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"Heal Their Land": Evangelical Political Theology From the Great Awakening to the Moral Majority

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"HEAL THEIR LAND": EVANGELICAL POLITICAL THEOLOGY

FROM THE GREAT AWAKENING TO THE MORAL MAJORITY

by

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In the 1970s, a movement arose among white American evangelicals and fundamentalists that has been labeled variously as the "Christian Right," or more broadly, "the Religious Right." While they had not been entirely apolitical in the middle decades of the twentieth century, in the 1970s many theologically conservative Protestants began to organize specifically around their religious concerns, forming a number of groups—of which the Moral Majority was the best-known—in an effort to "bring the nation back to God." They also moved to the political right, joining forces with "New Right" activists who were seeking to push the Republican Party in a more conservative direction. This dissertation examines the deep roots, long development and vigorous deployment of the ideology of the leaders of this movement. This ideology can be described as a "political theology," since these evangelicals and fundamentalists thought and wrote in theological categories. Leaders like Jerry Falwell believed that the nation had been founded in a special relationship with God; that it was now being corrupted by an anti-God philosophy; that things as varied as abortion, the push for gay and lesbian rights, the lack of prayer in public schools, the Equal Rights Amendment, and attempts to reduce the nation's nuclear weapons were evidence of this corruption; and that the time might be short before God judged America. In the words of II Chronicles 7:14, these leaders sought to "heal their land."

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the course of researching and writing this dissertation, I had a conversation with a family friend, a woman who has known me since I was a boy. When she heard that my topic was the political views of evangelicals, she expressed interest. She and I both would consider ourselves evangelicals, and she is from a rural community in central Nebraska that would be almost entirely "red," to use the color-coded parlance for Republican that has become popular in recent years. Yet from the vantage point of her eight decades in that community, she looked with some bemusement on the political affiliations of her neighbors, recalling a time when many in that same community voted for Franklin Roosevelt, the New Deal, and Democrats. Why is it, she asked me, that so many evangelicals now vote Republican?

I attempted to answer her question, fumbling for a succinct response. This dissertation is an attempt to do better, although it is hardly succinct. In part, what I am doing here is attempting to explain evangelicals to themselves, to elucidate the origins of the political ideology that many of them take for granted. For many evangelicals, a Democratic affiliation—common a generation or two ago—would be unthinkable now; in many of their churches, theological conservatism is assumed to translate into political conservatism. As an historian and a pastor, perhaps I can in some small way bring clarity to the thinking of my fellow evangelicals. I have no desire to tell them how or whether to vote. But my friend's question is an excellent one, and worth pondering. Why the alliance between Republicans and evangelicals? Why do many evangelicals accord politics the importance they do?

I am also attempting to explain evangelical conservative political theology to outsiders, for to many non-evangelicals—even to some evangelicals who do not share it—that ideology is mystifying at best. To those who are less generous, it is willfully obtuse or incoherent in its commitments. These include a so-called "pro-life" stance on edge-of-life issues—abortion and euthanasia—while supporting capital punishment and calling for less aid to the poor; a prophetic scheme that details the end of this world while expressing little concern for earth-care in the present; ardent support for Israel regardless of that nation's actions; suspicion of the broadly accepted theories of evolution and climate change; denigration of "big government" while simultaneously seeking government enforcement of "morality" and an expansion of military spending; and a fervent and unqualified belief in America's "Christian" past despite evidence that might temper that claim. Many of these stances make little sense to those outside the ideology. That could be said, of course, of *any* political ideology; any such ideology seems strange to those do not share it. Yet thoughtful outsiders will seek to understand, and I hope to assist in that process. I may not share much of the political ideology of the Christian Right, but I do share most of the basic theological commitments of the evangelicals who are part of the movement, and I do not wish to see them misunderstood or caricatured.

I am grateful for that conversation and many others over the years that have helped me think through these issues. I am also deeply grateful for the kindness and flexibility of my fellow Christian disciples at St. Paul's Evangelical Country Church, the church I pastor; I could not have completed this project without their willingness to let their pastor dabble in academic pursuits. Nor would I have started this particular project without the suggestion of Tim Borstelmann, a member of my committee and valued

professor, who encouraged me to tackle a project that is quite sweeping in scope. My adviser, Benjamin Rader, agreed to continue to serve as such even upon entering retirement. I thank him for his unfailing generosity of time, his insightful questions, and his suggestions that helped me deepen and clarify the story I attempt to tell. A number of others have provided help and encouragement along the way. I am grateful to Abigail Sattler, archivist at Liberty University, and Ben Brick, librarian at Grace University, for their assistance. Gary Nebeker alerted me to several useful sources. This history would be a much poorer one without them; its flaws, of course, belong to me alone.

This dissertation has truly been a family project. My parents have engaged in many hours of conversation about the Christian Right; my father, also a pastor, has always been a wise and trusted sounding board. My three young children have patiently put up with this project taking large amounts of my time. As one of my young daughters asked many months ago: "Daddy, why do you keep talking about Falwell?"

And regarding my wife, Lisa, I can only say that whatever knowledge I have gained in the course of my studies pales in comparison to a truly wise thing I did: marrying her.

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INTRODUCTION

REVIVAL AND REFORM

It is a war of ideology, it's a war of ideas, it's a war about our way of life.

—Paul Weyrich, conservative activist

On September 23, 1949, the American public learned that the Soviet Union had atomic weapons. "We have evidence," the Truman administration announced in a statement, "that within recent weeks an atomic explosion occurred in the U.S.S.R." The news was not entirely unexpected; Americans had known that Soviet acquisition of bomb technology was probably inevitable. But the speed of the Soviet development came as a surprise. An article in *Time* magazine declared: "For the first time, U.S. citizens would know, as much of the world had known since 1945, how it feels to live under the threat of sudden destruction—coming like a clap of thunder and a rattle of hail."[1]

Three days after the White House announcement, a thirty-year-old preacher from North Carolina began a three-week series of evangelistic meetings in Los Angeles, California. It was a campaign that would launch Billy Graham's career as America's most famous preacher of the twentieth century.[2] Graham was quick to incorporate the sense of fear engendered by the new threat into his sermons. "Russia has the bomb now," he preached in rolling cadences to the crowd assembled under a canvas tent, "the nation's in an armament race, and we're at each other's throats, with hate between us, and

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1. John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 99-100; Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents* (New York: Hachette Book Group USA, Inc., 2007), 1.

2. George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990), 217.

judgment is just around the corner unless we have a revival." The Soviet Union had declared war on God as Satan someday would, Graham said, hinting at a link between the Soviets and the Antichrist. Israel—founded the year before in 1948—was its own nation "for the first time since the days of ancient Babylon." Both were signs that the world's final battle, Armageddon, might be quickly approaching.

His audience should have no illusions that the United States deserved special treatment from God. "We're no better than Sodom and Gomorrah," Graham said. "We don't deserve to be spared any more than they were. The same sins that were characteristic of Sodom and Gomorrah and Pompeii, the same sins that were characteristic of a decadent Rome, the same sins that were characteristic of France in 1940, when France fell to the German Nazi Panzer divisions, those same sins are right here in Los Angeles today."

Nor were politics the answer to the problems of the nation. "I'm not taking up for the Republicans or the Democrats. The only party I'm for is the party of Jesus Christ," Graham preached, eliciting applause from the crowd. What was needed was personal repentance. "Today, you've got your choice: to go Satan's way, or God's way. And you have to make the choice."[3] The remedy for any nation that is "sin-sick," he wrote in a sermon published two years later, was spelled out in 2 Chronicles 7:14, which reads: "If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." America, wrote Graham, "I challenge you at this hour to a

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3. Billy Graham, "What's Wrong With the World," recorded sermon, Oct. 2, 1949, Los Angeles. Billy Graham Center Archives, accessed February 17, 2014, http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/exhibits/LA49/05sermons01.html#audio.

spiritual revival."[4] For Graham, at mid-century, that revival was one to which politics would be largely irrelevant.

Thirty years after Graham's Los Angeles revival meetings, another preacher would also diagnose America. "America—our beloved country—is sick," wrote Jerry Falwell in 1979. "And when a country becomes sick morally, it becomes sick in every other way." Abortion, pornography, homosexuality, "godless humanism," "ultra-liberals" and feminists were corrupting America's families, schools and communities. "Creeping socialism, which is a first cousin to communism, is taking over the Republic," Falwell wrote. The Soviet Union was still a threat, and the administration of President Jimmy Carter was considering signing the results of the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT II), a nuclear arms limitation pact, with "the godless, not-to-be trusted Russian communists—who are committed to world conquest." All were signs of America's sickness, Falwell asserted. "It doesn't take much to see the moral decay invading America everywhere."

Like Graham, Falwell believed that America was sick. Like Graham, Falwell believed that the nation could recover, and both men saw 2 Chronicles 7:14—referring, in the biblical text, to ancient Israel—as having direct application to the United States. The "healing" it promised was possible. Yet for Falwell, America's recovery from its illness would require more than revivalist preaching. Political action was called for, and Falwell founded the lobbying group Moral Majority in 1979 for that purpose. Those Americans who were still standing "on the side of Bible Morality" needed to oppose "the bleeding heart liberals" who were attempting to "pass their socialistic and godless legislation at

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4. Graham, "Whither Bound?" in *America's Hour of Decision* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1951), 146.

will…As the ranks of our Moral Majority swell into an army we will be able to look at the politicians and the men in high government positions, eye ball to eye ball, and set them straight about the direction this great nation must take."[5] Like Graham, Falwell called repeatedly for "revival." But for Falwell, the intended revival was a politicized one, a revival in which personal commitment to Christ went hand-in-hand with political action.

This is not to suggest that Graham was apolitical. Indeed, throughout his career, he was closer to the center of American politics than Falwell ever was, as friend, confidant and sometime confessor of various American presidents from Harry Truman on. Early in his career, there were times when he sounded as if he might use his national status for political purposes, as when he boasted in 1952 that he could mobilize sixteen million evangelical votes with a word.[6] In the post-Second World War era, he could be as virulently anti-Communist and conspiracy-minded as Senator Joseph McCarthy, as when he alleged that there were over a thousand "social sounding organizations that are communist and communist operated in this country."[7] Nevertheless, there was a difference in how Graham and Falwell perceived the relationship between religion and politics. Graham may have had political influence, but he used it primarily as a means of gaining respectability and publicity for his revivalist crusades. Falwell, on the other hand, sought to use his prominence as a television preacher to gain political influence. Both

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5. Jerry Falwell, "Why the Moral Majority?" in Moral Majority Capitol Report (Washington, D.C.: Moral Majority, Inc., August, 1979), The General Materials of the Moral Majority, MOR 1-2, series 2, folder 2, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

6. Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*, x.

