more subjects covered, the greater the potential for businesses to violate the law.¹³⁹ As my colleague Marc DeGirolami writes, where “government assumes an increasingly large role in the life of the citizenry, more injuries are transformed into legally (and perhaps even constitutionally) cognizable rights.”¹⁴⁰ But the volume of regulation alone does not explain things. The content matters, too. For reasons I will explain, administrative agencies inherently tend to favor the expansive concept of equality I have described. As a consequence, conflicts between the administrative state and the Traditionally Religious are apt to occur much more frequently.

Once again, Tocqueville offers useful insights as to why this should be so. Egalitarian democracies, he believed, tend to encourage a powerful state—because they promote an individualism that is unsustainable without it.¹⁴¹ In a democracy, the individual learns to rely on his own judgment, not received wisdom, in making his life choices.¹⁴² He learns to see himself as equal to everyone else; he sees no reason to defer to other people’s judgments or to the wisdom of traditional authority.¹⁴³ But this individualism, paradoxically, promotes a powerful state. The individual will from time to time feel his weakness and need the help of others. Subjecting oneself to one’s equals, or to traditional authority, would be unthinkable; but subjecting oneself to a state that stands

¹³⁶ White, “Trumping the Administrative State,” THE WEEKLY STANDARD (Jan. 23, 2018).

¹³⁷ *Id.*

¹³⁸ See, e.g., Gary Lawson, *One(?) Nation Overextended*, 94 B.U. L. REV. 1109, 1120 (2014).

¹³⁹ See Epstein, *supra* note 110, at 375; see also MCCONNELL ET AL., *supra* note 15, at 77 (“In a society that is pervasively regulated as ours now is, there are many more occasions for conflict between the government and religious believers.”).

¹⁴⁰ Marc O. DeGirolami, *Free Exercise By Moonlight*, 53 SAN DIEGO L. REV. 105, 131 (2016); see also Thomas C. Berg, *Religious Accommodation and the Welfare State*, 38 HARV. J. L. & GENDER 103 (2015).

¹⁴¹ For a discussion of individualism, by which Tocqueville meant a kind of withdrawal from and indifference to the affairs of other citizens, see DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, *supra* note 14, at II:ii.2, at 482.

¹⁴² “The inhabitant of the United States learns from birth that he must rely on himself to struggle against the evils and obstacles of life; he has only a defiant and restive regard for social authority and appeals to its power only when he cannot do without it.” *Id.* at I:ii.4, at 180

¹⁴³ See *id.* at II.iv.1, at 639.

alone above everyone would not only be thinkable but necessary.¹⁴⁴ Of the citizen in an egalitarian democracy, Tocqueville wrote:

His independence fills him with confidence and pride among his equals, and his debility makes him feel, from time to time, the need of the outside help that he cannot expect from any of them, since they are all impotent and cold. In this extremity, he naturally turns his regard to the immense being that rises in the midst of universal debasement. His needs and above all his desires constantly lead him back toward it, and in the end he views it as the unique and necessary support for individual weakness.¹⁴⁵

Only a powerful state has the ability to protect and provide for the individual who has abandoned traditional sources of belonging and authority.

Tocqueville famously thought that American democracy overcame this tendency to statism through its commitment to private associations, including religious associations, which provided competing sources of loyalty that kept the state in check.¹⁴⁶ But, over time, a democratic state will find such associations a threat and try to weaken them, all in the interests of human flourishing.¹⁴⁷ As Patrick Deneen writes, the logic of liberal democracy requires an activist state that breaks the hold of traditional authorities in order to promote a salutary personal autonomy. Individualism and the activist state thus reinforce one another—“a virtuous circle,” from the perspective of liberalism.¹⁴⁸ In Tocqueville’s words, the state willingly works for each individual’s happiness, asking in return only the authority to “knead him as it likes” and have the final say on what happiness shall mean.¹⁴⁹

In short, over time, a democratic state will tend to promote the equality as sameness principle through its administrative apparatus. The state will encourage people to think of themselves only as citizens and abandon traditional sources of identity that distinguish them.¹⁵⁰ It will work to break down the social boundaries that groups, including the Traditionally Religious, erect to maintain their distinctiveness and preserve their values. Indeed, as Philip Hamburger writes, in contemporary America, it is the small-o “orthodox” who need most to worry about government action—those “minorities that seek to preserve

¹⁴⁴ See *id.* at II.iv.3, at 645.

