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THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT IN AMERICA: WHERE IS IT GOING?

One of the most remarkable and, for people outside North America, mystifying phenomena of the 1980s was the Religious Right in the United States. It seemed to appear out of nowhere, flashed like a meteor across the American political sky, helped put Ronald Reagan in the White House, checked the inexorable march of liberalism, and then began to fade from media view after the televangelist débâcles (collapse of the Rex Humbard and Oral Roberts empires, and the Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart sex scandals), the dismal showing of Pat Robertson in the 1988 Republican presidential primary election campaign, the hard times which befell Jerry Falwell (leading to his disavowal of politics and final abandonment of the Moral Majority in 1989), and Reagan's embrace of Mikhail Gorbachev and détente with the Soviet Union. With George Bush's appropriation of Reaganism and the emotional 'hot-button' issues of the Christian activists, their social programme seemed to have become part of the political 'mainstream' in America. But the energies of the movement were not dissipated once it had gained a measure of legitimacy: it is alive and well today, and gaining in strength and influence.

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT?

The terms Religious Right, Christian Right, New Christian Right, and New Religious and Political Right have been used by various commentators to identify a vague but to them very threatening religio-political movement. Some see it merely as fundamentalism, while others find it to be either an aberration or a natural and logical development of American evangelical Protestantism. Although the term is used quite loosely, particularly by the media, most informed observers agree that the hallmarks of evangelicalism are an unshakeable belief in the divine inspiration of the Bible and its authority and accuracy, an emphasis on a personal experience with God through faith in Jesus Christ (popularly referred to as conversion or being 'born again'), and a desire to share one's faith with others (also known as 'witnessing' or 'evangelism').

Although the Christian or Religious Right fully embraced the political stance of American secular conservatism - firm anti-communism and hostility to any accommodation with the Soviet Union and a strong opposition to labour unions, expansion of the federal government, affirmative action programmes, bussing of school children to achieve racial integration, environmentalism, gun control, and any diminution of military strength - its most distinctive feature was a deep commitment to a package of social or 'family' issues. The central demand of the Christian Right was for the statutory prohibition of all abortions, even if amending the Constitution were required. Other items in the 'pro-family' social agenda included opposition to an equal rights amendment to the Constitution, pornography, state-sponsored day-care centres for working mothers and shelters for battered wives, child abuse legislation, and granting civil rights to practising homosexuals. Also advocated was parental control over textbooks and the content of instruction in the public schools - including

the teaching of free enterprise, patriotism, and 'scientific' creationism and the exclusion of sex and death education and values clarification units from the curricula. Finally, pro-family partisans demanded the restoration of classroom prayer in the public schools and the provision of vouchers or tuition tax credits to assist parents who sent their children to private or 'Christian' schools.

Even though the media and political pundits were stunned by the sheer audacity and naïvety of the new evangelical activists, they should not have been so surprised. This movement did not suddenly come out of the blue in 1979, that fateful year in which the Moral Majority, Christian Voice, and Religious Roundtable were formed and the Reagan campaign to dislodge the avowed evangelical Jimmy Carter from the presidency shifted into high gear. Its roots lie much earlier in the century: in the profound sense of frustration felt by evangelical Protestants who had not only lost the position of cultural dominance that they enjoyed in the nineteenth century but also were becoming marginalized in the increasingly pluralistic society of the United States.³ The 'fundamentalists' of the 1930s denounced the New Deal and communism, and many of them, most notably Gerald Winrod, saw the hidden hand of an 'apostate' Jewish conspiracy behind this.⁴ Elizabeth Dilling's *The Red Network* (1934), a who's who of Red radicals, was widely cited by fundamentalist preachers, and Gerald L. K. Smith, a conservative preacher with boundless political ambitions who moved increasingly toward anti-Semitism, for a time in the 1930s had a substantial following among fundamentalists.⁵

In the late 1940s through the mid-1960s, anti-communism served as the all-encompassing issue for the Christian Right. Carl McIntire, who linked modernism and communism into one grand, overarching conspiracy, for a while was rather popular, and the revelations of Senator Joseph McCarthy were favourably received in fundamentalist circles. As the 'new' evangelicalism developed its identity, McIntire himself was reduced to insignificance, but most evangelicals embraced anti-communism and Americanism as two sides of the same coin. A number of groups flourished in this period, most notably Billy James Hargis' Christian Crusade and Fred Schwarz's Christian Anti-Communism Crusade.⁶ Richard Nixon actively courted evangelicals in his 1960 and 1968 presidential bids, and especially in the 1972 race against George McGovern, while the premier evangelical preacher of the era, Billy Graham, functioned as an unofficial adviser to Nixon.⁷

The Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam War, Watergate, and the emergence of an 'evangelical left'⁸ all tended to put a damper on the Christian Right, but in the blaze of national exultation during the American Revolution Bicentennial in 1975-76 it re-emerged with new vigour and strength. In 1976 a concerted effort was made by evangelical political activists, led by Arizona Congressman, John B. Conlan, and Campus Crusade for Christ leader, Bill Bright, to elect conservative Christians to public office, but this was thwarted somewhat by a journalistic exposé⁹ and Jimmy Carter's presentation of himself as 'born-again'. Nevertheless, the abortive Reagan presidential campaign found some support in evangelical circles, while the political right, which had been building a disciplined, well-organized, and well-financed

network of loosely knit affiliates outside the official framework of the Republican party, saw the potential that lay in those evangelicals who were dissatisfied with lifestyle changes and the secularization of American society. The result was that the operatives of the political New Right set out to forge an alliance with several of the prominent television preachers and other evangelical activists who already subscribed to conservative political views. Hence, the formation of the religious New Right in 1979-80 was the natural culmination of a long period of development.

