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Pocketbook vs. Good Book

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Distinctly Catholic

Alexander Burns at Politico has an interesting article about the growing divide within the Republican Party between social conservatives and those who want to focus on economic issues and cutting the size of government.

You can make too much of this "divide." A strong commitment to capitalism has characterized the Religious Right starting with Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority in 1979. Then, of course, the commitment to capitalism dovetailed with the anti-Communism of religious conservatives. But, make no mistake about it, the sense of American exceptionalism that characterizes the Christian Right, infused with providential zeal, has always seen capitalism as an expression of that exceptionalism.

The "divide" is tactical: In the face of younger Republican voters with more libertarian sensibilities, especially on the issue of gay marriage, and an electorate that wants the government to focus on job-growth, can religious conservatives allow their social agenda items to be set aside. In early 1981, Falwell backed the Reagan Administration's decision to focus on its economic agenda. In the sequel, Reagan gave only half-hearted support to items important to the religious right, such as a school prayer amendment. He never managed, nor have any of his successors, to walk the short distance from the Oval Office to the National Mall to address the annual Right-to-Life March in person. That history notwithstanding, I suspect that the religious right will give the eventual Republican nominee some leeway and that this "divide" will be less important in 2012 than people think. But, who knows? By definition, the Religious Right are the true believers in the GOP and may not think tactical considerations should trump what are, for them, the truly important issues facing America.

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