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* at II.iv.3, at 644 (footnote omitted).

¹⁴⁶ Movsesian, *supra* note xx, at 14.

¹⁴⁷ See DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA II.ii.4, at 485 (“Despotism, which in its nature is fearful, sees the most certain guarantee of its own duration in the isolation of men, and it ordinarily puts all its care into isolating them.”); see also Movsesian, *supra* note 11, at 14.

¹⁴⁸ DENEEN, *supra* notexx4, at 59.

¹⁴⁹ DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA II:iv.6, at 663.

¹⁵⁰ *Cf.* *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, 134 S.Ct. 1811, 1841 (2014) (Kagan, J., dissenting) (“A Christian, a Jew, a Muslim (and so forth)—each stands in the same relationship with her country, with her state and local communities, and with every level and body of government. So that when each person performs the duties or seeks the benefits of citizenship, she does so not as an adherent to one or another religion, but simply as an American.”).

their distinctive beliefs in the face of majoritarian pressures to conform to more universal liberal views.”¹⁵¹ In a society like ours, which prizes equality and which deeply suspects tradition and communal authority, “orthodoxy” is itself “unorthodox,”¹⁵² even when people voluntarily choose it, and therefore occasions serious conflicts that our courts ultimately must resolve.

In twenty-first century America, this dynamic appears in various actions by government agencies that impinge on traditional religious associations and identities. Government has always impinged on the activities of religious associations in America, going back to the early Republic.¹⁵³ But the potential for conflict has become much larger today. The Traditionally Religious face an expanding set of rules and policies that promote new understandings of equality, particularly with respect to sexuality and gender, along with an ever-expanding bureaucracy dedicated to enforcing them.¹⁵⁴ As Richard Epstein writes, civil rights offices exist today “in virtually every government agency, most notably in the agencies that regulate housing, education, and employment.”¹⁵⁵ The Traditionally Religious face increasing pressure to accept the new understandings and comply with the new rules, or face a “looming threat of a wide range of legal sanctions.”¹⁵⁶

Masterpiece Cakeshop offers a good example. The Colorado Civil Rights Commission ruled against Jack Phillips in order to promote equality for same-sex marriage, a concept that relatively few would have endorsed even a decade ago, even on the progressive left.¹⁵⁷ It imposed significant regulatory burdens on him, including training and quarterly reporting requirements that would have demanded significant time and money.¹⁵⁸ One commissioner even hinted that, with views like his, maybe Phillips should think about doing business in a different state.¹⁵⁹ Phillips decided to resist. But not many businesses will do so. Not many will be willing to bear such burdens or to relocate. The more likely result will be that Traditional Religious businesspeople like Phillips abandon, or at least soften, their convictions in order to make a living. Of course the commissioners were trying to promote human flourishing and protect gay couples from indignities in the marketplace;

¹⁵¹ Philip Hamburger, *Exclusion and Equality: How Exclusion from the Political Process Renders Religious Liberty Unequal*, 90 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1919, 1929 (2015)

¹⁵² *Id.*

¹⁵³ See, e.g., Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The First Disestablishment: Limits on Church Property and Power before the Civil War*, 162 U. PA. L. REV. 307, 311 (2014).