7. Graham, "Whither Bound?", 144. Later in life, Graham said that he regretted the fervor with which he preached anti-Communism, saying that anti-Communism came dangerously close to being his "gospel" for a time. Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*, 24.

men saw America as sick and in need of healing. But the cure they recommended was radically different.

The contrast between these two men illustrates a development that occurred within American evangelicalism during the second half of the twentieth century. This development is sometimes referred to as the "rise of the Religious Right" or, more narrowly, the "Christian Right." While that movement included other religious groups, the change with the greatest impact happened among evangelicals. Simply put, white American evangelicals became more politically active and more politically conservative. In the 1950s, less than a third of American white evangelicals were identified as Republicans; by the end of the twentieth century, nearly two-thirds of them were, as illustrated in figure 1.[8] Not all evangelicals politically mobilized, nor did all of them
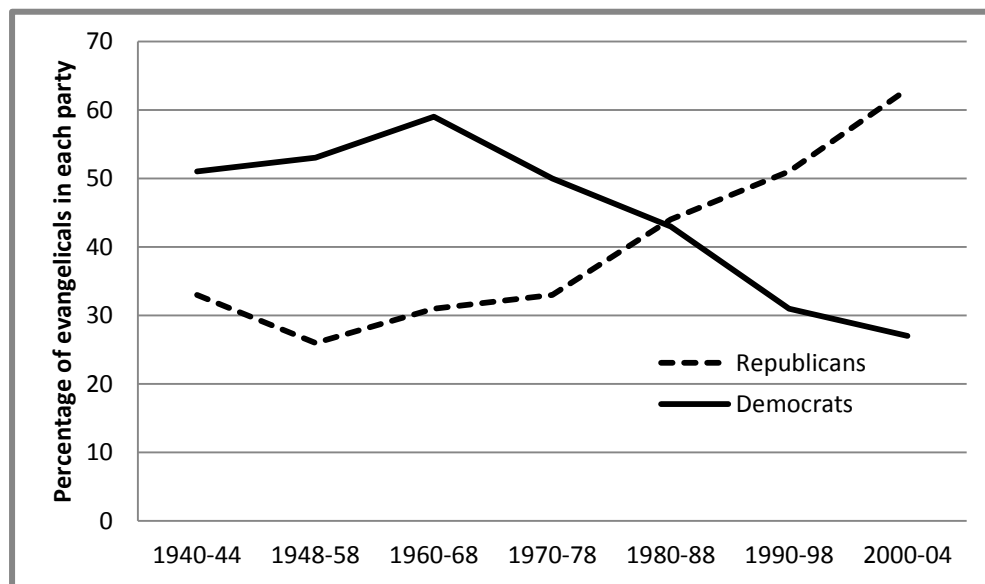

Figure 1. Partisan identification of evangelical Protestants, 1940-2000.

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8. Lyman Kellstedt, John Green, Corwin Smidt and James Guth, "Faith Transformed: Religion and Politics From FDR to George W. Bush," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 285.

move rightward in their politics. Nevertheless, millions of them came to agree with Falwell's diagnosis and proposed cure of politicized revival: America was indeed sick, and political engagement was called for.

What changed between 1949 and 1979?

Broadly speaking, the answer is that by the late 1970s, many white evangelicals—and fundamentalists, evangelicalism's more militant sub-group—had become convinced that America had forsaken its "godly roots" and the religious principles that had shaped the nation's founding. Motivated by a deep sense of historical grievance, they believed that their beloved country was being stolen from them by a group they described variously as liberals, "secular humanists," or elites intent on foisting godlessness on the "moral majority" of America. A philosophy alien to America's history, they believed, was corrupting nearly every sphere of American life: family and gender roles, the public role of religion, education, attitudes toward sexuality and the unborn, the nation's military preparedness, media and entertainment, and the nation's work ethic. The country was headed for disaster unless "moral" people stood up to the secular onslaught, and for these evangelicals, the battle would have to be fought politically.

A Political Theology

In this dissertation, I seek to describe the roots of this way of thinking by tracing its development through several centuries of American Christianity, focusing on the political theology of American evangelicals. Their political mobilization in the late 1970s was not without precedent, for they were heirs of a long tradition within American Christianity that saw the nation's strength and status as divine blessings that were contingent on obedience to God. From the 1920s through the 1960s, this tradition had

largely gone underground, for various reasons I describe. But it was both revived and revised by a number of theologically conservative Protestants who began to see political action as essential to their divine calling as Christians and who saw the Republican Party as the most promising means of "healing their land" from what they saw as its moral corruption.

In simple terms, then, I trace the ideology of the Christian Right, by focusing on some of its evangelical leaders. Ideology, according to Daniel Bell many years ago, is "a way of translating ideas into action…Ideology is the conversion of ideas into social levers."[9] Bell's definition is useful, for Falwell and other activists did indeed attempt to take a number of ideas present in the evangelical tradition and translate them into action—specifically, political action. By using the term "ideology," however, I am not suggesting that their thought was consistent or always coherent; Falwell, for example, was intelligent, but not a theoretician or a political philosopher. As Ed Dobson, one of his early lieutenants in the Moral Majority, said later of the organization's founding: "It was kind of a 'ready, fire, aim' approach. No one sat around for a lengthy period of time to discuss it, to analyze it, to come up with an ideology."[10] The same could probably be said of almost any political movement; any movement that grips the imaginations of a wide swath of the American public—as the Christian Right has done in the last few decades— is probably less a tightly organized belief system and more a loose collection of themes, symbolic gestures, and catchphrases.

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9. Daniel Bell, "The End of Ideology in the West: An Epilogue," in *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960), 370.

10. William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 200.

Nevertheless, the ideology of the Christian Right was not entirely amorphous, and a number of its components can be identified. First and perhaps most important was the belief that America had a special relationship with God. Different Christian Right activists phrased this in different ways—that America had a "covenant" with God, that it was founded by "godly men" upon "godly principles," that it was a "Christian nation"— but all shared this sort of religious exceptionalism. It is difficult to overstate the power of this version of American history for the Christian Right, for it provided both inspiration of and justification for political activism. Asserting America's "Christian roots" was more than simply an observation about America's past; it was also a mandate for the nation to "return to God."

Second, they believed that America had fallen from this state of grace, and many of them found the culprit in "secular humanism." Secular humanism, according to one prominent Christian Right leader, is "a man-centered philosophy that attempts to solve the problems of man and the world independently of God."[11] They saw this philosophy as insidiously effecting a host of social changes, not least the belief that growing government power was replacing a trust in God. For many of these politically mobilized evangelicals, their understanding of biblical prophecy, which included belief in a future world government headed by the Antichrist, gave this encroaching secularism an especially ominous cast.

Third, Christian Right activists believed that politics was the crucial arena in which the battle against secular humanism would be fought. They may have voiced a libertarian-sounding suspicion of "big government"—at least with regard to social

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11. Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1980), 27.

programs. But they nevertheless maintained a remarkable faith in the power of politics to change the culture of the nation. While this return to politics surprised many observers at the time, it was really the reactivation of an earlier vision of their role in public life. Evangelicals had always seen themselves as commanded to make a difference in their world—Jesus Christ, after all, told his disciples that they were to be "salt" and "light"[12]— and from the colonial period through the nineteenth century, many evangelicals had been politically engaged. That early ideology was a *reformist* one—an attempt to change society through politics and legislative action. From the 1930s to the 1970s, however, for a variety of reasons evangelicals understood their role primarily as an evangelistic one. They were to call people to accept the forgiveness of sin and relationship with God that Jesus Christ made possible through his death and resurrection; political action, for most evangelicals, was not crucial to this task. Thus, during this period, they were largely content to seek remedy for the nation's ills through *revival*—an initiation or renewal of spiritual commitment on the personal and individual level. The activism of the Christian Right in the late 1970s was a renewal of the older, reformist type of engagement.

Fourth, they saw their political goal as a "moral" one rather than a "religious" or theological one. To some outsiders, this distinction appeared somewhat specious, since the agenda espoused by the Christian Right appeared, *prima facie*, to be founded on a certain type of Protestant reading of the Bible. But many Christian Right activists and thinkers believed their agenda was one that could be endorsed by all concerned citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations and theological beliefs. This is not to say that they gave up their more narrowly defined "religious" goal of converting others to Christianity.

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12. Matt. 5:13-14.

As evangelicals, they still stressed evangelism. But they saw morality as a set of broadly held and obvious ethical standards that should be heeded regardless of one's religious beliefs; these standards were ones that a society ignored at its peril. This assertion that morality could be separated from religion meant that they could seek allies among Roman Catholics, Mormons, Jews and others in a way surprising to anyone who knew the antipathy American evangelicals had historically displayed toward these groups. The problem was that morality and religion were not so easily separated, and what appeared to them to be an inclusivist vision based on a broad moral consensus often appeared to others as exclusivist and based on a narrow reading on one religion's scriptures.

Fifth, the "moral" vision that they sought to uphold had four primary areas of concern. They wanted a return to "traditional" values regarding sexuality and family life, decrying legalized abortion, the feminist movement, the increased acceptance of premarital sex and homosexuality, rising divorce rates, and sexualized media. They wanted a public deference to religion, especially lamenting the Supreme Court decisions that had removed prayer and Bible reading from public schools. They were strongly nationalist and were vigorous "cold warriors," calling for increased military spending and a more assertive foreign policy against Communism. And, lastly, they believed that government was engaged in far too much social spending and that rather than creating a legitimate safety net, such spending was instead eroding the nation's work ethic. What held these disparate concerns together, in part, was a certain conception of "liberty." For the Christian Right, liberty was not the freedom to do whatever one wanted. Rather, liberty was the freedom to do what was right in God's eyes, and in their view, changing

attitudes, "immoral" legislation and court decisions, and Communism were all threats to that liberty.

To what extent these concerns were "conservative"—which is how evangelical political activists began to think of themselves—is a matter of some debate, and depends on how one defines the term. At root, "conservative" simply means a certain resistance to change; to conserve something means to protect it from a threat.[13] In this sense, the moral vision of the Christian Right *was* conservative; its members were seeking to turn back the clock to certain earlier attitudes, especially with regard to family life and sexuality. Yet in other important ways, the Christian Right agenda was at odds with political conservatism.

By the 1970s, conservatism consisted of several strands.[14] Traditionalists like Russell Kirk (especially in his 1953 book, *The Conservative Mind*) argued that civilized society needed traditions, customs, and classes as restraints on humanity's tendency toward anarchy; change was not automatically beneficial.[15] Second, although anti-Communism was a part of most American's mental furniture across the political spectrum, anti-Communists like Whittaker Chambers saw the ideology not just as a political threat but as a metaphysical one; the contest between the United States and the

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13. David T. Koyzis observes that "conservatism is itself not a single unified ideology capable of being evaluated as an identifiable doctrinal position." Rather, a "conservative has a heightened sense that with change of any sort comes inevitable loss—often the loss of something good which cannot be replaced." *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 72-73.