The 'newness' of this movement - that is, what made it different from the earlier Christian Right - could be seen in several of its features. These included the participation of clergy in the day-to-day process of electioneering, the extensive use of television, the raising of large sums of money for political purposes, the involvement of fundamentalists who laid aside their traditional separatism in order to work together with people of differing religious views (what neo-conservative George Weigel calls the 'new ecumenism')¹⁰ to advance the higher cause of conservative political action, concentration on a sweeping socio-moral agenda rather than some single-issue reform (like anti-slavery, temperance, or anti-communism), the utilization of 'secular humanism' as an all-embracing conspiracy on which to blame America's woes, and the existence of a national rather than regional constituency of activists and supporters alike.¹¹ In other words, the implementation of the agenda required their active participation in the decision-making processes of the nation.¹²

Those fundamentalists who perceived that an erosion of social norms had occurred and who were exposed to arguments that their lifestyle was being discriminated against were ripe for political mobilization. Where political messages were being proclaimed from the pulpit and people were watching televangelists, a greater participation by fundamentalists in the political process resulted. They challenged the changes that had taken place and entered the fray to champion conservative views on foreign policy, women's issues, and education.

GEORGE BUSH AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

George Bush was conscious of the importance of the evangelical coalition in Reagan's victories in 1980 and 1984, and he deliberately set out to court and win them over to his own candidacy in 1988. To garner this vote, he had to utter all the shibboleths of the Religious Right. To his favour was the fact that he had been a lifelong Episcopalian and he had something Reagan did not - a track record as a churchman. Although his faith was hardly the rousing revivalism of the TV preachers, he did present himself to the evangelical community as one of them. He added to his staff, as a liaison officer with the evangelicals, Doug Wead, a charismatic journalist and writer whose latest position had been with Jim Bakker's PTL Club television ministry,¹³ and in February 1988 he published *Man of Integrity* with a fundamentalist press, Harvest House in Eugene, Oregon.¹⁴ In this widely distributed campaign tract Wead set forth Bush's views on a broad range of political, economic, and social questions in a manner intended to secure a favourable response from the Christian Right. Above all, the candidate made known that he had accepted Jesus Christ as his

personal Saviour and that he believed 'strongly in the Lord and the hereafter, in life after death'.¹⁵ On numerous occasions during the campaign the vice-president assured Christian conservatives that he shared their views on abortion, pornography, traditional values, school prayer, and civil religion.

He also had a close relationship with Billy Graham. A Graham associate told Wead 'that George Bush is the best friend he has in the whole world outside his own immediate staff'.¹⁶ This was evidenced by the evangelist's offering of the opening prayer at the Inaugural ceremony in 1989 (itself a grandiose civil religion festival) and his hurried trip to Washington at Bush's behest to lead a prayer service at the opening of Operation Desert Storm on 16 January 1991, because the president's pastor at the Episcopalian St John's Church on Lafayette Square was allegedly involved in a peace march that evening.¹⁷

Another example of Bush's effort to woo conservative evangelicals was his choice of Senator Dan Quayle as his running mate. The Indiana lawmaker had conservative church affiliations and identified solidly with Christian Right views. In their younger days, both Dan and Marilyn Quayle had been under the influence of the maverick Houston fundamentalist preacher, Robert B. Thieme, Jr., whose social views were even to the right of Jerry Falwell's. Thus, Quayle could appeal to the born-again types, especially the disappointed followers of Pat Robertson, who had continued to be suspicious of the GOP¹⁸ front-runner. Although many pundits saw him as a liability to the ticket, he cemented the support of the far right, both secular and religious.¹⁹

Bush's efforts at attracting the evangelicals were quite successful. According to data gathered by Calvin College political scientist, Corwin Smidt, the percentage of white evangelicals voting Republican had increased significantly, and the level of support which Bush received from them exceeded that of Reagan in 1980. In fact, of the people polled who were identified as evangelicals, the number who voted for Reagan and Bush was almost double those who also declared themselves as Republicans. In some places the evangelical vote for Bush exceeded eighty per cent.²⁰

After he entered the White House, the president found that his Christian Right constituency would not take lightly their social agenda being put on the back burner. Thus, he had to maintain a secure link with the evangelical community and, passing over the evangelicals' possibly most able political lobbyist, Robert Dugan, director of the National Association of Evangelicals' Office of Public Affairs²¹ (so a prominent Religious Right publication lamented),²² Bush named Doug Wead as his special assistant for public liaison. Still, almost from the beginning there was grumbling about the minuscule number of high-level appointments given to evangelical rightists and the efforts of White House staffers to backpedal on the abortion issue. To check the erosion of support, Wead arranged a meeting at the close of 1989 of nearly a hundred evangelical luminaries with Bush, Quayle, and other top White House figures. No one from the middle or left of the evangelical spectrum was invited. Complaints were aired about appointments and abortion, but Republican National Committee chairman,

Lee Atwater, insisted that his party was not taking the evangelicals for granted and that 'we need your help, and we need it bad'. Bush told the group that the administration respects you and 'will listen to you'.²³

The president followed this up with ringing affirmations of the Religious Right agenda in speeches to the Catholic University of America Centennial Dinner on 12 December and the National Religious Broadcasters on 29 January 1990. On the former occasion he talked about 'fundamental faith, belief in the Almighty', and stressed that political values without moral values could not sustain a people. He praised the Catholic charities that illumined his 'Thousand Points of Light'²⁴ as reflections of the belief 'that we were placed on the Earth to do God's work'. He also endorsed 'the most basic freedom, the right to life', voluntary school prayer, and church-sponsored, government-supported child care centres. Then he concluded by referring to the revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe with a phrase he repeated verbatim in the second speech: 'For today the time's on the side of peace, because the world increasingly is on the side of God.'²⁵

Before the evangelical media moguls, most of whom either identified with the Religious Right or at least shared its social views, Bush was even more explicit. He tickled their ears with what he called 'some good news for modern man' (the title of a popular Bible translation), namely: 'There is no denying that America is a religious nation.' He then declared that 'political values without moral values, a moral underpinning, cannot sustain a people', and that 'while God can live without man, man cannot live without God'. He went on to spell out these values - the coexistence of religion and government, the option of religious-based child care in the bill he had sent to Congress, the sanctity of life and the necessity for policies that encourage adoption not abortion, the right of voluntary school prayer and a constitutional amendment 'restoring' this because 'we need the faith of our Fathers back in our schools', and policies which reflect the rights of the individual. After praising 'Operation Just Cause' (his military adventure in Panama) and citing the revolutions in Eastern Europe as evidence that the world is increasingly on the side of God, he expressed a firm conviction that 'one cannot be America's President without a belief in God, without the strength that your faith gives to you'.²⁶

