ABSTRACT. What are the effects of civil religion on American society and culture? As a phenomena which presumably serves to integrate the political with the religious sectors of the national culture in the minds of citizens, it would seem that civil religion should have political consequences. Limited work has shown that civil religious beliefs help predict one's preference among presidential candidates. However, there have been no tests of civil religion as an indicator of public policy preferences. This investigation explores such relationships. While civil religion significantly related to stands on various public policies, these relationships are weak except in comparison to many other types of social indicators. Furthermore, civil religion's political impact on public policy orientations would appear less than its impact on the selection of presidential candidates.

In recent years, civil religion has come to be conceptualized primarily as a belief which is neither completely political nor entirely church religious. The belief asserts a divinity superior to the nation and to sectarian varieties of religion. In such a manner, a nation of citizens as well as its churches and their members are held accountable to the purposes of the higher being which exercises judgement over their behavior.

After Bellah (1974, p. 255), the central tenet of American civil religion "... is that the nation is not an ultimate end in itself but stands under transcendent judgement and has value only insofar as it realizes, partially and fragmentarily at best, a 'higher' law". Further, Bellah (1975, p. 3) defines civil religion as "... that religious dimension, found in the life of every people, through which it interprets its historical experience in the light of transcendent reality".

As a phenomena which presumably serves to integrate the political with the religious sectors of a national culture in the minds of citizens, it would seem that civil religion should have political consequences. For example, the United States presidency is acknowledged by Bellah (1967, 1974) and others as a central role in the American civil religion. In a test of the hypothesis that civil religion should influence voter choices between presidential candidates, one study (Wimberley, 1980) found that civil religion ranks with such customarily high correlates and predictors of presidential elections as poli-
tical party and political beliefs. In a separate analysis (Christenson and Wimberley, 1978), it was discovered that while civil religious commitments had no relationship to whether people voted, the civil religious were slightly inclined toward Democratic party membership and conservative political identities.

Here, the issue of civil religion's political effects is to be extended beyond choices among candidates and voting behavior — although further work is merited along those lines — to stands on public policy issues. Again, the general proposition is that commitment to a transcendent civil religion should influence orientations within the more mundane political realm. Therefore, if people believe in a civil religion, this should be reflected in their political outlooks.

More specifically, it is first hypothesized that differences in civil religious beliefs should correlate with differences in positions on public policies. Secondly, the correlation between civil religion and various policy positions should be relatively strong in comparison to other social indicators which also may serve as correlates of public policy stances.

I. RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Data to test these hypotheses were obtained from a statewide study of policy preferences among North Carolinians in 1975. Households were sampled through telephone listings across the state. The 68 percent response rate included 3054 usable returns from the 4502 sample members who could be reached through the mail.

Sample members were asked to indicate whether they felt more or less state funds should be spent on a variety of government services and programs. They could respond to each item by checking whether the state should spend less tax money on it, the same amount as was then being spent, more funds but without increasing taxes, or more funds even if taxes had to be increased. These issues included 36 areas of health, education, cultural amenities, welfare services, crime, transportation, recreation, state economic promotion, consumer protection, and environmental protection.

The questionnaire also contained a civil religion index. It consisted of four items which carried five-point endorsements from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These items were: (1) America is God's chosen nation today; (2) To me, the flag of the United States is sacred; (3) Human rights come from God