14. George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), xiii-xix. While it is possible that Nash overestimated the strength of the "traditionalist" wing of his fusionist synthesis, his work nevertheless remains an influential account of the intellectual history of conservatism. Kim Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 2011), 729-730.

15. Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 19.

Soviet Union was a battle between good and evil. Libertarians contributed a third set of concerns to conservatism, viewing an expanding government as a threat to individual liberty and valuing an unfettered free market as a way of maintaining that freedom. These strands were in some ways contradictory, the most obvious tension being the one between the radical liberty espoused by libertarians and the customs and mores extolled by traditionalists.[16]

They also were in partial tension with the agenda of the Christian Right. Christian Right activists shared a hatred of "godless Communism"—Falwell bemoaned the "sad fact" that the United States only had the capability of killing "3 to 5 per cent of the Soviets because of their antiballistic missiles and their civil defense"[17]—but their vision differed from the other two strands. Evangelicalism has historically been a populist movement, one that has been skilled in appealing to ordinary citizens; traditionalists, on the other hand, were more likely to engage in intellectual debates and to value the role of cultural elites in guiding society.[18] Libertarians, with their stress on individual freedom, did not look kindly upon the Christian Right's desire to use government power to enforce a moral code.[19] Nevertheless, what the Christian Right shared with political conservatism

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16. Jerome L. Himmelstein affirms these same basic strands as making up the "New Right" that arose in the second half of the twentieth century: economic libertarianism, social traditionalism and militant anti-Communism. He, too, notes the tensions inherent in this mixture. Himmelstein, "The New Right," in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*, ed. Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1983), 15-18.

17. Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 98.

18. D.G. Hart, *From Billy Graham to Sarah Palin: Evangelicals and the Betrayal of American Conservatism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 14.

19. For an analysis of this tension in recent years, see Ryan Sager, *The Elephant in the Room: Evangelicals, Libertarians, and the Battle to Control the Republican Party* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006).

was a belief that the federal government was too big—at least in terms of its domestic programs, since almost all conservatives defended an expanded military as part of the legitimate function of government. The Christian Right also believed that it was too secular, but other conservatives were willing to overlook that difference with their own agendas for the sake of an alliance.

The Development and Deployment of a Reformist Ideology

As Kim Phillips-Fein has recently written, "religion still receives more lip service than sustained engagement from political historians."[20] If the Christian Right has become one of the most important voting blocs of the GOP, as is frequently noted, then understanding the thinking of its members is crucial in grasping the contours of the conservative movement. While the Christian Right has been the subject of several excellent histories, its ideology—especially the relationship of that ideology to its theology—has not been thoroughly elaborated.

Daniel K. Williams' book *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*, for example, chronicles the political development of the Christian Right and its marriage with the Republican Party, arguing that the story began not in the 1970s but in the 1920s when fundamentalists fought against both theological and cultural "liberalism."[21] Darren Dochuk has described how the rise of the Christian Right has been in large measure a *southern* story, highlighting the importance of southern California with its religious culture of "entrepreneurialism, experimentation, and engagement."[22] Lisa McGirr's

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20. Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism," 733.

21. Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right is also a story of the

California southland; she examines the growth of political conservatism in Orange

County during the 1960s and 1970s, and includes in her account the area's burgeoning

evangelical churches.[23] William Martin's *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the*

Religious Right in America, companion book to the film of the same title, contains a

wealth of interview material and is a broad survey of the development of religious

conservatism.[24] Michael Lienesch, a political scientist, provides a useful—although

somewhat ahistorical—summary of the ideology of the Christian Right.[25] Other observers

seeking to tell the story of the "conservative ascendancy" in the last third of the twentieth

century have accorded the Christian Right an important place in that history, describing it

as a rear-guard action to preserve the "traditional" family[26] or as part of a general

backlash against moral permissiveness and the cultural upheaval of the 1960s.[27] Still

others have sought to situate the Christian Right against a global backdrop that included a

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22. Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), xviii.

23. Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

24. William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996). Martin's interview material comes primarily from Christian Right leaders. Although her book lacks the historical context that Martin provides, Ruth Murray Brown includes enlightening accounts from grassroots activists and her own first-hand observations. Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002).

25. Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

26. Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 250-274.

27. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 113-120; Paul Boyer, "The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 29-51.

number of political movements from a variety of conservative religious traditions, including political Islam, Judaism and Hinduism. In this literature, the Christian Right is just one among several movements that have risen in reaction to a perceived erosion of values and a fragmentation of community that has accompanied modernization, globalization and secularization.[28]

What is lacking in this literature is a sustained treatment of the ideology of the Christian Right. It is certainly true that the activism of the Christian Right was in part a "backlash," for example, against certain cultural and social changes. But *why* it was a backlash needs to be explained. How did politically active evangelicals come to think about politics as they did? In attempting to answer this broad question, I am not asserting that all politically active evangelicals—far less all evangelicals!—think in the same way. They are and have been a diverse group. Nevertheless, there are common themes in the rhetoric of the movement. Examining these ideological themes of the Christian Right is by necessity a theological discussion, for its members think and write in theological categories; thus, the questions I seek to answer are in part theological ones. How is it that evangelical theology, which in the middle of the twentieth century seemed to militate *against* political activism, could for many evangelicals support it by the 1980s? Why did evangelicals, whose theology has denigrated "good works" as having little value apart from the heart-change of a "born again" experience, seek to use the power of politics to coerce "moral" behavior? How did dispensationalism, an influential method of biblical interpretation among evangelicals that includes a highly pessimistic view of the future,

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28. See, for example: Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Torkel Brekke, *Fundamentalism: Prophecy and Protest in an Age of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

affect their understanding of politics? How is it that a movement that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had cared deeply for a broad range of social issues—such as slavery, women's rights, temperance, child labor, improved housing—could by the 1980s be predominately focused on issues relating to sex and the family—such as abortion, pornography, homosexuality, feminism and divorce? Finally, why was this political theology deployed in the late 1970s? These are questions that are not tangential but central to understanding the development of modern American conservatism—or at least they should be.

Elucidating the theological underpinnings of the Christian Right's ideology also helps shed light on one of the most vexing problems facing historians of modern American conservatism: the role of race. Race is one of the primary fault lines in the historiography of the movement, with some historians seeing a backlash against the changes of the civil rights era as a crucial part of its formation[29] and others emphasizing the importance of economic issues and political principles.[30] Clearly, in the 1960s and 1970s the nation made great strides in remedying centuries of racial injustice. These changes were both legal—the most obvious examples being the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—and cultural, as overt racism became less acceptable in society. No longer could politicians engage in naked race-baiting in an effort to win votes. But racial prejudice did not disappear with the passage of these landmark pieces of legislation, and a basic question is the extent to which, for example, conservatives' calls

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29. See, for example, Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), who argues that "white reaction against the modern civil rights movement [is] at the center of the conservative resurgence since the 1960s" (10); and Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

30. For example, Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy.*

for "law and order," a reduction in welfare spending, an expansion of states' rights versus federal power, and an end to school busing were "code" for racial concerns.

I am sympathetic to those who see race as central to the conservative resurgence. After all, when the Democratic Party became decisively supportive of civil rights for African Americans in the 1960s, those within that party who opposed civil rights had to go somewhere, and they became open to the Republican invitation to join a party that, while not openly racist, did appear to be more in keeping with their concerns. However, understanding something of evangelical theology adds another dimension to this discussion of race and political conservatism. While I develop this especially in chapter 3, here I will simply note that because evangelicals have largely understood sin and salvation in a personal, individualistic way, many white evangelicals were prone to view the civil rights movement with suspicion because it was an attempt to right a social wrong without accompanying "regeneration" of the heart.

Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism

Thus far, I have used the the term "evangelical" to describe a certain type of Protestant Christian. But this obscures an important distinction, because many of those who mobilized as part of the Christian Right in the 1970s—including Falwell—identified themselves not as evangelicals but as "fundamentalists."[31] Some definitions are necessary.

Who is an "evangelical"? And how do evangelicals differ from "fundamentalists"? The term "evangelical" is derived from the Greek word *euangelion*,

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31. See, for example, Falwell, "Why I Am a Fundamentalist," in *Fundamentalist Journal* 1, no. 1. (September 1982), 6.

which means "gospel" or "good news." That good news, as Christians have understood it, is that Jesus Christ makes forgiveness of sin and eternal life with God possible. But, given that *all* Christians share that belief, what makes evangelicals distinct?

During much of the twentieth century, a common definition was that an evangelical was "anyone who liked Billy Graham." Falwell liked to say that a fundamentalist is "an evangelical who is angry about something."[32] While these definitions are somewhat tongue-in-cheek, they are reminders of how loosely both terms have been used. After all, evangelicalism and fundamentalism are not clearly defined denominations with creeds and membership standards; there are no "card-carrying evangelicals." As a result, some observers have simply labeled as "evangelical" anyone who has had a "born again" experience, or claims a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ."

Among scholars attempting more precision, there has been considerable debate about what constitutes evangelicalism. Clearly, it is a diverse movement. The National Association of Evangelicals, for instance, claims as members about 45,000 churches representing over forty different denominations from a range of theological traditions, including Calvinist, Arminian, Anabaptist, and charismatic.[33] The Evangelical Theological Society, a group of scholars whose doctrinal basis affirms simply the Trinity and the inerrancy of Scripture,[34] includes members who hold different beliefs about

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32. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 1, 6.

33. "Connecting and Representing Evangelicals," National Association of Evangelicals, accessed February 17, 2014, http://www.nae.net.

34. "About the ETS," The Evangelical Theological Society, accessed February 17, 2014, http://www.etsjets.org/about.

eschatology, the proper subjects of baptism, the nature of God's work in creation, and whether "charismatic gifts"—such as tongues-speaking—exist today.[35] The label "evangelical" has been given to Christians who hail from a wide variety of churches, including some from mainline Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopalian churches, African-American churches and historic peace churches like the Mennonites.

Metaphors abound in attempts to capture this evangelical diversity. Timothy Smith has referred to the "evangelical mosaic" and the "evangelical kaleidoscope." Randall Balmer has used the imagery of a "patchwork quilt," a metaphor intended to evoke the folksy populism he sees in American evangelicalism.[36] Robert K. Johnston speaks of evangelicalism as an extended family.[37] Some have suggested that the groups lumped together as "evangelicals" are too diverse to be included in the same camp. Donald W. Dayton, for example, has argued that the term evangelical "has lost whatever usefulness it once might have had" and "that we can very well do without it."[38] In part, his objection is that there have been three separate meanings of "evangelical"— Reformational in the sixteenth century, pietistic and conversionist in the eighteenth, and fundamentalist in the twentieth—and that asserting commonality among all three is going too far.