However, in April the era of good feelings came to a halt when a few homosexual advocates were invited to the White House to witness the signing of the Hate Crimes Act. Evangelical leaders were incensed and even Wead openly criticized the action. Then in July some homosexuals engaged in working against AIDS discrimination received an invitation to the signing ceremony for the Americans with Disabilities Act. Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission, fired off a letter expressing his 'outrage and distress' over the second invitation, and the normally cautious Dugan suggested some heads should roll in the White House for this gaffe. What resulted, however, was that Wead's enemies in the administration's inner circle had him fired.²⁷

Again it was back to damage control. Within a few days a new special assistant to the president for public liaison was named, Leigh Ann Metzger of Georgia, a

youthful Southern Baptist conservative with impeccable Religious Right credentials. Still in her twenties, Metzger had learned right-wing politics at the knee of her mother who had worked actively in the effort to block the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in her home state. In college Leigh Ann served with Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum²⁸ and the Reagan-Bush campaign, and after graduation in 1984 ran the campaign headquarters in Atlanta. Next she worked in the office of Congressman Pat Swindall (for a time a fixture on the Christian Right until he lost his seat due to a scandal), and then for two years as legislative director for the Eagle Forum and three years at the National Republican Congressional Committee. In an interview after assuming her new post, Metzger declared that she saw the opportunity for a growing relationship between Washington politics and the evangelicals as 'in the very infant stage . . . Our political strength is largely untapped' and 'not coordinated at all'. She clearly saw her role as that of building a closer relationship between the evangelical community (which she regarded as deeply conservative) and the Bush administration.²⁹

She was soon put to the test by these evangelical conservatives. They demanded an opportunity to register their concern about the 'administration's recent stands on key moral issues', and she arranged a meeting between Bush and eighteen 'evangelical leaders' on 30 October, a week before the critical mid-term elections. Among those present were the Southern Baptist Convention president Morris Chapman, Richard Land, and Robert Dugan. Land told Bush that there was 'serious erosion in his support among evangelicals' and shared with him the 'flash points' that were causing disappointment. These included the invitations to homosexual rights activists to bill-signing ceremonies, the failure to seek restrictions on controversial grants given by the National Endowment for the Arts, and the need for stronger and more visible presidential leadership on the abortion issue. The attendees told Bush that evangelicals wanted to give input into his administration, and he expressed a receptivity for ongoing dialogue with them. Dugan said afterwards: 'I think probably it was the most frank exchange with the President of the United States in my 12 years in Washington, DC in terms of laying out some moral issues that were critical for the nation as well as for his relationship with the Evangelical community.'³⁰

The Persian Gulf war for all practical purposes recemented the alliance between Bush and Religious Right, although Dugan and his National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) grumbled at the group's national meeting about the president's omission of any reference to God during his victory speech to Congress on 6 March 1991. A resolution adopted by the NAE convention praised Bush 'for his principled leadership' and thanked God 'specifically for . . . the removal of the original aggressor from Kuwait', but it contained a phrase criticizing the president because he 'thanked everyone but God' in his address.³¹ Few voices were raised in protest against Operation Desert Storm in evangelical circles, except of course in the publications of the historic peace churches and of groups traditionally committed to peace like the *Baptist Peacemaker* and *ESA Advocate*, the organ of Evangelicals for Social Action.³² Billy Graham's aforementioned public endorsement and Robert Dugan's and Richard

Land's defence of the conflict as a 'just war' typified just how firmly American evangelicals were behind their nation's leader.³³

Especially noteworthy was President Bush's appearance at the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) convention on 28 January. Before his talk the NRB had launched 'Operation Desert Prayer' and its board of directors unanimously adopted a resolution pledging support to the president and the government 'as they do all that is necessary, though costly, to bring genuine peace in the Middle East'. The resolution noted that his attempts 'to attain peace by diplomacy have been repeatedly rejected'.³⁴ In his address Bush once again endorsed their social issues - anti-abortion, school prayer, and religious-based child care. Then he portrayed the war as having everything to do with what religion embodies - 'good versus evil, right versus wrong, human dignity and freedom versus tyranny and oppression.' It is a 'just war', fought 'for moral, not selfish reasons'. We will prevail above all because of the support of the American people, who are 'armed with a trust in God and in the principles that make men free.' He concluded with a reference to Lincoln's statement of concern about whether we were on God's side and affirmed, as he did the year before, 'that times will soon be on the side of peace because the world is overwhelmingly on the side of God.'³⁵

To be sure, at times the relationship was shaky, but Bush now had the Religious Right firmly in his pocket. Although he was not able to exploit the Persian Gulf victory against the Democrats in Congress as he had hoped, yet with the many appointments he had made to the Federal courts at all levels, the possibility that he might successfully breach the wall of separation between church and state and implement much of the Christian Right's social agenda was now very real.

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND THE GRASSROOTS

Many in the Religious Right were deeply resentful that they were unable to achieve political power during the Reagan years. Its adherents felt that they were the crucial factor in his election but they received little for their efforts. Reagan gave lip-service to their social agenda but did virtually nothing to secure its implementation. He focused on traditional conservative matters such as the economy and military expenditures, and few of the Religious Right received appointments to high office. Thus, with the onset of the Bush era the Christian Right shifted its emphasis much more to grassroots organizing. This point was made forcefully by Paul Weyrich, the political strategist who is often given credit for launching the New Christian Right in 1979, in the discussion at an invitational conference, 'Evangelicals, Politics, and the Religious New Right', sponsored by the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington on 14-15 November 1990.³⁶

This turn away from high-profile organizations and personalities to grassroots activism on socio-moral issues has been noticed by other commentators. For example, a feature article in the *Wall Street Journal* acknowledged that the Christian political movement was shifting its focus to the local level and working in ways that were less flamboyant and threatening to conservatives outside the movement. The reporter examined the efforts of 'this decentralized army of local activists' and their attacks on

school curricula, library books, and sex education courses, and he found that they not only had become more proficient at building alliances with others of like mind to confront specific local issues but also were very much involved with the work of the Republican party, which of course reflected the political change that had occurred in the 1980s.³⁷