¹⁵⁴ On the centrality of sexuality in contemporary conflicts over religious liberty, see Horwitz, *supra* note xx, at 160.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Epstein, *Freedom of Association and Antidiscrimination Law: An Imperfect Reconciliation*, Library of Law and Liberty, <http://www.libertylawsite.org/liberty-forum/freedom-of-association-and-antidiscrimination-law-an-imperfect-reconciliation/> (Jan. 2, 2016).

¹⁵⁶ *Id.*

¹⁵⁷ President Obama notably did not endorse marriage equality in his first campaign in 2008, though he did endorse it in time for his second. Saikrishna Bangalore Prakash, *Missing Links in the President's Evolution on Same-Sex Marriage*, 81 FORDHAM L. REV. 553, 554 (2012).

¹⁵⁸ *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 138 S.Ct. at 1726.

¹⁵⁹ *Id.* at 1729.

that's not the point. The point is that in imposing these burdens, the Commission acted in a way calculated to advance the principle of equality as sameness and weaken the hold of traditional religious commitments. As Rod Dreher writes, we can anticipate many more such conflicts in the future.¹⁶⁰

IV. *Conclusion: After Masterpiece Cakeshop*

In short, *Masterpiece Cakeshop* reflects important cultural and political trends. Those trends will continue to shape future conflicts between anti-discrimination norms, on the one hand, and religious freedom, on the other—disputes, to paraphrase Justice Kennedy, which set the right of gays and lesbians to obtain goods and services in the marketplace without experiencing affronts against the right of religious persons to have their sincere beliefs respected by our government.¹⁶¹ In the space remaining, I would like to offer three predictions for what may lie ahead.

First, conflicts like the one in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* will become more frequent and harder for our society to negotiate. The equality-as-sameness principle has expanded to cover sexual identity and behavior in a way few foresaw even a decade ago.¹⁶² The principle continues to expand, driven by its own inner logic. As Adrian Vermeule observes, the “triumph of same-sex marriage” has been “followed ... rapidly by the opening of a new regulatory and juridical frontier, the recognition of transgender identity.”¹⁶³ Indeed, shortly after Jack Phillips won his case at the Supreme Court, the Colorado Civil Rights Division found probable cause that he had again violated CADA, this time by refusing to create a cake for a customer who wished to celebrate the anniversary of her coming out as transgender.¹⁶⁴ Phillips has filed an action for an injunction against the Colorado authorities, again alleging a violation of his constitutional rights.¹⁶⁵ Not only may the Supreme Court soon have to settle whether vendors have a free exercise right to decline to provide services for transgender coming out ceremonies. The Court may have to do so in another case involving Jack Phillips himself.

The new understanding of sexual identity and behavior has become a flash point in our culture wars. Nones, especially younger Nones, embrace the new understanding, as do

¹⁶⁰ On the challenges conservative Christians, in particular, may expect to face in the marketplace, see ROD DREHER, *THE BENEDICT OPTION* 179-94 (2017).

¹⁶¹ *Id.* at 1732.

¹⁶² *Cf.* Horwitz, *supra* note xx, at 173-74 (discussing the rapid change in public acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage).

¹⁶³ Adrian Vermeule, *Liturgy of Liberalism* FIRST THINGS (Jan. 2017), at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/01/liturgy-of-liberalism>.

¹⁶⁴ See Colorado Civil Rights Division Finding, available here, <http://www.adfmedia.org/files/MasterpieceCakeshopProbableCauseDetermination.pdf>. [not sure how to cite].