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35. For brief examinations of a variety of issues on which evangelicals hold divergent views, see Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

36. Both are quoted by Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 21.

37. Robert K. Johnston, "American Evangelicalism: An Extended Family," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, eds. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 252-269.

38. Donald W. Dayton, "Some Doubts About the Usefulness of the Category 'Evangelical'" in Dayton and Johnston, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*.

Yet, despite such protests, it seems unlikely that the term "evangelical" is going to disappear. Moreover, there are numerous scholars who, while acknowledging the diversity, see a basic unity among the various branches. Douglas A. Sweeney, for example, asserts that evangelicals "comprise a movement that is rooted in classical Christian orthodoxy, shaped by a largely Protestant understanding of the gospel, and distinguished from other such movements by an eighteenth-century twist."[39] That "twist" was the revivalism of the Great Awakening, with its emphasis on conversion and emotional fervency. David Bebbington, in a definition often cited by historians, also includes conversion in his four-fold definition of evangelicalism: "*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross."[40] While evangelicals have differed in various particulars, they have shared these characteristics.

Who, then, are "fundamentalists"? In short, fundamentalism is a sub-type of evangelicalism that developed an emphasis in the early twentieth century on defending what its adherents saw as orthodox Christianity against those who were attempting to "modernize" the faith. Fundamentalism, according to George Marsden, was "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism…a loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring

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39. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story*, 23-24.

40. David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2-3.

Christianity into line with modern thought."[41] The efforts of these fundamentalists to control their denominations and institutions largely failed. But fundamentalists did not disappear. Instead, in the 1930s and 1940s they were remarkably successful in developing their own subculture.[42] In the 1970s, fundamentalists would provide much of the leadership for the nascent evangelical right.

Among such evangelicals, few ideas were as compelling as the belief that America was founded as a "Christian nation," and thus it is where I begin my narrative. Chapter 1 describes the deep roots of this belief, which date back to the earliest days of Puritan settlement, and sketch its subsequent development. While most evangelicals have stopped short of describing the United States as a "new Israel," many have had the belief that their nation has a special relationship—for some, a covenant—with God. Understanding this belief helps explain the passion the Christian Right has had for "bringing the nation back to God"; it also helps explain how many evangelicals can both hold to dispensationalism, which often has discouraged social reform, and also lobby for political change.

Chapter 1 takes the story through the American Civil War, as both northern and southern evangelicals saw themselves as the rightful heirs of the nation's "godly" heritage. Chapter 2 addresses the theological "civil war" within American evangelicalism that erupted in the decades after the bloody conflict, as fundamentalists and modernists squared off in a battle over the proper way to interpret the Bible. This dispute had important political ramifications: by the 1930s, many fundamentalists had largely given

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41. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 4.

42. Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16-31.

up on political and large-scale reform, although still praying for widespread revival. Yet

great care should be taken in describing the 1930s and 1940s as decades of

fundamentalist "retreat," as some have. These were rather decades of regrouping;

fundamentalists—and fundamentalism's "neo-evangelical" reformers—never gave up on

their vision of America's mythic religious past. In chapter 3, I examine some of the social

and cultural changes of the 1960s and early 1970s. These changes—among them civil

rights legislation, "second wave feminism," the *Roe v. Wade* decision, and shifting mores

regarding sexuality—did not immediately cause the political mobilization of conservative

Protestants. But they were sources of increasing concern, and helped lay the groundwork

for the Christian Right of the late 1970s. What evangelicals and fundamentalists still

needed was a new way to think about politics; chapter 4 describes how Francis

Schaeffer—who diagnosed much of American society as suffering from the ill effects of

"secular humanism"—and other writers helped them begin to see political action as a

primary way of effecting social change. Chapter 5 explores how history and eschatology

shaped the ideology of the Christian Right. Various writers in the 1960s and 1970s

propagated the "Christian nation" version of American history, updating and modifying it

and in the process creating a "usable" past that was put into service by political activists

as the Christian Right movement coalesced. Others saw in current events, both domestic

and foreign, signs that the end of the world was near. Their version of premillennial

dispensationalism was not overtly political, but it did have political implications that

would become increasingly clear. Chapter 6 describes the organization of a number of the

Christian Right groups in the late 1970s, and attempts to locate their formation against

the backdrop of the national politics of the period. Finally, in chapter 7 I show how a

number of conservative Protestant political leaders in the late 1970s and early 1980s

helped forge an ideology that joined their religious convictions with the political agenda

of the Republican Party in the era of Ronald Reagan.

CHAPTER 1

THE ROOTS OF EVANGELICAL PATRIOTISM

…for we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world…

—John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," 1630

The first English settlers in North America portrayed their colonial effort in religious terms—hardly surprising, given the religious nature of English society in the seventeenth century. Indeed, European society as a whole largely took for granted that religion and government were inextricably linked. Europeans saw themselves as part of "Christendom," a Christian civilization whose roots extended all the way back to the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire following the conversion of the emperor Constantine.[1] It was simply assumed that Christianity was a part of Europe's identity. The state and the church were mutually supportive. Rulers enforced proper worship and punished those deemed heretical. During the Middle Ages, one's baptism as an infant symbolized membership in both spiritual and political kingdoms.

This apparent religious unity was never complete, for there were always dissenters of various sorts. In 1054, a growing split within Christendom was finalized with the division between the Eastern Orthodox church and the western church led by

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1. E. Glenn Hinson, *The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 198-215. Constantine's "Edict of Milan" (313) ended the persecution of Christians. It was the Emperor Theodosius, however, who in 380 made Christianity the official religion of the Empire.

Rome.[2] The Protestant Reformation that began in the sixteenth century destroyed the unity of western Christendom, as Christianity fragmented into Lutheran, Catholic, and Calvinist branches, with a number of smaller groups seeking to interpret the Bible by their own lights. "Anabaptists"—an initially pejorative term meaning "rebaptizers," since they argued that their baptism as infants was meaningless—challenged the union of church and state.[3] But for the most part, this union remained intact, and the ruler of a country determined its religion.

These new religious differences added fuel to the fires of political tension, as Protestant and Catholic nations throughout Europe fought for territory and converts. England did not escape this religious conflict. The English Reformation, which began in 1534 when King Henry VIII separated the English church from Rome, began a long period of intermittent religious strife. For well over a century and a half, Protestants and Catholics sought to shape the theology and worship of the national church. Especially fervent in their desire for Protestant reform were a growing number of "Puritans," labeled as such for their belief that the English church needed "purifying" from what they viewed as the corrupting influence of Roman Catholicism.[4]

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2. Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1984), 251-265.

3. For a sketch of sixteenth-century Anabaptist views on the state, see William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 257-263.

4. Richard S. Dunn, *The Age of Religious Wars, 1559-1715* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 164-178, 194.

Colonial Covenantalism

The zeal of many Protestants was strengthened by their belief that their country had a covenant with God, a divine calling with certain obligations. For example, William Tyndale, whose writings and English translations of the Bible would have an enormous effect on the English Reformation, viewed the covenant of the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament—as having application to all nations. In the biblical covenant, God made an agreement with the nascent Israel: whether he blessed or cursed Israel depended on its obedience to his commands.[5] Tyndale wrote: "For according unto these curses hath God dealt with all nations, after they were fallen into the abominations of blindness."[6] Tyndale stopped short of claiming that England was God's chosen nation, but he did propagate the idea that a nation's welfare was dependent on its keeping the covenant with God. In a work published in 1531, he expressed fear that England would soon incur God's curses. England had rejected the message of those God had sent, such as John Wycliffe (c. 1320-1384): "And as I doubt not of the examples that are past, so am I sure that great wrath will follow, except repentance turn it back again, and cease it."[7]

Thus, the first English settlements in North America were birthed in a culture that took the blending of religion and politics for granted. Those who migrated to North America in the early decades of the seventeenth century transferred these ideas to their new homes, believing that English Christianity was at the center of God's redemptive

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5. See, for instance, Deut. 28.

6. Quoted in Richard Hughes, *Myths America Lives By* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 22.

7. Ibid., 23.

plan for the world.[8] Especially for Puritan settlers, the concept of covenant loomed large in their thinking. For some—like the "pilgrims" who sailed on the *Mayflower* and landed at Plymouth in 1620—England's covenant was irreparably broken and the only solution was to separate themselves and live elsewhere. Others, like John Winthrop, were more optimistic about England's future and sought to build a "city on a hill" that would be a model that England would emulate.[9] Despite these differences, they shared a sense of their high calling; as Sydney Ahlstrom writes, they maintained the conviction "that the reformation being carried out in these commonwealths was actually a decisive phase in the final chapter of God's plan for his Church in this world."[10]

This is not to suggest that the motives of the English settlers were entirely spiritual or that all English settlers had a uniform devotion to these spiritual ideals. Many came for material gain, to escape unwelcome circumstances at home, or to fulfill a sense of adventure; African slaves, who first arrived in 1619, and some indentured servants came unwillingly. The communities English settlers created were hardly godly utopias, even in their own eyes. Nevertheless, as they described their endeavors they frequently resorted to religious language, which took several forms. First, most English colonists saw their new societies in North America as Christian communities, with the Bible as a guide not only for how they lived their private lives, but as a blueprint for their systems of governance. Second, they saw their colonies as providentially ordained: it was God

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8. Conrad Cherry, *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998). 25.

9. Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), 30-32. See also Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984), 1-15.

10. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 135.

who who had made their settlements possible and God who would use them for his purposes. Third, they at least gave lip-service to the idea that their colonies would serve as evangelistic beachheads for reaching Native Americans with the Christian faith.

These themes were not mutually exclusive, and were often combined. In 1606, for example, King James I issued a charter to the London Company, giving it permission to found what would become known as Jamestown, the first successful English colony. The charter described the London Company's "Desires for the Furtherance of so noble a Work, which may, by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the Glory of his Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian Religion to such People, [who] as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God…"[11] John Rolfe, Virginia colonist and husband of Pocahontas, described the English in Virginia as "a peculiar people, marked and chosen by the finger of God, to possess it, for undoubtedly he is with us."[12] The Mayflower Compact of 1620 described the voyage of the English Puritan separatists to Cape Cod as having been undertaken "for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country."[13]

It was John Winthrop's famous sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," however, that gave clearest voice to the idea that God had made a covenant with English immigrants. Preached to Puritan immigrants to Massachusetts at the beginning of their

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11. "The First Charter of Virginia; April 10, 1606," The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, accessed February 18, 2014, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/va01.asp.