One of the largest feathers in the Christian Right cap is the Southern Baptist Convention. The story of the religio-political capture of the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination is much too long and complicated to be recounted in detail here. What is important is that the internecine struggle among the Southern Baptists was over more than just biblical inerrancy. It was first and foremost a 'Kulturkampf' initiated by the political right to gain control of the denominational machinery and orient it in that direction. The strategy (inaugurated in 1979) was to control the SBC presidency by electing a conservative at the national convention each June. The tactics used were vintage politics - bringing in busloads of voting delegates, shutting off the floor microphones of opponents, presiding officers ruling dissenters out of order, and even obtaining celebrity endorsements, such as Billy Graham in 1985 and Ronald Reagan in 1986, for the conservative candidate. Before, the election of a president was a popularity contest; now, it was political hardball.

Securing a conservative president was seen as the crucial task, because he could then name like-minded people to the 'Committee on committees' which was responsible for appointing members to the boards of the seminaries and denominational organs. As the terms of 'moderates' in these bodies ran out, they were to be replaced with 'fundamentalists', and over a period of time they would be brought into line with the new order in the denomination. All the leading figures in the fundamentalist bloc subscribed to the Christian Right position on economic and social issues - Judge Paul Pressler, Paige Patterson, Charles Stanley, Edward McAteer, Harold Lindsell, Adrian Rogers, James T. (Jimmy) Draper, just to mention the best-known personalities.³⁸ Two other prominent rightists who are charismatics but identify themselves as Southern Baptists are the television preachers, Pat Robertson and James Robison.

From a political standpoint, the most spectacular effort of the Southern Baptist right was its assault on the traditional Baptist doctrine of separation of church and state. As early as 1982 Ed McAteer, the leader of the Religious Roundtable, began pushing a resolution at the annual convention endorsing school prayer. Within a few years, after the right had gained full control, adoption of such expressions of opinion were commonplace. More significantly, the right turned its sights on the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a political action agency in Washington that represented the interests of nine Baptist denominations, both white and black, in church-state affairs. Because its director, James M. Dunn, himself a Southern Baptist from Texas, refused to endorse the Reagan and New Christian Right political agenda, the fundamentalists tried to gain control of the BJCPA in order to oust him. Failing in this, in 1987 they created a separate Public Affairs Committee to represent Southern Baptists in Washington. Among its first moves was to endorse the nomination of Judge Robert Bork to the Supreme Court, a totally unprecedented move in Southern

Baptist history, but obtaining convention support to exist as a separate agency (a Religious Liberty Commission) proved to be impossible because of the budget crunch arising from the denominational struggle. In 1989 it was subsumed under the Christian Life Commission, which by then had been captured by the conservatives, and became its Washington office. At the same time, the fundamentalists succeeded in cutting the national funding to the BJCPA but moderates in the state conventions were able to make up the difference.³⁹ Then, in 1992 the national SBC organization severed all ties with the BJCPA and threw its entire weight behind the Christian Life Commission.

The CLC is a distinctive body in the SBC structure. Founded in the 1930s, it had been in the forefront of the struggle for racial integration in the South, and under the dynamic leadership of Foy Valentine it had gained the reputation as a first-rate, moderate to liberal social action agency. It had come under heavy fire from the fundamentalists for not taking an absolutist stance on abortion, but they were not able to block the moderate Larry Baker's appointment as executive director when Valentine retired in 1987. But Baker was forced out a year later and his replacement was the earlier-mentioned Richard Land, an avowed fundamentalist from Texas who had had some political experience and held thoroughly conservative social views. Henceforth the CLC directed its attention to fighting abortion, homosexuality, obscenity, pornography, and drug and alcohol abuse, and working to remove the barrier between church and state by promoting school prayer and voucher or tax credit schemes for parents of private school children; one heard much less about racial and social justice. The CLC plied the churches with literature, tapes, and speakers promoting these views. By 1991 Land achieved his dream of making the CLC the principal Southern Baptist lobby in the nation's capital, although moderates refused to accept this verdict and many of them continued to support the BJCPA on an individual basis.⁴⁰

Although the Religious Right incursion into the Southern Baptist ranks is the most spectacular of the grassroots efforts, a number of organizations have been active in advancing 'pro-family' perspectives and 'traditional values' in the Christian community. Phyllis Schlafly's ever-powerful Eagle Forum (80,000 members), which was in the forefront of the movement that torpedoed the Equal Rights Amendment, remains amazingly efficient in mobilizing its constituency through 'phone trees' (a chain of people who alert one another by telephone), newsletters, and lobbyists to fight the alleged teaching of witchcraft, the occult, sex education, and New Age doctrines in the public schools. The larger (700,000 members) Concerned Women for America, led by Beverly LaHaye, has been devoting its attention increasingly to state and local concerns as well.

Among the most dynamic forces of the Religious Right is Dr James Dobson, a child development psychologist whom Jerry Falwell once called 'the rising star and future leader of the religious right'. His 'Focus on the Family' programme is heard on over 1,450 radio stations and has a paid membership of two million people, a budget of \$60 million and a staff of 700 who answer the telephone calls and deluge of mail from people seeking advice and counsel. He fervently supports 'traditional family values', namely, the permanence of marriage and opposition to anything that might

condone or encourage sexual activity outside marriage, whether it be steamy soap operas, pornography, or public acceptance of homosexuality. He is also a dedicated foe of feminism and, of course, abortion. Through the efforts of its Washington-based Family Research Council, headed by Reagan's former domestic policy adviser, Gary L. Bauer, pro-family coalitions were formed in eighteen states to carry on lobbying and public education at local levels. For over a decade, Dobson had ready access to the White House.⁴¹

Pat Robertson remains very active on the political front. His National Legal Foundation devotes itself to 'religious liberty' issues, which translated means using litigation to expand the 'right' of religious expression in the schools and other public places through such forms as prayer and Bible reading, student Bible clubs, and teachers and pupils witnessing to their faith. Lawyer John Whitehead's Rutherford Foundation pursues similar goals.