¹⁶⁵ See Phillips Complaint, available here, <http://www.adfmedia.org/files/MasterpieceCakeshopComplaint.pdf> [not sure how to cite this].

regulatory agencies, which seek to promote it in American life.¹⁶⁶ But the Traditionally Religious, who remain comparatively numerous, continue to oppose it. Some of them, at least, will continue to resist government efforts to enforce it. That each side in the conflict cares deeply about the outcome, and finds the other's position increasingly unfamiliar and offensive, will make compromise much more difficult.¹⁶⁷

It is true, of course, that the Traditionally Religious may themselves come to accept the new understanding over time. According to the Pew Survey I quoted earlier, acceptance of homosexuality does appear to be “growing rapidly even among religious groups” that traditionally have “strongly opposed” same-sex relations.¹⁶⁸ If the Traditionally Religious were to accept the new understanding of sexuality, conflicts like *Masterpiece Cakeshop* would fade from view, much like conflicts over serving African-Americans in public places thankfully have disappeared from American life. But it seems more likely that those Traditionally Religious who accept the new understanding will gradually drift away from religion entirely and join the Nones. The mainline Protestant denominations that have embraced new norms about homosexuality—for example, the Episcopalians and Presbyterians¹⁶⁹—have continued to experience sharp declines in membership, even as membership in conservative churches has remained relatively stable.¹⁷⁰ Endorsing the new sexual norms has not kept believers in the pews. Religious polarization, in other words, seems likely to continue.

Second, the law in this area likely will remain unsettled and deeply contested for some time to come, for two reasons. First, as I explained earlier, the law of religious exemptions is already something of a “patchwork.”¹⁷¹ Different jurisdictions apply different tests in different circumstances. For example, for purposes of the Free Exercise Clause, the Court's 1990 decision in *Employment Division v. Smith* indicates that no constitutional right to a religious exemption exists where a law is neutral and generally applicable.¹⁷² In circumstances where the state has not shown neutrality towards religion, however, or

¹⁶⁶ On Nones' acceptance of homosexuality, see *supra* p. xx.

¹⁶⁷ See INAZU, *supra* note xx, at 2-3 (discussing growing polarization over values in American life). For an interesting discussion of how mutually-incomprehensible values make the resolution of social conflict between secular and traditionally religious groups difficult, see JONATHAN HAIDT, *THE RIGHTEOUS MIND* (2012).

¹⁶⁸ Pew Report (Nov. 3, 2015), at 29/34.

¹⁶⁹ The Episcopal Church reported a 19% decline in active members over the ten-year period from 2007 to 2017. Episcopal Church, “Episcopal Domestic Fast Facts: 2017, at <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/22938>. The Presbyterian Church (USA) lost almost five percent of its membership in 2017 alone; since 2005, it has lost two out of every five active members. Jeffrey Walton, “Presbyterian Official: ‘I Don’t Despair’ as Members Vanish,” *JUICY ECUMENISM* (June 4, 2018), at <https://juicyecumenism.com/2018/06/04/presbyterian-decline/>.

¹⁷⁰ MARK CHAVES, *AMERICAN RELIGION* 87 (2011). For an interesting discussion of how doctrinal leniency generally can lead to a decline in religious commitment, see Thomas C. Berg, *Partly Acculturated Religious Activity: A Case for Accommodating Religious Nonprofits*, 91 *NOTRE DAME L. REV.* 1341, 1355-58 (2016).

¹⁷¹ See *supra* text accompanying note xx (quoting MCCONNELL ET AL., *supra* note xx, at 149).

¹⁷² 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

where a law is not generally applicable, a different rule applies under a later case, *Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah*.¹⁷³ Before *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, most commentators understood that *Lukumi* called for the compelling interest test in those circumstances—the government could substantially burden religious exercise if it had a compelling reason for doing so and had chosen the least restrictive means.¹⁷⁴ Justice Kennedy's opinion in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* suggests, though, that the government's failure to act neutrally amounts to a per se violation, even without going through the compelling interest analysis.¹⁷⁵ It remains to be seen what the Court will make of this suggestion in future cases.

Federal constitutional doctrine is thus unsettled. With respect to federal statutory law, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) requires the compelling interest test—though, as I will explain in a moment, saying that doesn't clarify things too much.¹⁷⁶ With respect to state constitutional and statutory law, substantial variation exists.¹⁷⁷ Some states apply the *Smith* test as a matter of state constitutional law, while others apply some version of the compelling-interest test.¹⁷⁸ Some states have adopted a version of RFRA and apply the compelling-interest test as a matter of state statutory law; some do not.¹⁷⁹ In short, generalizations are difficult.