12. George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990), 15.

13. "The Mayflower Compact," UShistory.org, accessed February 18, 2014, http://www.ushistory.org/documents/mayflower.htm.

colonial endeavor in 1629, it illustrates their sense of divine mission. Winthrop, the newly chosen governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, asserted that he and his fellow migrants were called to exercise justice and mercy toward one another and to "work out our salvation under the power and purity of his holy ordinances." They were to live in obedience to God, for they had entered into a "covenant" with God. If he brought them safely to their intended destination, "then has he ratified this covenant and sealed our commission, [and] will expect a strict performance of the articles contained in it." The consequences of failing to live up to the terms of their covenant would be severe. If the colonists would "fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnal intentions, seeking great things for our selves and our posterity, the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us." Keeping the covenant, however, would make them a blessing to the world. The Lord would "be our God and delight to dwell among us, as his own people and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways…men shall say of succeeding plantations: the Lord make it like that of New England."[14] Winthrop saw a parallel between Massachusetts and ancient Israel, and ended his sermon by quoting from Deuteronomy 30, in which God promised blessings if Israel would obey him and curses if it did not.

Clearly, these English colonists intended to create societies that were Christian in orientation. By some measures, they were successful, if one simply means that a majority of the colony's inhabitants were professing Christians, or that the colony's leaders sought

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14. John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *The American Intellectual Tradition: A Sourcebook*, vol. 1, *1630-1865*, ed. David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7-15.

to enforce certain Christian behaviors like church attendance, or that the accepted authority in the colony was the Bible.[15]

English colonists were also, for the most part, sharply antagonistic toward those who did not share their religious beliefs or their vision of how society should be constructed. Many English settlers may have traveled to North America for the freedom to worship as they chose, but they were not interested in extending that right to others. The 1641 Massachusetts "Body of Liberties" stated that "if any man after legall conviction shall have or worship any other god, but the lord god, he shall be put to death." Capital punishment was also mandated not just for murder but for witchcraft, blasphemy, sodomy, homosexuality, adultery and kidnapping.[16] Early Baptists in the American colonies were sometimes whipped, fined or imprisoned. Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were banished from the Massachusetts colony for their dissenting views. Four members of the Society of Friends, also known as "Quakers," were executed in Massachusetts between 1659 and 1661 for their beliefs and rejection of Puritan authority. Most famously, nineteen people were executed in the witchcraft hysteria that gripped Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692.[17]

Protestant settlers were also sharply anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish. Settlers to Virginia were ordered to bring "no traitors, nor Papists that depend on the Great Whore;" in 1640, Virginia forbade Catholics from holding office unless they swore loyalty to the Church of England, and any Catholic priest who dared migrate to Virginia was to be

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15. See Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1983), 19-21, for a discussion of these matters of definition.

16. Ibid., 35.

17. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 58; Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 154-156.

deported. Maryland's 1649 "Act Concerning Religion" that made toleration of all
Christian groups the official policy explicitly excluded "blasphemers and Jews"—hardly
a promotion of the "Judeo-Christian ethic" that some twentieth-century evangelicals
would laud.[18]

Attitudes toward Native Americans and slaves were even less friendly. The
English did view the conversion of Native Americans to Christianity as one of their
responsibilities, thus revealing their belief in the essential humanity of native
inhabitants.[19] Yet they could also refer to Native Americans as "wild men," "hellish
fiends and brutish men/That devils worshipped" and "miserable animals."[20] William
Bradford, governor of Plymouth, described the burning of a Pequot village in 1637—
including the slaughter of several hundred women and children—as a "sweet sacrifice,"
for which the English "gave the praise to God."[21] John Cotton argued that English settlers
had the right to possess land that Indians had occupied for centuries: "Where there is a
vacant place, there is liberty for the son of Adam or Noah to come and inhabit, though
they neither buy it, nor ask their leaves."[22] Sporadic and brutal conflicts, like King
Phillip's War (1675-1676), were setbacks to what missionary efforts to Native Americans

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18. Steven Waldman, *Founding Faith: How Our Founding Fathers Forged a Radical New Approach to Religious Liberty* (New York: Random House, 2009), 4-5, 16-17.

19. The seal of the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Company depicted an Indian and words from Acts 16:9 that Paul heard in a dream from Macedonia: "Come Over and Help Us." Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 73.

20. The first phrase is from William Bradford; the second from Michael Wigglesworth. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 31. The third is from Cotton Mather. James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 133.

21. John Fea, *Was America Founded As a Christian Nation? A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 91.

22. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 32.

there were. Almost no white settlers in North America questioned the practice of slavery;[23] as Peter Kolchin notes, American slavery arose in a global context in which various forms of unfree status—slavery, serfdom, peonage—were widely practiced and accepted. Furthermore, there was little concerted effort by whites to introduce Christianity to slaves during the colonial period.[24] One observer noted in 1682 that "Christians in America…take very little care to have their slaves instructed...There, provided that the slaves can multiply, and work hard for the benefit of their masters, most men are well satisfied without the least thought of using their authority and endeavors to promote the good of the souls of those poor wretches."[25]

"The Birthday of a New World"

Religious leaders themselves hardly saw their era as any sort of "golden age" of Christianity. Indeed, within a few years of the founding of the New England colonies, the "jeremiad" became a staple of Puritan preaching. This type of sermon was essentially a lament over the sins of the people, and a warning that the society would experience God's judgment if its members did not repent and return to faithfulness.[26]

In the eighteenth century, it appeared to some in the American colonies that those pleas and prayers were being answered in the form of the First Great Awakening. This period of trans-Atlantic revivals, in which the American colonies participated, is usually

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23. An exception was the protest in 1688 from Pennsylvania Quakers and German Mennonites that slavery was a violation of the "Golden Rule" of Scripture to treat others as one would like to be treated. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 77.

24. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 4, 54.

25. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 77-78.

26. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 166.

dated to the 1730s and 1740s, although some have questioned whether it should be thought of as a cohesive event or as disparate revivals not meriting a group descriptor.[27] To be sure, there were revivals throughout the eighteenth century, but those beginning in the mid-1730s were exceptional in their energy. Beginning with the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in Massachusetts, the revival spread throughout the colonies through the preaching of many others, preeminently George Whitefield, who toured the colonies in the early 1740s and preached to thousands. In the fall of 1740, for example, he spoke to crowds of nearly 8,000 every day for a month.[28]

The Great Awakening shaped American Protestantism in a variety of ways, giving rise to a new style of belief and practice known as "evangelicalism." Above all, evangelicals emphasized the need for a personal relationship with God, an emphasis forcefully presented in the Great Awakening. Thousands reported a new intensity of religious experience. The revivals also fostered a new style of preaching, one more geared to emotional appeals to the heart, and one that would continue to be developed into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The First Great Awakening was largely Calvinist[29] in theological orientation. Calvinism emphasized a human being's inability to generate faith by himself or herself; traditionally, Calvinism taught that sin held a person's will completely captive unless freed by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, revivalist

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27. See, for instance, Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction," *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982), 305-325. Noll argues that the term "Great Awakening" is still useful, as long as it is carefully defined and one allows for other widely scattered local revivals. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 44.

28. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 91.

29. John Calvin (1509-1564) was born in France, but most of his ministry and prolific writing career was spent in Geneva. He is known as as the father of "Reformed" theology, which especially stresses God's sovereignty over all creation.

preachers could appeal to individuals to be saved, believing that God would move in

those whom he had called, or "elected," to salvation.[30] The Awakening was also a

sweeping event that united Americans, in that reports of revivals in various locales were

published elsewhere; Harry Stout has suggested that Whitefield became America's first

celebrity.[31] The Awakening also was a stimulus for a more individualistic understanding

of religion: while Protestantism as a whole stressed the need for individuals to place their

faith in Christ, itinerant evangelists like Whitefield urged them to do so even apart from

settled ministers and established churches. As Mark Noll writes, "the Great Awakening

by itself did not bring about the change from a Puritan style of religious life to an

evangelical style, but it had much to do with facilitating that shift, and thus it contributed

forcefully to the shape of later religious life."[32] Finally, the Awakening also prompted an

increase in conversions to Christianity among African Americans, both slave and free.

For some, the Great Awakening confirmed their belief that God had a special plan

for America. Christians have typically held one of three general views of the "end-

times"—what will happen at the end of earthly history—based on their understanding of

a passage in Revelation that speaks of Satan being bound for a thousand years.[33] Some

have been *postmillennialists*—the "post" refers to their belief that Christ will return at the

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30. Christopher H. Evans, *Histories of American Christianity: An Introduction* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 81.

31. Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), xiii.

32. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 104-105.

33. Revelation 20:1-3 reads: "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time" (New American Standard Bible).

end of that thousand-year period. In this view, society will develop in a positive direction

and things will get better and better until the dawn of the millennium brightens into the

full day of a golden age, culminating with Christ's arrival. Others have been

premillennialists, believing that Christ will return before the millennium begins, and that

until that day, the world's spiritual condition will get worse and worse. Still others have

been *amillennialists*, who hold that the reference to a thousand years is not to be taken

literally. In this view, the "millennium," taken symbolically, has been happening ever

since the earthly ministry of Christ. Most American Christians in the eighteenth century

were postmillennialists, and some saw the revivals as a sign that the millennial kingdom

was imminent—or even present. John Moorehead, a Boston minister, proclaimed: "The

Millennium is begun. Christ dwells with Men on Earth." Some seventy New England

clergymen signed a manifesto in 1743 that declared the Awakening to be a sign of the

millennium.[34] Jonathan Edwards, a pastor and theologian in Northampton,

Massachusetts, and defender of the revivals, saw God's hand in them. "It is not unlikely

that this work of God's Spirit," he wrote, "so extraordinary and wonderful, is the

dawning, or at least a prelude of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in scripture,

which, in the progress and issue of it, shall renew the world of mankind." Surely the

millennium was near. And, he added, "there are many things that make it probable that

this work will begin in America."[35] Edwards was hardly the first Puritan to suggest that

America would be the center of the millennial age. Cotton Mather's 1702 *Magnalia*

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34. Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1992), 70.

35. Jonathan Edwards, "The Latter-Day Glory is Probably to Begin in America," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 54.

Christi Americana asserted that New England would possibly be "the Spot of Earth, which the God of Heaven Spied out" as the capital of the millennial kingdom."[36]

Theologically, Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Paine were worlds apart. Edwards was one of the foremost heirs of the American Puritan tradition, with its belief in the sovereignty of God and the divine inspiration of the Bible. Paine, author of the pamphlet *Common Sense* that did much to mobilize revolutionary sentiment in the American colonies against Great Britain, within two decades would write *The Age of Reason* that attacked the Bible and organized religion, earning him the opprobrium of many American clergymen.