Potentially much more significant is the Christian Coalition, formed by Robertson in late 1989. It was built from the 1988 campaign mailing list and by mid-1990 had 25,000 members in 30 states and a budget of \$1.5 million. Its executive director is Ralph E. Reed, an unassuming young conservative who formerly headed the College Republican National Committee, which sought to mobilize college and university students for the Republican Party. He declared in an interview: 'What Christians have got to do is take back this country, one precinct at a time, one neighborhood at a time, and one state at a time . . . I honestly believe that in my lifetime we will see a country once again governed by Christians . . . and Christian values.'

The Christian Coalition's political goals include securing legislation to make abortion a crime and school prayer permissible, protesting against films and TV programmes that 'defame our Lord', protecting the presence of religious symbols on government property (like Christmas crèches on courthouse lawns and crosses depicted in city seals), opposing 'anti-Christian bias' in the media, and defending the legal rights of Christians. It was designed to pick up where the Moral Majority and Robertson's Freedom Council - both now defunct - had left off. It first drew public attention in June 1990 when it launched a publicity campaign on behalf of ending federal funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, and in the fall it worked against seven congressional supporters of this NEA.⁴²

Such groups as Donald Wildmon's American Family Association (AFA) and CLeaR-TV (Christian Leaders for Responsible TV - its 1991 chairman was Billy Melvin, the chief executive of the National Association of Evangelicals) have enjoyed considerable success in pressuring television networks to reduce the amount of sex and violence. Particularly noteworthy was the latter's two-month boycott of Burger King for its sponsorship of allegedly racy and anti-Christian TV programmes and the hamburger chain's decision to cut back on financing questionable shows. More recently he gained national notoriety by fighting to keep the British television documentary, *Damned in the U.S.A.*, off the air in the United States, since the film (in which he was interviewed at length) with its sexually graphic elements allegedly would hurt his reputation. Also, Schlafly's Eagle Forum, Wildmon's AFA Law

Center, Robert Simonds of the National Association of Christian Educators, and Louis Sheldon of the California-based Traditional Values Coalition have challenged the use of Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich's *Impressions*, an elementary school reader, as it contained overtones of 'witchcraft, mysticism, and fantasy' and 'persistent themes of rebellion against parents and authority figures'.⁴³

A recent group, that has come to light thanks to an exposé in the November-December 1990 issue of *Mother Jones* magazine, is the Coalition on Revival (COR). It is an umbrella organization that has drawn in many from the Christian Right and has as its goal the mobilizing of conservative religious groups into a united army which can establish the Kingdom of God in America. On its steering committee are many of the big names in the Religious Right, including Tim LaHaye of the American Coalition for Traditional Values and televangelist D. James Kennedy. However, because COR is so clearly dominated by Christian Reconstructionism, a movement seeking to impose Old Testament law on all of society, a number of evangelical figures originally involved in the group have dropped out. The COR has an ambitious programme to set up a 'kingdom' counter-culture of sorts, which includes a 'Christian' court system, the abolition of the Federal Reserve banking system and the Internal Revenue Service, and the replacement of public schools with private Christian schools by the year 2000. It even advocates electing Christians to county boards and sheriffs' offices, intending, once they are in power, to form county militias to protect the nation. It is known that Reconstructionist ideas are filtering into the Christian Right bloodstream and even finding their way into evangelicalism itself, but space precludes a further examination.⁴⁴

The one issue that overshadows all the others is abortion. This effectively binds together all the Christian pro-family groups. Anti-abortion ('pro-life') organizations, like the National Right to Life Committee, American Life Lobby, Christian Action Council, and Operation Rescue, draw upon an enormous reservoir of support in the evangelical community. Abortion is also the cross-over issue that ties in Roman Catholics and many in the mainline churches with the Christian Right. There is also a kind of feedback from the Catholic side in particular, because behind their opposition to 'choice' is a deeper matter, namely, an animosity toward birth control in general.⁴⁵

There is no pro-choice movement in the evangelical community although some individuals are privately critical of the pro-life stance. Even the Evangelicals for Social Action, one of the few remaining responsible voices in the US for a moderate/liberal evangelicalism, endorses the pro-life position on abortion and on occasions will co-operate with far-right anti-abortion activists. Mass circulation evangelical magazines, like *Christianity Today*, *Christian Herald*, *Moody Monthly*, and *World*, simply assume that the pro-life position is the only Christian option (unlike ESA, however, they are not 'pro-life' when it comes to capital punishment or war). Right-wing evangelicals have for all practical purposes elevated the anti-abortion stance to an article of faith. Thus, a respected preacher and author like Charles Swindoll could say flatly that the 1990s are not a time for Christians to give on abortion. It will be the most 'significant topic of debate through this decade'. He added that today the

most dangerous place in America to be is not in the inner city or a prison 'but in the womb of a mother who is being told if she doesn't really want the baby, an abortion is the solution'.⁴⁶

A special target of Christian Right hostility is the Planned Parenthood organization. George Grant, executive director of D. James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, wrote *Grand Illusions: Legacy of Planned Parenthood*, which was a 1990 release of the now defunct Christian Right publisher, Wolgemuth and Hyatt. In November 1990 the Christian Medical and Dental Society, the primary evangelical professional association of medical practitioners, sent a letter to its members informing them that the board of trustees had unanimously voted to discontinue the society's use of the American Express credit card because the firm 'donates support to Planned Parenthood, an organization that promotes abortion on demand'. The membership was urged to do likewise and not patronize American Express businesses.⁴⁷

WHAT IF THE RIGHT WERE TO WIN?

It is clear from the foregoing that the Religious Right remains a major force on the American Christian scene. Numerous special purpose groups exist which promote a rightist agenda and draw upon an abundance of grassroots supporters who can be mobilized and trained for action. Also there are the networks among the various leaders that can assist in this process, especially those which were formed in the pro-life struggle. As long as the Religious Right can convey the image of the outsider doing battle with the forces of big government and social evil, it stands a chance of achieving success. Moreover, keeping a lower profile is to the advantage of the right. Since preachers and television personalities make easy targets for its foes, the leadership is increasingly being drawn from educated and articulate lay people in business and the professions.