Nonetheless, notwithstanding the doctrinal uncertainty, the compelling interest test remains the leading test in this area—under *Lukumi*, under RFRA and its state analogues, or under state constitutional provisions—and will provide the rule of decision in most cases in which a vendor seeks a religious exemption from anti-discrimination laws.¹⁸⁰ But—and this is the second reason for my prediction that the law will remain unsettled—the compelling-interest test itself is deeply indeterminate. It turns on vague concepts that provide little guidance in specific cases.¹⁸¹ The test depends almost entirely on the intuitions of individual judges, which of course differ greatly.¹⁸² In the recent *Hobby Lobby* case, for example, in which plaintiffs sought a religious exemption under RFRA from the so-called Contraception Mandate, the Justices differed strongly among themselves on the

¹⁷³ 508 U.S. 520 (1993).

¹⁷⁴ See, e.g., Lund, *supra* note xx, at 375.

¹⁷⁵ See discussion *supra* p. xx.

¹⁷⁶ Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, 42 U.S.C.A. § 2000bb-1.

¹⁷⁷ MCCONNELL ET AL., *supra* note xx, at 189-90.

¹⁷⁸ See *id.* at 198; see also DURHAM & SCHARFFS, *supra* note xx, at 231 (noting the state high courts that have adopted the *Smith* analysis for state constitutional purposes).

¹⁷⁹ MCCONNELL ET AL., *supra* note xx, at 189-90.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *id.* at 198 (noting that “more than half of the states currently apply the compelling-interest test to free exercise claims”); DURHAM & SCHARFFS, *supra* note xx, at 231 (observing that “it seems likely that a majority of jurisdictions will ultimately maintain strict scrutiny protections”).

¹⁸¹ See *Priests for Life v. Dept. of Health & Human Serv.*, 808 F.3d 1, 21 (Kavanaugh, J., dissenting from the denial of rehearing en banc) (discussing indeterminacy of the compelling-interest standard).

¹⁸² See *supra* p. xx.

meaning and application of all three concepts: “substantial burden,” “compelling interest,” and “least restrictive means.”¹⁸³

Indeed, in a society as polarized as ours, how could judges’ views on these concepts not differ? Is requiring a Christian vendor to provide services on an equal basis for gay and straight weddings a substantial burden on the vendor’s religion? Does the state have a compelling interest in ending discrimination that would justify that burden, even if other nearby vendors would readily provide those services? Does the state have other, reasonable alternative measures available to it that would burden the vendor’s religious exercise to a lesser degree? The answers depend on one’s perception of the nature and value of religion, the true meaning of equality, the proper scope of government action, and many other factors. The questions do not submit to easy, objective criteria on which everyone agrees, certainly not in our society, today. In a society in which we cannot agree on what is good, how can we agree on what is a compelling interest?

It’s possible, of course, that these indeterminacy problems will hasten the end of the compelling interest test. The test has drawn strong criticism from judges and scholars for decades, as far back as the Court’s 1990 *Smith* decision, which sought to do away with the test, or at least to sharply confine it.¹⁸⁴ But the test has shown remarkable durability. As I have explained, the Court reaffirmed the test, at least in some circumstances, only a few terms after *Smith*, in *Lukumi*.¹⁸⁵ Justices Gorsuch and Alito hinted at their disapproval of *Smith* in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* itself.¹⁸⁶ And, in 1993, Congress reinstated the test in RFRA, by a unanimous vote in the House and a vote of 97-3 in the Senate.¹⁸⁷ It’s not clear RFRA would pass today—but it’s not clear that a vote to repeal it would succeed, either.¹⁸⁸ Last year, in the run-up to the Court’s decision in *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, Democratic members of Congress introduced the “Do No Harm Act,” which seeks to amend RFRA to make clear that the act does not apply to federal anti-discrimination laws.¹⁸⁹ The Do No Harm Act would not repeal RFRA, only limit its application. And yet the new act has not attracted a single Republican cosponsor, in either the House or the Senate.¹⁹⁰ Repealing, or

¹⁸³ *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores*, 134 S.Ct. 2751 (2014).

