

**POLITICS & GOVERNMENT**

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."