Yet Edwards and Paine shared a belief that America would play a central role in the drama God was unfolding in the world. For Paine, the timing of Europe's discovery of the Americas was no coincidence. "The Reformation was preceded by the discovery of America: As if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years, when home should afford neither friendship nor safety, " Paine wrote in *Common Sense*, published in 1776.[37] The American revolution that Paine sought to inspire had sweeping possibilities: "We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birth-day of a new world is at hand, and a race of men perhaps as numerous as

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36. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 70.

37. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense and Other Writings*, ed. George Stade (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005), 35. John Adams had recorded precisely the same idea in his diary in 1765: "I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth." Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 25.

all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom in the event of a few

months."[38]

Paine's assertion partook of Christian millennialism, although Paine himself did

not hold the view of biblical authority on which it was founded. American colonials with

a variety of religious beliefs shared the belief that the revolution was in some sense a new

dawn for the world. For many, the American Revolution had divine sanction. Abraham

Keteltas of Newburyport, Massachusetts, preached a sermon in 1777 titled "God Arising

and Pleading His People's Cause" in which he argued that "[o]ur cause is not only

righteous but, most important, it is God's own cause. It is the grand cause of the whole

human race." The cause of the American Revolution "is the cause of truth against error

and falsehood, the cause of righteousness against iniquity, the cause…of benevolence

against barbarity, of virtue against vice." The Revolution, he preached, was a battle of

heaven against hell. "It is the cause for which heroes have fought, patriots bled, prophets,

apostles, martyrs, confessors, and righteous men have died. Nay, it is a cause for which

the Son of God came down from his celestial throne and expired on a cross."[39]

For some eighteenth-century evangelicals, the Great Awakening that shaped their

movement made the American Revolution more possible. Historians have long debated

the relationship between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution.[40] Leaders

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38. Paine, *Common Sense and Other Writings*, 63.

39. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, 34-35.

40. Much of the historical debate, at least in the second half of the twentieth century, has centered on a thesis propounded by Alan Heimert, who argued in 1966 that the Awakening provided the impetus for the revolution. The theology of the Awakening, he wrote, "provided pre-Revolutionary America with a radical, even democratic, social and political ideology, and evangelical religion embodied, and inspired, a thrust toward American nationalism." Philip Goff, "Revivals and Revolution: Historiographic Turns since Alan Heimert's *Religion and the American Mind*," *Church History* 67, no. 4 (December 1998), 699. One of the primary limitations of this thesis is that it seems to ignore the fact that clergymen on both sides of the

of the Awakening did not explicitly espouse any particular political ideology, and it is

difficult to draw a bright line connecting the content of the revivalist sermons with the

revolution.[41] Yet various historians have suggested the Awakening helped create a

cultural milieu in which revolutionary ideas could flourish. Gordon Wood, for example,

writes that the religious revivals, which relied on an individualist logic, "became in one

way or another a massive defiance of traditional authority" and could foster a willingness

to challenge all forms of deference—including that needed to support a monarchical

society.[42] Patricia Bonomi also argues that denominational schisms caused by the

Awakening foreshadowed a spirit of later political rebellion; the Awakening "pierced the

façade of civility and deference that governed provincial life" and ushered in a "new age

of contentiousness;" revivalists frequently characterized their opponents as tyrannical and

illegitimate—rhetoric that would later be put to political use.[43]

    If the earlier revivalists' contribution to the revolution was limited to challenging

deferential habits, many preachers *during* the revolutionary era went much further,

baptizing the cause of independence with God's approval. In 1777, Nicholas Street

preached in New Haven, Connecticut, that the rebelling colonies were like Israel fleeing

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Awakening debates became supporters of the revolution; Heimert understood the Awakening's critics to have been at least reluctant revolutionaries if not outright loyalists. See Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 161. But Heimert's thesis is not entirely dead among historians, in the sense that many do see a cultural link between the Awakening and the revolution.

41. Marsden writes that the Awakening did not involve any "direct political program." *Religion and American Culture*, 29. Noll echoes that assertion, noting that prominent evangelists of the Awakening were "mostly interested in eternal matters." Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham* Lincoln (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 75.

42. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 145.

43. Ibid., 132, 153.

from Egyptian slavery during the Old Testament exodus. "And now we are in the

wilderness, i.e. in a state of trouble and difficulty, Egyptians pursuing us, to overtake and

reduce us." The colonies were fighting against "Egypt"—that is, Great Britain, which

was in "unreasonable vileness and cruelty…endeavouring to oppress, enslave and destroy

these American States."[44] Samuel Sherwood, a Congregational pastor in Fairfield,

Connecticut, preached in 1776 that God had favored "this branch of his church" with

"liberties and privileges…beyond what are enjoyed in any other part of the world."

Sherwood sought to encourage his hearers with the belief that God would ensure the

success of the revolution: "It does not appear probable that a persecuting, oppressive and

tyrannical power will ever be permitted to rear up its head and horns in it.…Liberty has

been planted here; and the more it is attacked, the more it grows and flourishes."

Comparing Great Britain to "Babylon the great" in the biblical book of Revelation,

Sherwood suggested that these "commotions and convulsions in the British empire"

might be the tribulation before the millennium, ending his sermon with a peroration of

biblical texts describing that blissful era. Clearly, in Sherwood's view, God favored the

American cause.[45] Israel Evans, a Continental Army chaplain who served under George

Washington, also linked America with Israel. Evans preached a sermon immediately

following the 1781 American victory at Yorktown; his published version included a

poem with the lines: "To him who led in ancient days/The Hebrew tribes, your anthems

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44. Nicholas Street, "The American States Acting Over the Part of the Children of Israel in the Wilderness and Thereby Impeding Their Entrance into Canaan's Rest," in Cherry, *God's New Israel*, 69-70.

45. Samuel Sherwood, "The Church's Flight into the Wilderness," in *A Documentary History of Religion in America to 1877*, 3rd ed. Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 228.

raise;/The God who spoke from Sinai's hill/Protects his chosen people still."[46] In these sermons and many others like them, preachers like Street, Sherwood and Evans borrowed indiscriminately from biblical examples of oppression, applying them to the wartime situation. They also freely combined Whig revolutionary ideology and Scripture. As John Fea writes, "[v]ery few patriot sermons noted the differences between civil liberty as taught by patriots and spiritual liberty as taught in the Bible."[47]

Republican Ideology, Revival and Reform

This assertion that God favored the patriot cause gave rise to the belief following the war that the newly independent nation was specially favored by God. For numerous Americans following the attainment of independence, the blessings of political liberty and the blessings of eternal salvation were granted by the same God, and had considerable overlap. This "deification of the national enterprise," writes Marsden, was the beginning of "civil religion": "the attributing of a sacred character to the nation itself."[48] If so, then the first saint of the civil religion was George Washington. Even while alive, Washington was the subject of remarkable encomiums. The chaplain Evans' praise of Washington could be mistaken for references to Christ. In 1779, Evans told battle-weary troops that "once more see[ing] the illustrious CHIEF of the armies of the United States, and obtain[ing] his approbation, for he knows your worth, will make you forget all your past dangers and toils, and make you pant for an opportunity to distinguish

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46. Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 127.

47. Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?*, 108.

48. George Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990), 42.

yourself in his presence."[49] This adulation would continue into the nineteenth century,

with biographies like that of Mason Locke Weems, who invented stories of Washington's

piety and moral probity,[50] and paintings like the 1865 *The Apotheosis of Washington*,

which adorns the rotunda of the United States capitol and depicts Washington ascending

to heaven surrounded by female figures representing Liberty, Victory and the original

thirteen colonies.[51]

The United States Constitution, ratified in 1788, did not mention God,[52] and the

Bill of Rights (which took effect in 1791) prohibited the federal government from

establishing a national religion or prohibiting its free exercise, although it said nothing

about support of religion by the individual states.[53] Such a hands-off policy—the creation

of what Thomas Jefferson would later suggest was a "wall of separation" between church

and state[54]—did not, however, mean the separation of religion from American society.

Within a half-century of America's independence, evangelicalism in a multiplicity of

sects and denominations was thriving. Indeed, writes Fea, if "the United States was ever a

'Christian nation,' it was so during the period between the ratification of the Constitution

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49. Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 125-126.

50. Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?*, 171-172. Weems' biography was published in forty different editions between 1799 and 1825. See also Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York: Random House, 2004), 7; and David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 59-71.

51. "Apotheosis of Washington," Architect of the Capitol, accessed February 18, 2014, http://www.aoc. gov/cc/art/rotunda/apotheosis/Overview.cfm.

52. At least, with the exception of Article VII, which mentions the "Year of our Lord."

53. In 1791, five of the nation's fourteen states had "established" religion—that is, systems in which certain churches received tax dollars—at the time of ratification. Massachusetts was the last state to "disestablish" religion in 1833.

54. The reference comes from Jefferson's 1802 letter to a Baptist group in Danbury, Connecticut.

(1789) and the start of the Civil War (1861)."[55] This would have been surprising to many

of the nation's "founding fathers," many of whom were heavily influenced by Deism.[56]

This departure from traditional Christianity was an outgrowth of the Enlightenment, the

eighteenth-century movement that put great trust in the ability of reason and the scientific

method. Deism was a view of God that stripped traditional theology of anything that

could not be supported by unaided human reason; Deists believed in a creator God—

since reason demanded that a highly complex "machine" like the universe have a

creator—but were highly suspicious of any claims of his supernatural intervention in the

world.[57] They also, for the most part, rejected the Trinity, the traditional Christian belief

that God, while one being is also three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. Jefferson,

famously, excised all miracles, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and any claims of Christ's

divinity from his version of the gospels.[58]

Jefferson was prescient about many things, most notably the destructive power of

slavery in the new nation. But regarding the religious future of America, he wildly missed

the mark, asserting that Unitarianism—a theology that rejected the Trinity—would sweep

the nation. "I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief," he wrote to a

Unitarian minister, "which has surrendered its creed and conscience to neither kings nor

priests, the genuine doctrine of only one God is reviving, and I trust there is not a young

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55. Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?*, 4. Between 1776 and 1850, the percentage of Americans belonging to a church roughly doubled, to 34 percent. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 55.

56. For a discussion of the religious beliefs of selected early American political leaders, see Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* and Waldman, *Founding Faith.*

57. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 32.

58. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*, 82-83. See also Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), 24-25.

man now living who will not die an Unitarian."[59] Yet it was evangelicalism, with its

thorough-going Trinitarian theology and its emotional fervency far removed from Deistic

coolness, that carried the day in the nineteenth century.

By 1835, the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville could write after an extended tour

of the United States that "America is still the place where the Christian religion has kept

the greatest real power over men's souls."[60] In large measure, this was due to the "Second

Great Awakening" that was then revitalizing American Christianity. As is the case with

the First Great Awakening, giving precise dates to the second is difficult, for the entire

nineteenth century was punctuated by revivals in various regions. But the first four

decades of the nineteenth century saw a surge of conversions to evangelical Christianity.