¹⁸⁴ *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

¹⁸⁵ *Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 (1993).

¹⁸⁶ See Kendrick and Schwartzman, *supra* note xx, at 162.

¹⁸⁷ L.A. Powe, Jr., *The Court’s Constitution*, 12 U. PA. J. CONST. L. 529, 541 (2010).

¹⁸⁸ Richard W. Garnett, *Religious Accommodations and—among—Civil Rights: Separation, Toleration, and Accommodation*. 88 S. CAL. L. REV. 493, 501 (2015) (“It is, as many have observed, extremely unlikely that RFRA would be adopted today, let alone enacted with near-unanimous and bipartisan support.”).

¹⁸⁹ Do No Harm Act, H.R. 3222, 115th Cong. (2017). The Senate version of the bill, which bears the same name, is S. 2918, 115th Cong. (2018).

¹⁹⁰ For the House sponsors, see Cosponsors: H.R. 3222—115th Congress (2017-2018), at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3222/cosponsors?r=2>. For the Senate cosponsors, see Cosponsors: S. 2918—115th Congress (2017-2018), at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2918/cosponsors>.

even amending, RFRA will require a bipartisan coalition, and it is difficult to see how a coalition could form in our current political environment.

For American politics is becoming more and more polarized on the basis of religion—something that has not been true, historically.¹⁹¹ Religion is now a strong element of partisan identity.¹⁹² Today's Democratic and Republican Parties have dramatically different religious profiles. According to a Pew survey conducted earlier this year, about 70% of Republicans and people who lean Republican believe in the God of the Bible—they are the Traditionally Religious.¹⁹³ By contrast, only 45% of Democrats and Democratic-leaningers say they believe in the God of the Bible.¹⁹⁴ Another Pew survey revealed that Nones now make up the largest “religious” grouping in the Democratic Party—about 30%.¹⁹⁵ To be sure, some progressives are religious believers, a group some have called the “Religious Left.”¹⁹⁶ But this group has relatively little impact within the contemporary Democratic Party, and it's not clear how much impact the group will have in the future.¹⁹⁷

In this political environment, a move by one party to tinker with RFRA would immediately raise suspicions on the part of the other. Achieving agreement on any changes seems unlikely. As a result, the compelling interest test seems here to stay. And that observation leads to my third, final, prediction. *Masterpiece Cakeshop* suggests that judicial appointments, certainly on the federal level, will become even more heated and partisan than they already are. Because the compelling interest test is so indeterminate, so dependent on the prior commitments of the people doing the judging, the identity of the judges is extremely important. Each side in our polarized society understands how crucial it is to have judges with the “right” intuitions about religion and equality on the bench. Each, therefore, will fight long and hard to ensure that such judges are appointed—and, conversely, that judges with the “wrong” intuitions are not. Having judges with the “wrong” intuitions about religion and equality could lead to negative outcomes in cases about which both sides care deeply. The stakes are too high to be ignored.

¹⁹¹ See Andrew Koppelman, *Gay Rights, Religious Accommodations, and the Purposes of Anti-Discrimination Law*, 88 S. Cal. L. Rev. 619, 654 (2015).

¹⁹² Mark Movsesian, “The New Divide in American Politics,” FIRST THINGS (May 23, 2018), at <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/05/the-new-divide-in-american-politics>.

¹⁹³ Pew Research Center, “When Americans Say They Believe in God, What Do They Mean?” (April 25, 2018), at <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/04/25/when-americans-say-they-believe-in-god-what-do-they-mean/>.

