

**AMERICAN PROPHETS BY JACK JENKINS**  
**SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 1: FAITH IN PUBLIC LIFE**

"A window into one of the great, untold stories of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Obamacare."

"The legacy-defining achievement of Barack Obama's presidency also represented the triumphant culmination of a long-term collaboration between grassroots faith groups and a religion-savvy advocacy infrastructure in Washington backed by prominent institutional progressives. Put is another way, if it weren't for the Religious Left, the ACA probably wouldn't exist."

"The modern Religious Left's decentralized nature may not have the same basic laser-focused legislative agenda as the Religious Right's inside-the-Beltway power brokers, but the Religious Left's passion, combined with an admittedly ephemeral, and sometimes heavily Catholic religion-and-politics apparatus that helps grassroots activists influence the influential, has proven enough to force laws through Congress, stoke the ire of the Vatican, and stare down Donald Trump."

### **THE SEARCH FOR GOD INSIDE THE BELTWAY**

"Back in 2003 John Podesta (who would go on to serve in Barack Obama's White House) believed that Republicans had co-opted the perception of religion in the public square to the point where, as he put it, 'To be religious was to be conservative.'" Podesta kept this in mind when he founded the **Center for American Progress (CAP)**. "CAP would also play a role in the realm of faith." Podesta once declared that his faith was "really what makes me a progressive."

**PICO National Network**, a California-based organization, affiliated with **Faith in Action (Gordon Whitman)** (vehemently rejects the 'Religious Left' label) – relaunched "after the 2004 election as a national network of congregations and interfaith coalitions" transforming "the group into the single largest bloc of mostly progressive-leaning faith-based activists in the country...(to protect) "access to health care, particularly Medicaid.

06/04/2004: **Podesta** and **Melody Barnes** collaborate to convene a gathering of 400 clergy, advocates, and scholars for a faith and policy conference. "Attendees ranged from religious progressives such as **Jim Wallis of Sojourners**, to more issue specific leaders, such as **Sister Carol Keehan of Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA)**."

**Res Publica (Ricken Patel, Tom Pravda, and Tom Perriello)** (A group of young public sector professionals dedicated to promoting good governance, virtuous civic cultures, and deliberative public discourse globally) drafted a report, '**The Future of the Progressive Faith Movement**.' "There was a strong sense that the politics of greed, othering and militarism demanded a moral response." It "claimed the movement was plagued by a dearth of media training, struggled to articulate a uniform vision, lacked a firm connection between grass-roots efforts and national actors, and suffered from deep challenges of leadership, turf-battling, personality-conflict, ego-competition, and incompetence."

**CAP (Podesta)** envisioned **Faith in Public Life (FPL)**, an organizational anchor for the Religious Left, a strategy hub to coordinate disparate groups and develop overarching media strategies for campaigns. "CAP hired **Rev. Jennifer Butler** as CEO of FPL and incubated FPL at the think tank before **spinning it off in 2008**.

**January 2005: CAP** rolled out its first universal healthcare plan, one that would be credited with laying the groundwork for what became the **ACA**. Podesta: "The push for **healthcare as a basic human right connected very strongly** to people who saw their obligation not just as citizens, but as **believers**."

**Spring 2005: Tom Perriello (Res Publica)** invited 20 of his fellow Washington-based religious progressives to join him for a 3-day retreat at Grassmere, Charlottesville, VA. The 'Grassmere Group,' as it came to be known spawned "several faith-related groups geared toward aiding progressive legislative battles: **Catholics in Action for the Common Good (CACG)-Tom Perriello and Alexia Kelly** and **Catholics United – Chris Korzen and James Salt**."

**Res Publica** coordinated with the National Council of Churches to create **Faithful America.org**, a progressive Christian version of MoveOn

### **THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION**

**2006: Sr. Carol Keehan of CHA** irons "out an internal list for health care policies"

**November 2008: Sr. Carol Keehan (CHA)** was brought in to **help craft** what would become the **ACA** and worked constantly to get a 'yes' in support of the bill. The **US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)** "was not endorsing, but not opposing." **Sister Carol Keehan** reaches out to **Cardinal Francis George**, President of **USCCB** many times, but (the cardinal) did not respond. The bishop's posture maddened Keehan."