Perhaps the greatest problem confronting the Christian Right is that of winning. If they achieve much or all of their 'pro-family' agenda, then what? It is always better to champion specific policies but keep them just out of reach. For such a social movement like this, the only thing that may be worse than losing is winning. If they lose, they can re-group and start over again with different organizations and methodologies. If they win, then they will have to deal with the problems which their policies have created, for example, providing adequate housing, nourishment, employment, and medical care for all those individuals the pro-lifers are going to keep alive, when at the same time as good conservatives they are trying to scale back government-provided social services to a bare minimum.

In the summer of 1992 the latter scenario seemed all but certain to become a reality. It was widely expected that the Christian Right was going to win. President Bush was making considerable headway in carrying out the 'pro-family' social programme. More and more liberal judges were being replaced with conservatives, and the Supreme Court now had enough Reagan and Bush appointees to begin dismantling abortion legislation. The Secretary of Education was calling for public

assistance for private education. The president still could draw on the public enthusiasm for the stunning victory in the Persian Gulf Conflict, while the Democrat front-runner, Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas, had been seriously harmed during the bruising primary campaign. The spoiler, Texas billionaire Ross Perot, had temporarily withdrawn from the presidential race.

In July the Democrats proceeded to nominate Clinton and Senator Albert Gore, both of whom were members of Southern Baptist churches, but because of their moderate stances the denominational leadership turned against them and lined up solidly behind President Bush. When Clinton introduced the concept of a 'new covenant' as a campaign theme, he was bitterly denounced by Pat Robertson for being 'blasphemous' and using 'pseudo-Christianity to mask what you're doing'. Jerry Falwell accused him of 'misquoting and manipulating Holy Scripture for political purposes'.⁴⁸ Clinton certainly could anticipate receiving no support from the Christian Right.

At the Republican convention in Houston the following month, the religious right was centre stage, and for its adherents the conclave was practically a victory celebration. On the opening day Robertson's Christian Coalition, which claimed that 300 of the more than 2,000 delegates were CC members, sponsored a 'God and Country' rally with Vice-President Quayle as the feature attraction. The party platform (statement of principles) was virtually written by the Christian Right, as it contained 'planks' acknowledging belief in God, endorsing school prayer, educational 'choice', and sexual abstinence, and opposing abortion rights, school birth control clinics, rights for homosexuals, and gun control. The moderate 'pro-choice' Republicans were silenced, and throughout the gathering speakers and delegates exuded religiosity. Jerry Falwell likened it to a 'Baptist revival meeting'. At a 'prayer breakfast' during the convention Bush boasted of the triumphs of the 'righteousness of God' in the Cold War and the Gulf conflict, urged bringing 'the faith of our fathers back to our schools', and told how much God had given him strength through prayer.⁴⁹

Immediately afterwards, he went to Dallas for a two-day 'National Affairs Briefing' which was organized by the Religious Roundtable, the body led by Southern Baptist, Ed McAteer. Among the noteworthy figures there were Jerry Falwell and Catholic conservative, Pat Buchanan, but George Bush was clearly the main attraction. Saying a prayer and offering a welcome before the president's speech were Drs Joel Gregory and W. A. Criswell of First Baptist Church, Dallas. Former SBC president, Dr Adrian Rogers, introduced Mr Bush. Besides touching on several of the 'hot button issues' of the religious right, the president dropped one of the most memorable lines of the 1992 election campaign: 'I was struck by the fact that the other party took words to put together their platform but left out three simple letters, G-O-D.'⁵⁰

Clinton refused to attend the briefing or even to give an interview to *Christianity Today* magazine, which went ahead and published one with Bush, where he said all the right things to please evangelicals.⁵¹ The Clinton camp was conscious that the president had most of the evangelicals in his pocket, and it did not waste political

effort trying to lure them back to the Democratic Party. To be sure, Clinton and Gore did not apologize for their church relationships nor try to exploit them during the campaign, but rather they kept pressing on the issue that was closest to the hearts of the American people, namely, the sagging economy.

Evangelicals pulled out all the stops to elect Bush. An 'Evangelical Leaders and Laymen Coalition for Bush/Quayle '92' signed up over 135 prominent figures, while the Bush campaign organization even set up an 'evangelical desk' with several full-time staff to help mobilize the vote. The vocal anti-abortionist, Randall Terry, leader of Operation Rescue, sent a mass mailing to churches across the nation proclaiming that 'to vote for Bill Clinton is to sin against God'. On election day polls showed that from 55% to 61% of self-identified evangelicals and fundamentalists voted for Bush.⁵²

All this was to no avail, as far as re-electing President Bush was concerned, and many moderate Republicans blamed the religious right's extremism for frightening voters and insuring his defeat. Then, upon taking office, Bill Clinton began to implement a social agenda far different from that of the Christian Right. Within the first week after his inauguration on 20 January 1993, he rescinded several of Bush's orders restricting abortions and set in motion a process that would lift the ban on homosexuals serving in the armed forces.

Nevertheless, Ralph Reed's Christian Coalition had shown the ability of evangelicals to penetrate the Republican organization and play a major role in the party. Their most important achievements were at the grassroots levels, and political observers believe the Christian Right groups will be focusing increasing attention on local and state level politics. One study found that the religious right won in about 40% of the state and local races in which they were involved, and others suggest that it is now better positioned politically than it was during the late 1970s.⁵³ The Christian Right may have lost the big battle in 1992, but by no means has it lost the war. The victory scenario may yet be fulfilled.

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR BAPTISTS

We can sympathize with the Christian Right's concern for life and maintenance of traditional values. However, the manner in which it used the political system in the name of God is quite disturbing, and its intention to secure publicly recognized and sponsored religious exercises is highly dubious. Would the latter in particular strengthen the Christian faith or would this further weaken its spiritual quality? Baptists have known the answer to this question for centuries, but some in the US have forgotten it. These persons would be well-advised to measure their unqualified support of the Christian Right against their heritage and become less willing to allow the political gurus of our day to determine their spiritual agenda. In the face of the advance of the Christian Right we should return again to our roots.