While church membership is not the only way to assess the strength of the revival, the

percentage of Americans who were members of churches seems to have doubled between

1800 and 1860.[61]

If the First Great Awakening was largely Calvinist in theological orientation, the

second was marked by a more Arminian bent. "Arminianism"—a theological framework

named for the Dutch theologian James Arminius (1560-1609)—put far greater trust in

human ability to come to Christ than did Calvinism. Charles G. Finney, the most famous

and influential of the mid-nineteenth century evangelists, wrote that revival "is not a

miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the

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59. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*, 88.

60. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. by J. P. Mayer. Trans. George Lawrence (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1969), 291.

61. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 48. Marsden notes that membership statistics are somewhat unreliable, apparently referring to uneven records and varied criteria among different denominations.

right use of the constituted means." While the means themselves were created by God,

the use of those means to bring about revival lay within human power.[62] In part, this

emphasis on human free will in salvation was due to the growing influence of Methodism

in America. John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, and Francis Asbury

(1745-1816), an Englishman who spent most of his adult life traveling America as a

Methodist missionary, emphasized humanity's liberty to accept or reject God's free

grace. Baptists, too, modified somewhat their traditional Calvinism, in practice if not in

doctrine.[63] Both Baptists and Methodists engaged in vigorous evangelism, and the

numbers of both grew tremendously in the early nineteenth century.[64] By the mid-

nineteenth century, asserts Richard J. Carwardine, evangelicalism was the "principal

subculture in American society."[65]

A theology that emphasized human free will dovetailed easily with the growing

egalitarianism and democratic spirit in the new republic. Americans had thrown off the

yoke of the British Empire, and were open to a theological message that said that their

wills were also unshackled. For many, the rhetoric of revival and Revolution became

inextricably linked, and many American evangelicals blended their faith with republican

ideology. As Nathan Hatch writes, evangelists in the early republic "could rarely divorce

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62. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Leavitt, Lord, 1835), 12.

63. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 172, 178.

64. Finke and Stark note the change in "market share" held by different religious denominations between 1776 and 1850. The Baptist share of all religious adherents increased from about 17 percent to about 21 percent during that period. The Methodist increase was far more pronounced, rising from about 3 percent to over 34 percent. The percentages of religious adherents claimed by Congregationalists, Episcopalians and Presbyterians all fell in those years. Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*, 56.

65. Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 1.

[their message of revival] from contagious new democratic vocabularies and impulses that swept through American popular cultures."[66] According to Tocqueville: "For the Americans the ideas of Christianity and liberty are so completely mingled that it is almost impossible to get them to conceive of the one without the other."[67] Thus Lorenzo Dow, an American Methodist revivalist preacher, could quote both the Bible and Thomas Paine in a sermon, and cite the Declaration of Independence as an authority: "But if all men are 'BORN EQUAL,' and endowed with unalienable RIGHTS by their CREATOR, in the blessings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—then there can be no just reason, as a cause, why he may or should not think, and judge, and act for himself in matters of religion, opinion, and private judgment."[68]

For many American evangelicals, it was indeed "self-evident" that all (white men, at least) were created equal. Both reason and Scripture, with its affirmation of the "priesthood" of all believers,[69] seemed to support the rectitude of the American political system. Theodore Frelinghuysen, whose political career included being a U.S. senator and a vice-presidential candidate, asserted that "Republic is a word of Christian meaning."[70] It was clear to many evangelicals that God's hand was on the American nation, birthing it through the Revolution, preserving it during its tumultuous first decades and now was blessing it as it expanded. From there, it was a short step to

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66. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 7.

67. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 293.

68. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 36-37.

69. The idea comes primarily from I Pet. 2:9.

70. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, 19.

affirming that God had specially chosen the nation for his purposes. "[I]f this nation is, in the providence of God, destined to lead the way in the moral and political emancipation of the world," said Lyman Beecher, Congregational and Presbyterian minister, in an 1835 speech, "it is time she understood her high calling, and were harnessed for the work."

This sense of "high calling" fed the belief that the nation had a "manifest destiny" to overspread the continent, bringing with it the purported blessings of liberty and Christianity. "It is…plain that the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West," Beecher continued. "There is the territory, and there soon will be the population, the wealth, and the political power."[71] The idea that the future lay in the west was an old one. Ernest Lee Tuveson notes that many Europeans had long had a sense that "civilization" was carried across the centuries by particular peoples, and that it had moved west, from the Near East to Greece to Rome and then to Western Europe. It seemed logical that the next step would be across the Atlantic. "Westward the course of empire takes its way," wrote the British philosopher George Berkeley in a 1726 poem.[72] In the nineteenth century, the Lousiana Purchase (1803), the forcible removal of Native Americans from their lands east of the Mississippi River, and a burgeoning population pushing ever westward made real the possibility that America might eventually stretch all the way to Pacific Ocean. The imaginations of many Americans were fired by the possibility of expanding the nation's borders. In 1845, the journalist John L. O'Sullivan summarized the attitudes of many, writing of "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying

71. Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 2nd ed. (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1835), 10-11.

72. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation,* 94-95.

millions."[73] By 1846, the United States had negotiated with Britain for Oregon and instigated a war with Mexico that resulted in the acquisition of California and much of what is now the American Southwest. While for some the concept of "manifest destiny" was a purely nationalist sentiment, it also for others had a religious component. Not only had "Providence" allotted the western lands to America, as O'Sullivan asserted, but pushing westward allowed Christianity to spread, too; missionaries, revivalists and denominations moved westward with the nation.

Two Civil Wars

By the mid-nineteenth century, evangelicals across regional and denominational boundaries shared a common "creed": "a Trinitarian God; the depravity, guilt and condemnation of all mankind; an atonement by the Son of God sufficient to procure man's salvation; regeneration by the Holy Ghost producing repentance and faith; and the final judgment of all men, resulting in everlasting misery for the wicked and blessedness for the righteous."[74] Despite these unifying characteristics, evangelicalism was about to both experience and contribute to the Civil War. Evangelicals, North and South, would take different positions not only on the question of slavery, but on the proper relationship of Christians to their government and the type of reform that they should seek. Furthermore, within a few decades of the Civil War, evangelicalism would be further fractured by another "civil war," one between fundamentalists and modernists.

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73. John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," in *The Early American Republic: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Sean Patrick Adams (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 189.

74. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, 2.

The Second Great Awakening took place as the "second party system," consisting of the Whig and Democratic parties, was forming, and the two processes shaped each other. Both political rallies and evangelical revivals drew on the same populist theme of the equality of all white men. Both politicians and revivalists pragmatically used varied means to excite the masses. As Finney noted, the politicians "get up meetings, circulate handbills and pamphlets, blaze away in the newspapers, send their ships about the streets on wheels with flags and sailors, send coaches all over town, with handbills, to bring people up to the polls, all to gain attention to their cause and elect their candidate." Revivalists were justified in adopting similar tactics, he suggested.[75]

There were evangelicals who saw political involvement as unfitting for the dutiful follower of Christ, for several different reasons. For some, their political abstention was rooted in a distaste for the "evils" of party spirit: the divisiveness fostered by party politics worked against the harmony desired in a Christian society, political rallies—often lubricated with plenty of alcohol—led to moral decay, and duplicitous politicians said whatever they thought the electorate wanted to hear. "[V]ital piety,' wrote one Methodist churchman, "declines in the Churches very nearly in proportion to the increase of political excitement."[76] Other political abstainers had deeper theological reasons for their disengagement. Some adopted a "pietist" stance, arguing that the Christian's primary duties were to cultivate personal holiness and to save souls; politics was an irrelevant concern. Others, like the Reformed Presbyterians, believed that the American system of government was essentially non-Christian—the Constitution did not acknowledge the

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75. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 198-199.

76. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, 8-11.

supremacy of Christ or the authority of Scripture—and thus they would not ally

themselves with it. Premillennialists like the "Adventist" followers of William Miller

believed that the return of Christ was so near that politics was pointless. Why vote when

the universe itself would soon be destroyed?[77]

The political abstainers, however, were in the minority in the antebellum period.

Most evangelicals were politically engaged, although they were not monolithic in their

party affiliations. Those who viewed politics as a means of advancing their reform

agendas tended to join the Whig Party, agreeing with its vision of an activist role for

government, including the responsibility to uphold public morality. For evangelical

Whigs, the old Puritan idea still loomed large: the state was a moral entity and Christians

had a duty to influence it. Democratic evangelicals, on the other hand, tended to believe

that government should be neutral, and that regenerate individuals should voluntarily

regulate their own behavior.[78] While they may have disagreed over the proper affiliation

for evangelicals, both Democratic and Whig evangelicals would have affirmed Finney's

statement: "In a popular government, politics are an important part of religion. No one

can possibly be benevolent or religious, to the full extent of his obligations, without

concerning himself, to a greater or less extent, with the affairs of human government."[79]

The nineteenth century was one of tremendous Christian activism generally, and

especially on the part of evangelicals. Reformers were motivated by a variety of

impulses, most prominently the biblical commands to ameliorate the needs of their fellow

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77. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, 14-16.

78. Ibid., 35.

79. Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Richard Friedrich (Fairfax: Xulon Press, 2003), 480.

humans. For some, there was a fair bit of anxiety over Roman Catholicism thrown in[80];

this was an era, after all, of strong nativism whose most prominent political manifestation

was the Know-Nothing (or American Party) with its principle that "Americans must rule

America."[81] For some evangelicals, improving education was a way to assimilate

potentially dangerous immigrants into an "American" way of life. They also were driven

by the postmillennialist hope common to the era. Writing in the 1830s, Finney gave voice

to this optimistic eschatology: "If the church will do all her duty, the millennium may

come in this country in three years."[82]

Evangelicals increased their mission activities, forming groups like the American

Sunday School Union (1824) for the purpose of evangelizing and educating young people

within the nation's borders, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign

Missions (1810) to send missionaries overseas. They created magazines and publishing

houses, like the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society, as tools for

reaching a popular audience.[83] They formed an abundance of voluntary societies, creating

what Ronald G. Walters has termed a "benevolent empire" of overlapping causes,

leadership boards and financial resources.[84] These groups tackled a variety of social

issues, seeking, for example, to improve education, end the practice of dueling, improve

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80. For example, in the speech noted above, Beecher warned his hearers of the "dark-skinned" and Catholic populations "leaving Europe and dashing upon our shores." While he argued that their rights should be protected, he also expressed fear that Catholic beliefs about the relationship between church and state were dangerous to republican government . Beecher, "A Plea for the West," 66-69.

81. Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers: 1815-1860*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 10.

82. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, second edition (New York: Leavitt, Lord and Co., 1835), 282.

83. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 424-425.

