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or war, exchanges ambassadors, and prevents foreign invasions, while the judicial branch punishes criminals. But Montesquieu could not determine whether the executive or the legislative branch was to dominate.

The Founders' uneasy solution was to give the U.S. president powers "weak in theory [but] strong in practice." In theory, the president, Mansfield says, is an "errand boy" for Congress, carrying out its laws. But he also has certain special powers (to veto legislation, to command the armed forces). Moreover, he is vested with "the executive power" which, in practice, gives him wide latitude. He takes an oath not to execute the laws, but to faithfully execute his *office*. This Constitutional ambivalence, says Mansfield, is recognition of "the ambivalence of human freedom against, or in concert with, the things that limit and enslave men."

NASA's Troubles

"Accountability in the Public Sector: Lessons from the Challenger Tragedy" by Barbara S. Romzek and Melvin J. Dubnick, in *Public Administration Review* (May-June 1987), 1120 G St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

What caused the space shuttle Challenger to explode 73 seconds after lift-off on January 28, 1986?

The president's Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident seemed to provide clear and succinct answers. The so-called Rogers Commission blamed two factors—design flaws in the solid rocket boosters, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) errant decision to launch in marginal weather. But Romzek and Dubnick, both professors of public administration at the University of Kansas, argue that the commission's focus was too narrow; moreover, its reform proposals, they say, are likely to lead to more, not fewer failures.

Romzek and Dubnick believe that NASA blundered because it became accountable to too many parties, including the White House, Congress, various federal agencies, and the press.

When NASA was founded in 1958, the authors say, it was a simpler, less political organization. Its mission, at least after 1961, was clear: by the end of the decade, they were to land a man on the moon and return him safely to Earth. Aeronautical engineers filled the agency's ranks and made key decisions. NASA became one of "the most innovative organizations (public or private) in recent American history."

During the late 1960s, however, members of Congress and the press began to doubt whether the space effort was worth the cost. To survive, the agency had to become more politically and bureaucratically astute. NASA's future looked promising when administrator Dr. James Fletcher (1971-77) won White House and congressional approval for a continuing, partly commercial venture: the space shuttle.

To control the shuttle's costs, the authors say, NASA decentralized and contracted out many of its tasks. Meanwhile, members of Congress and the press expected the shuttle to perform without a hitch. On the eve of Challenger's last flight, CBS News anchorman Dan Rather announced another "costly, red-faces-all-around space shuttle delay."

After its Challenger investigation, the Rogers Commission called for

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the creation of an independent Solid Rocket Motor Design Oversight Committee, and a separate Office of Safety, Reliability and Quality Assurance to monitor NASA. But such reforms, the authors believe, would exacerbate the agency's troubles by relying increasingly on "enhanced bureaucratic structures," and "legal accountability mechanisms."

The Challenger exploded, Romzek and Dubnick argue, not because such "mechanisms" failed, but because, for a technology-oriented agency like NASA, they are inappropriate altogether.

Pulpit Power?

"An Experimental Study of the Influence of Religious Elites on Public Opinion" by Bruce McKeown and James M. Carlson, in *Political Communication and Persuasion* (Vol. 4, #2, 1987), 1755 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Ste. 324, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Churches have become more politicized in recent years, as liberal activists and conservative evangelists have used the pulpit to inveigh against everything from the evils of pornography to the evils of apartheid. But does all this sermonizing have any political impact?

Probably not, say McKeown and Carlson, political scientists at Seattle Pacific University and Providence College, respectively. The "conventional wisdom" that preachers have the ability to sway millions of Americans may be false.

The authors asked two groups of Catholic and evangelical Protestant students whether they agreed or disagreed with five statements about welfare, tax reform, public service jobs, military deterrence, and nuclear missile targeting. One-third of the students were told the statements were written by Billy Graham; one-third were told the statements came from recent pastoral letters by the American Catholic bishops; and one-third were not told the statements' source.

McKeown and Carlson found that authorship had "no influence" over student belief in any statement. Catholic students rated statements attributed to Graham only two-tenths of a point lower (on a ten-point scale) than when the statements were attributed to the Catholic bishops. Protestant students rated statements attributed to Catholic bishops only two-tenths of a point lower than when the same statements were attributed to Graham. In seven out of 10 cases, students' support was highest when the statements were not attributed to any source.

Billy Graham, the authors conclude, "may be a fading star in the political heavens of ascendant fundamentalism and an anachronism in the political domain." Because the Catholic bishops provoked neither strong support among Catholic students nor strong disdain among Protestant students, the opinions the bishops express may well be equally irrelevant to both denominations.

The authors conclude that "the recent politicization of American religion" has not changed the political beliefs of church congregations. Americans, they suggest, have deeply rooted political convictions, not easily altered by a sermon or a "policy statement."