NOTES

1 For the cultural dominance of evangelical Protestantism, see Richard V. Pierard and

Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, Grand Rapids 1988, pp. 56-8.

- 2 This problem is examined by Timothy P. Weber, 'Finding Someone to Blame: Fundamentalist Conspiracy Theories in the 1930s', *Fides et Historia*, Summer 1992, pp.40-55. On Winrod, consult Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War*, Philadelphia 1983.
 - 3 See Glen Jeansonne, *Gerald L. K. Smith: Minister of Hate*, New Haven 1988.
 - 4 On these movements see Erling Jorstad, *The Politics of Doomsday: Fundamentalists of the Far Right*, Nashville 1970; and Richard V. Pierard, *The Unequal Yoke: Evangelical Christianity and Political Conservatism*, Philadelphia 1970.
 - 5 This is spelled out in Richard V. Pierard, 'Billy Graham and the US Presidency', *Journal of Church and State*, Winter 1980, pp. 119-21; and 'Cacophony on Capitol Hill: Evangelical Voices in Politics', in *The Political Role of Religion in the United States*, ed. Stephen D. Johnson and Joseph B. Tamney, Boulder, Colo. 1986, pp. 83-5.
 - 6 This was the movement around *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* magazines, the *Reformed Journal*, Ron Sider's Evangelicals for Social Action, and a variety of other manifestations of criticism among US evangelicals of the status quo during the 1970s.
 - 7 Jim Wallis and Wes Michaelson, 'The Plan to Save America', *Sojourners*, April 1976, pp. 5-12.
 - 8 Quoted in Thomas C. Atwood, 'Through a Glass Darkly', *Policy Review*, Fall 1990, p. 46.
 - 9 Erling Jorstad, *The New Christian Right 1981-1988: Prospects for the Post-Reagan Decade*, Lewiston, N.Y. 1987, pp. 4-5.
 - 10 Robert Booth Fowler, 'The Failure of the Religious Right', in *No Longer Exiles: The Religious New Right in American Politics*, ed. Michael Cromartie, Washington, DC, 1993, p.60; presented at the Ethics and Public Policy Center conference on 'Evangelicals, Politics, and the Religious New Right', Washington, DC, 14-15 Nov. 1990.
 - 11 PTL was shorthand for 'Praise the Lord', and was commonly used by both charismatic and non-charismatic evangelicals.
 - 12 George Bush, with Doug Wead, *Man of Integrity*, Eugene, Ore. 1988, p. 34. This was a campaign biography, a common practice in US politics, where a journalist is hired to produce a 'puff job' on a candidate for distribution to the faithful and others at a low price.
 - 13 Bush's use of civil religion in the campaign and the outset of his presidency is examined in Richard V. Pierard, 'Public Religion in a Kinder, Gentler America', *Liberty*, Mar.-Apr. 1990, pp. 3-6.
 - 14 Wead, *Man of Integrity*, p. 44.
 - 15 President Bush praised the evangelist in his remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast two weeks later. 'In fact, the night the war began, Dr Graham was at the White House. And he spoke to us then of the importance of turning to God as a people of faith, turning to Him in hope. And then the next morning, Dr Graham went over to Fort Myer where we had a lovely service leading our nation in a beautiful prayer service there, with special emphasis on the troops overseas.' *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 31 Jan. 1991, p. 101.
- A reliable evangelical source reported that Bush had summoned Graham with an 'I need you' call that afternoon and he arrived at the White House about an hour before the attack was announced on national television. After this he joined the Bushes for a private dinner, prayed four or five times with the president and other family members, and spent the night at the White House. On the next morning chaplains hastily organized a service in the chapel at an Army post across the Potomac in Virginia which several hundred people attended, including the Bushes, Quayles, General Colin Powell, and a large portion of the Cabinet and White House staff.
- In his 17-minute sermon Graham said 'there come times when we have to fight for peace' and the country's leaders 'are facing a crisis today as great as any leader in American history.' He expressed the hope, from the famous prayer of Lincoln, 'that we will be on God's side'. An Army chorus sang 'God Bless America' and the entire congregation joined in 'Amazing Grace'. *National & International Religion Report*, 28 Jan. 1991, p. 1. The *Washington Post* account referred to Graham as 'unofficial chaplain to the White House'. 18 Jan. 1991, p. C3.
- 16 GOP = Grand Old Party, common political shorthand in the US for the Republican Party.
 - 17 As vice-president, Quayle made a special effort to reach evangelicals. Examples include the championing of 'values' in his attacks on the media, a tub-thumping speech to the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis on 9 June 1992, and the interview, 'Where Quayle Stands' in *Christianity Today*, 22 June 1992, pp. 28-31,