¹⁹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁹⁵ Pew Report (Nov. 3, 2015), at <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.

¹⁹⁶ See, e.g., STEVEN H. SHIFFRIN, *THE RELIGIOUS LEFT AND CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS* (2009).

¹⁹⁷ For explanations why the religious left will have difficulty influencing progressive politics, see, for example, Massimo Fagioli, *Francis and the ‘Religious Left’: It Won’t Be An Easy Match*, *Commonweal* (July 30, 2018), at <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/francis-religious-left>; Daniel Cox, *Don’t Bet on the Emergence of a ‘Religious Left’*, *Five Thirty Eight Blog* (Apr. 20, 2017), at <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/dont-bet-on-the-emergence-of-a-religious-left/>.

The late Justice Scalia recognized this dynamic long ago, in a different context, in his dissent in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.¹⁹⁸ Because the Court's constitutional jurisprudence had come to turn on the personal values of the Justices, he observed, the electorate had every right to focus on nominees' values during the selection process. "[C]onfirmation hearings for new Justices *should* deteriorate into question-and-answer sessions in which Senators go through a list of their constituents' most favored and most disfavored alleged constitutional rights, and seek the nominee's commitment to support or oppose them," he wrote.¹⁹⁹ "Value judgments, after all, should be voted on, not dictated; and if our Constitution has somehow accidentally committed them to the Supreme Court, at least we can have a sort of plebiscite each time a new nominee to that body is put forward."²⁰⁰ For Justice Scalia, of course, interrogating nominees about their personal value judgments was a matter for regret. But, good or bad, the compelling interest test, which makes judges' value judgments about religion and equality crucial to the outcome of a case, creates strong incentives to do so.

In short, the new religious partisanship will only amplify the already intense acrimony over judicial selection. Given their religious profiles, the two parties will likely nominate judges with very different views on the conflict between anti-discrimination laws and religious liberty; each party will be very wary of the other's nominees. On the whole, given the party's religious makeup, one would expect Democrats to nominate judges with skeptical views of traditional religion—and therefore, less favorable views on exemptions for the Traditionally Religious from anti-discrimination laws. One would expect the opposite, on the whole, from judges Republican administrations nominate. Again, because everyone knows how high the stakes are, the judicial confirmation wars will likely be quite passionate and divisive for the foreseeable future. The Kavanaugh hearings are only a start.

* * *

Masterpiece Cakeshop is a narrow decision. The case turns on rather unique facts and does little to resolve conflicts between our anti-discrimination laws, on the one hand, and our commitment to religious freedom, on the other. But the narrowness of the case's holding is deceiving. In fact, *Masterpiece Cakeshop* reflects very broad cultural and political trends that drive those conflicts and shape their resolution: a deepening religious polarization between Nones and the Traditionally Religious, an expansive understanding of equality as sameness, and an activist state dedicated to enforcing that understanding in large areas of our common life.

¹⁹⁸ 505 U.S. 833, 1000-01 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

¹⁹⁹ *Id.* at 1001 (emphasis in original).

²⁰⁰ *Id.*

As everyone knows, law and culture have a mutually-reinforcing relationship.²⁰¹ Court rulings influence the way our culture perceives social conflicts: which arguments seem legitimate and which parties deserve our sympathies. But culture, in turn, influences law. I have explored here the cultural and political trends that form the backdrop to our law's attempt to resolve our competing commitments to equality and to religious freedom. Those trends, which *Masterpiece Cakeshop* so clearly reflects, will continue to shape our law for decades to come.

²⁰¹ See Naomi Mezey, *Law as Culture*, 13 YALE J.L. & HUMAN. 35, 37 (2001) ("mutually constitutive nature of the relationship"). For a good introductory essay on the subject of law and culture, see Menachem Mautner, *Three Approaches to Law and Culture*, 96 CORNELL L. REV. 839 (2011).