Rev. Jennifer Butler, Faith in Public Life (FPL) negotiated with the USCCB to revise the ACA bill in ways amenable to both sides of the abortion debate. She, like Keehan (CHA) wasn't sure the USCCB was operating in good faith.

"In the lead up to a major vote on the ACA the White House hosted a conference call with representatives of the. The (USCCB) moved to end the call that day, but representatives inadvertently failed to terminate the call. White House officials (were) able to overhear them...initiate a separate conference call with the opponents of the bill...the USCCB allegedly began discussing strategies for how to stop the ACA."

Summer 2009: The Tea Party pressures Democrats at Town Hall meetings to vote against the ACA bill.

August 2009: Faith in Action, Faith in Public Life (FPL), Faithful America, Sojourners, Catholics United, Catholics in Action for the Common Good (CACG) collaborated for 40 days on Health Reform, which "included 50 prayer vigils, rallies in 45 cities, cable ads featuring evangelical, Catholic, and mainline Protestants pastors" supporting healthcare reform. As Whitman of Faith in Action said, "If you have the major religious leadership in a state standing there, it's easier for you to stand there (with them) if you're and elected official."

December 18, 2009: FPL coordinated a letter signed by 2 dozen Nebraska leaders who agreed to defend Ben Nelson, Nebraska Senator in supporting the ACA. Nelson continued his support of the ACA.

2010: "Sister Carol Keehan (CHA) (receiving no responses from Cardinal George USCCB), declared that 'the ACA was not perfect but it was a major first step.' Sr. Simone Campbell of Network said she would support CHA if it got pushback from USCCB; she put together a sign-on letter for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)...Then Cardinal George of USCCB insisted that the bill must be opposed because it did not do enough to ban federal funding for abortion...(Sr. Simone's) sign-on letter boasted **59 nuns**, most of whom were **leaders** of major orders...**representing** nearly **60,000 nuns nationwide**. It said: 'Despite claims to the contrary, the Senate bill will not provide taxpayer funding for elective abortions...We urge you to vote 'yes' for life by voting yes for healthcare reform in the (ACA).'" It was a staggering power move in direct defiance of the bishops.

Faith in Public Life (FPL) began managing media operations for the nuns, hosting press conferences featuring Sr. Simone Campbell (Network) and pro-life Democratic House members. Catholics United blasted its email lists with messages encouraging supporters to call Cardinal George (USCCB) 'to get the facts straight.'

March 21, 2010: The House passes the Senate version of the Senate ACE bill, 219 to 212 vote. 2 days later President Obama signed the bill into law

## THE LONG GAME

"The passage of the ACA came at a cost for American Catholic nuns...The USCCB issued a statement deriding the efforts of Keehan, Campbell, and Catholics United as a 'wound to Catholic Unity...The Vatican (under then Pope Benedict XVI) issued a scathing critique of LCWR and Network accusing them of promoting 'radical feminine themes incompatible with the Catholic faith' and reprimanded them for issuing public statements that 'disagree with or challenge the bishops, who are the church's authentic teachers of faith and morals....Bishops forbade Sr. Simone Campbell from speaking in their dioceses; that only inspired larger crowds. If the goal of the bishops was to silence women religious (it) backfired spectacularly...(and) raised the public profile of Sr. Simone Campbell."

Bad blood continues between veterans of the ACA debate and the Catholic hierarchy.

The progressive faith community has maintained its dedication to healthcare preaching the value of health insurance enrollment. In 2014 Faith in Action launched initiatives that encouraged religious communities to host educational or enrollment events for uninsured people.

Progressive faith groups have continued to defend the ACA:

- When the ACA faced significant pushback from conservative faith groups, particularly over the law's contraceptive mandate,
- When the GOP-led Congress rode into power with Donald Trump to repeal and replace the ACA. (Religious groups marched at the front of protests) ( A 24 hour prayer vigil)
- Lobbying potential swing votes in the Senate
- During the late-night vote on the Republican health care plan in July 2017