- in which he made a strong confession of evangelical faith.
- 18 Corwin Smidt, 'Evangelical Voting Patterns: 1976-1988', in *No Longer Exiles*, pp.98-99. See also Lyman A. Kellstedt and Mark A. Noll, 'Religion, Voting for President, and Party Identification, 1948-1984', in *Religion and American Politics*, ed. Mark A. Noll, New York 1990, pp. 355-79.
 - 19 The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) is an umbrella organization representing several smaller evangelical and fundamentalist denominations.
 - 20 *Scoreboard Alert* (organ of the National Citizens Action Network, Costa Mesa, Calif.), Sept.-Oct. 1989, p. 2. Dugan was an unsuccessful Republican congressional candidate in the 1970s. He understands the political process well and has developed an extensive network of connections in the capital.
 - 21 *Christianity Today*, 15 Jan. 1990, pp. 44-5.
 - 22 'Thousand Points of Light' was something Bush promoted. In his speech accepting the Republican nomination for president in 1988, Bush said he would keep the country moving forward 'for a better America, for an endless, enduring dream and a thousand points of light'. He created a Thousand Points of Light Foundation that searched out unsung common people doing voluntary charitable works, and he awarded them with a certificate of recognition. Such an individual was a 'point of light'.
 - 23 *Public Papers of the Presidents. George Bush, 1989*, pp. 1696-7.
 - 24 *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 29 Jan. 1990, p. 142.
 - 25 *Christianity Today*, 10 Sep. 1990, pp. 60-2.
 - 26 A powerful, right-wing women's organization. Phyllis Schlafly, a well-to-do Catholic lawyer in Illinois, was the prime force in blocking acceptance of the Equal Rights Amendment. Her group mounts challenges to 'liberalism' in the schools and school textbooks. See below, pp.9-11.
 - 27 *Light* (Organ of the SBC Christian Life Commission), April-June 1991, p. 15.
 - 28 News report in *Light*, Jan.-Mar. 1991, pp. 14-5.
 - 29 *Christianity Today*, 8 Apr. 1991, p. 62.
 - 30 ESA is one of the few remaining groups in US evangelical circles that actively promotes social justice. By liberal, mainline denominational standards, ESA is rather conservative, since it is pro-life on the abortion issue, and Sider even came out in favour of public funding for private schools.
 - 31 *New York Times*, 15 Feb. 1991, p. A9.
 - 32 *National & International Religion Report*, 11 Feb. 1991, p. 8; *Christianity Today*, 11 Mar. 1991, p. 62.
 - 33 *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 28 Jan. 1991, pp. 87-9.
 - 34 Noted by the author who was a participant at the meeting. See also the report in the *Washington Post*, 30 Nov. 1990, p. A3, and *World*, 24 Nov. 1990, pp. 8-9. According to People for American Way's *Right-Wing Watch*, Weyrich has been urging conservatives to return to grassroots politics for some time. He is fond of quoting Mao Tse-tung's dictum, 'In any revolution, take the countryside, and the capital will fall'. He feels the right has focused too much attention on national politics and needs rebuilding from the bottom up. Jan. 1991, p. 1, 26 Sept. 1988, pp. A1, A19.
 - 35 For an introduction to this complex struggle see Joe Edward Barnhart, *The Southern Baptist Holy War*, Austin, Tex. 1986; Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention*, Grand Rapids 1990; and above all the excellent study by Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1990. Among the best analyses of the political activism and voting behavior of the SBC conservatives are the various essays of Furman University political scientist, James L. Guth, for example, 'Southern Baptists and the New Right', in *Religion in American Politics*, ed. Charles W. Dunn, Washington, DC, 1989, pp. 177-90.
 - 37 Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, pp. 240-3.
 - 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 236-9.
 - 39 Atwood, 'Through a Glass Darkly', *Policy Review*, p. 44; *Los Angeles Times*, 12 June 1989, p. 13. A perceptive discussion of the Dobson empire was published in the *New York Times*, 5 June 1990, p. A22. In 1993 the Family Research Council became an independent body.
 - 40 *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 1990, p. A5; 23 June 1990, pp. F16-7.
 - 41 *Right-Wing Watch*, Jan. 1991, p. 3.
 - 42 Fred Clarkson, 'Hard COR', *Church and State*, Jan. 1991, pp. 9-12. For an introduction to the world of Reconstructionism (also known as theonomy), see H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology, Blessing or Curse? An Analysis of Christian Reconstructionism*,

- Portland, Ore. 1989; Williams S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey, eds., *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, Grand Rapids 1990; and Andrew M. Manis, 'Defining America', *Report from the Capital*, June 1992, pp. 10-11, 14. See also Richard V. Pierard, 'Religion and the New Right in the 1980s', in *Religion and the State*, ed. James E. Wood, Jr., Waco, Tex. 1985, pp. 408-10. The movement first received major national media attention in a Bill Moyers programme on the Public Broadcasting System, Dec. 1988.
- 43 The great depth of evangelical animosity towards 'artificial' birth control was revealed in a *Christianity Today* symposium, 'Is Birth Control Christian?', 11 Nov. 1991, pp. 34-45.
- 44 *Focus on the Family*, Aug. 1990, p. 18.
- 45 Copy of the letter in the author's possession.
- 46 *USA Today*, 21 July 1992, p.A4.
- 47 *USA Today*, 18 Aug. 1992, p.A4: *Christianity Today*, 5 Oct. 1992, pp.50-1.
- 48 *New York Times*, 23 Aug. 1992, p.15; *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 22 Aug. 1992, pp.1484-6.
- 49 *Christianity Today*, 26 Oct. 1992, pp.64-5.
- 50 *Christianity Today*, 14 Dec. 1992, pp.40-1, 62.
- 51 *Christianity Today*, 14 Dec. 1992, p.62; *New York Times*, 21 Nov. 1992, p.1.

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HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST

The Historic Chapels Trust was officially launched by the National Heritage Secretary, Peter Brooke, on 15 June at a reception in London. It has been set up to preserve non-Anglican places of worship in England which are of outstanding architectural or historic interest but are no longer in regular religious use. While the Redundant Churches Fund has cared for Church of England buildings since 1969, there has until now been no equivalent for other denominations and faiths. The new trust is an independent registered charity, formed with the help of a grant from the Department of National Heritage. The Secretary of State has given further practical help by easing the legal transfer of redundant chapels to the Trust. Grants from English Heritage will be available for repair work in some cases.

Peter Brooke welcomed the formation of the Historic Chapels Trust, both for its preservation objectives and its public education role: 'These buildings are important to our history both for their architecture - in the case of Nonconformist buildings very often the rich interior lying behind a modest and deliberately self-effacing exterior - and also as a symbol of the large number of eminent figures in all walks of life who have sprung from this background and made valuable contributions to our country's history.'

Among the first four chapels which the Trust proposes to take into ownership is the eighteenth-century Baptist meeting-house at Cote in Oxfordshire. This stone chapel still has the box pews installed in 1859, together with a table pew above the baptistery. Its burial ground contains many eighteenth-century headstones with elaborate carving. The church was formed in 1656 and acquired its site at Cote in 1703-4. The Trust's other initial acquisitions are Walpole Congregational Chapel, Farfield Friends Meeting-house, and Todmorden Unitarian Chapel. All these buildings are graded I or II on the Statutory List. Once they have been repaired, the Trust hopes to make them accessible to the public.

When the church moves on in its mission, leaving empty buildings, at least the finest examples of its architectural past now have a chance of protection by a Trust sympathetic to the chapel tradition.

ROSEMARY TAYLOR