84. Walters, 33.

the care of the disabled and mentally ill, and curb the nation's use of alcohol.[85] The latter

was rooted in the fact that the nation's per capita liquor consumption was higher in the

early nineteenth century that at any other time in American history; the temperance

movement gained enough steam in the mid-nineteenth century that Massachusetts and

Maine restricted access to strong drink.[86]

As the abolitionist movement gained steam in the mid-nineteenth century, the

divergent understanding of the role of government contributed to the sectional crisis.

Southern evangelicals, concerned with maintaining their slave society, viewed a reformist

vision of the federal government with alarm, for it could become a tool of abolition.

Some northern evangelicals had precisely that hope. Not all abolitionists were

evangelicals, nor were all northern evangelicals abolitionists, but the anti-slavery cause

was, Carwardine writes, "profoundly influenced by that strain of millennialist,

perfectionist revivalism associated with Finney," especially in New England.[87]

The American Civil War was a fight over the question of slavery, the proper

relationship of the federal government to the states, and the nature of the nation's

westward expansion. It was also a religious war.[88] Differing ways of interpreting

Scripture on the question of slavery motivated belligerents. The famous line from

Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address—"Both read the same Bible, and pray to

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85. Sweeney, 74.

86. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 296.

87. Carwardine, 134.

88. Noll is perhaps the most prominent historian of American evangelicalism to make this assertion. See, for example, *God and Race in American Politics*: *A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 14; *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

the same God"—is accurate.[89] But many northern and southern evangelicals came to strikingly different conclusions on the question of slavery. Those seeking to defend the practice pointed out that the Bible never condemned slavery; indeed, the New Testament commanded slaves to obey their owners, and the apostle Paul sent an escaped slave back to his master. Northern anti-slavery evangelicals had a somewhat more complex biblical case to make. One strategy they used was to argue that the type of slavery condoned in the Bible was different from the race-based, perpetual bondage practiced in nineteenth-century America. A second was to argue that the spirit of the Bible was to be followed rather than the letter; in other words, that the general thrust of the Bible—in its principles of Christian love, the creation of all humans in God's image, and the basic unity of believers—was toward equality.[90] This second strategy was vulnerable to the pro-slavery charge that its proponents were playing fast and loose with the biblical text and were insufficiently literal in their interpretation.[91] In the 1830s and '40s, three major Christian denominations—Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist—split into northern and southern wings. The reasons for these splits were complex, especially in in the case of the Presbyterians, who faced other differences than slavery. But the issue of slavery did play a major role in these divisions, and the fracturing of these church bodies foreshadowed the collapse of the second party system—and the subsequent creation of the Republican Party—and the Civil War itself.

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89. Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," in Hollinger and Capper, 528.

90. Noll, *America's God,* 389-390.

91. "Broken Churches, Broken Nation," *Christian History* xi, no. 1 (1992): 27.

The war provided opportunities to once again reflect on the nature of God's dealings with America. For some of those northern evangelicals who saw slavery as the "national sin," the war was a harbinger of the millennium: this group had great hopes that a new day would dawn with slavery's eradication. In the words of Julia Ward Howe in her "Battle Hymn of the Republic," the nation was now undergoing God's "righteous sentence." He was "trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored," and using his "terrible swift sword." But his "truth is marching on," and she claimed to see the "glory of the coming of the Lord." The same idea was present—without the optimistic millennial hope—in Lincoln's remarkable second inaugural address, in which he suggested that God might be punishing both north and south with "this mighty scourge of war."[92]

A more common response among both northern and southern evangelicals was to claim God's approval for their side. For many Americans the idea that America was God's chosen nation—in some sense, a "new Israel"—was standard. Lincoln, whose own faith remains something of a mystery,[93] expressed the idea with a caveat, describing himself as a "humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people."[94] Others were not so cautious; Lincoln's "almost" did not figure in their

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92. Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," 529.

93. Lincoln's faith was the subject of speculation during his political career, and remains so. He never formally joined a church, and at least early in life was influenced by the religious skepticism of writers like Thomas Paine. There is no evidence that he had a "born again" conversion so treasured by evangelicals. Yet his rhetoric reveals a man profoundly influenced by the Bible, and there is some evidence—especially his "Meditation on the Divine Will"—that he had moved by the time of his death from a mechanistic fatalism to a belief in God's providential control of the world. For a discussion of this move, see Ronald C. White, Jr., *A. Lincoln* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2009), 622-627. For a short summary of Lincoln's religious views, see Noll, "The Puzzling Faith of Abraham Lincoln," *Christian History* xi, no. 1 (1992): 11-15.

thinking. Both northern and southern preachers sought to claim for their side the mantle of God's chosen nation. Beecher, a strong defender of the Union who in 1861 was the pastor of a Congregational church in Brooklyn, rehearsed Israel's difficult exodus from Egypt and argued that throughout history, standing for moral principle meant facing tribulation: "And now our turn has come. Right before us lies the Red Sea of war. It is red indeed. There is blood in it…and the Word of God to us to-day is, 'Speak unto this people that they go forward!'"[95] Using the same biblical story, Benjamin M. Palmer, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, drew the reverse conclusion: the southern states were only seceding from the Union to defend the principle of self-government, "but the heart of our modern Pharaoh is hardened, that he will not let Israel go."[96]

After the war, evangelicals sought to bridge the divide between north and south, although regional denominational splits remained into the twentieth century. But the Civil War was not the only disrupting event in the second half of the nineteenth century; American evangelicals faced various social challenges, including urbanization, immigration and industrialization. There was nothing intrinsically "rural" about American evangelical theology, and evangelicalism had long thrived in urban settings. But these changes did mean that evangelicals would have to adapt, no longer able to rely on small-town ethos and familial networks that had shaped the culture of the nation.[97]

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94. Abraham Lincoln, "Address to the New Jersey Senate," Abraham Lincoln Online, accessed November 14, 2012, http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/trenton1.htm

95. Henry Ward Beecher, "The Battle Set in Array," in Cherry, *God's New Israel*, 172.

96. Benjamin M. Palmer, "National Responsibility Before God," in Cherry, *God's New Israel*, 184.

The bigger question was how evangelicals would react to new intellectual challenges, namely, the theory of evolution and new, critical methods of understanding the Bible. Disputes over these issues would eventually split American Protestants into "fundamentalists" and "modernists." As far as American evangelicals were concerned, this religious "civil war" was nearly as earth-shaking as the war between North and South. It was also a split with political implications, for the theological conservatism of fundamentalists would come to be matched by their political conservatism.

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97. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 364.

CHAPTER 2

FUNDAMENTALISM, MODERNISM AND NEO-EVANGELICALISM

> An evangelical message vitally related to world conditions is not precluded by New Testament doctrine. Indeed, conservative Protestantism insists, *only* this estimate of the sinfulness of man and his need of regeneration is sufficiently realistic to make at all possible any securely-grounded optimism in world affairs. Any other framework can offer only a "bubble and froth cure."
>
> —Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism,* 1947

In the early twentieth century, long before Billy Graham rose to prominence, the most famous American revivalist preacher was another "Billy": William Sunday, "the baseball evangelist." Born in Iowa in 1862, Billy Sunday (1862-1935) became a professional baseball player in the 1880s. After undergoing a conversion experience, Sunday left baseball and became a preacher. The basic message of the Bible, Sunday believed, was that individuals could be saved from the penalty of their sin and be spared an eternity in hell. Humanity's real problem was not economic or working conditions, or lack of education. Rather, humans were sinners who needed to come to Christ and forsake their wicked ways. It was a message that Sunday preached with vigorous energy and flamboyant showmanship—he was known for sliding across the platform as if the podium were home plate, or for planting an American flag on the pulpit—and he drew heavily on homespun metaphors and colloquial speech. "I'd stand on my head in a mud puddle," he once said, "if I thought it would help me win souls for Christ."[1]

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1. George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990), 179; L. W. Dorsett, "Sunday, William (Billy) Ashley," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid, Robert D. Linder, Bruce L. Shelley, Harry S. Stout (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

Washington Gladden (1836-1918) was also a preacher, but one with a markedly different style, temperament and theology. Gladden, by 1882 the pastor of a Congregationalist church in Columbus, Ohio, sought to apply Christian theology to all aspects of life, including economic and social conditions. He advocated ethical business practices, profit-sharing between owners and employees, and unionization. The church, he believed, ought to ameliorate the conditions that led to poverty, unemployment and drunkenness. The views of Gladden—along with those of men like Walter Rauschenbusch, Josiah Strong, and Charles Sheldon—would eventually become known as the "Social Gospel." Leaders of this movement believed that Christianity ought to be a powerful force for social reform.[2]

To Gladden, the revivalist Sunday's message of individual salvation from eternal damnation was simplistic, a caricature of Scriptural teaching, and when Sunday came to Columbus in 1912 for a series of revival meetings Gladden sharply criticized him and his techniques. A debate erupted in the city's religious press. Sunday—who defended Christian charity and generosity—nevertheless charged that leaders like Gladden were "trying to make a religion out of social service with Jesus Christ left out." For Sunday, the Social Gospel had too much "social" and not enough "gospel." "We've had enough of this godless social service nonsense," he said.[3] The road to the kingdom of God is not by the bathtub, or the gymnasium, or the university, but by the "blood red hand of the cross of Christ."[4]

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2. Roger Bruns, *Preacher: Billy Sunday and Big-Time American Evangelism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 129.

3. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 31.

The exchange between Gladden and Sunday was but one small skirmish in a much larger war that had broken out within American evangelicalism. By 1912, evangelicalism was dividing into two camps, split over how to respond to new social and intellectual challenges. A "conservative" wing, to which Sunday belonged, sought to defend the old orthodox theological formulations; a "liberal" wing was willing to adapt and modify evangelical theology to make it more amenable to new intellectual trends. Following the First World War, these wings would coalesce into "fundamentalists" and "modernists," and would battle for control of Protestant denominations and colleges.

Fundamentalists largely lost these battles, and also lost the cultural influence that conservative Protestants had enjoyed in the nineteenth century. From the 1930s through the 1970s, fundamentalists—and the "neo-evangelicals" who would seek to reform fundamentalism—largely avoided overt political action, although they never were as apolitical as some observers thought. It was true that their theology—in large measure a reaction against the Social Gospel—pushed them away from political activity, as did their fascination with premillennial dispensationalism. Nevertheless, they still voted, and many were willing to politically mobilize over certain issues like prohibition and measures restricting the teaching of evolutionary theory. And they never lost their hopes for restoring "Christian America," which for them meant a nation in which Christianity was again accorded a place of social and political prominence. During these decades, conservative Protestants would lay the groundwork for their political resurgence in the 1970s.

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4. Bruns, *Preacher*, 130-131.

"Be Ye Separate": The Fundamentalist-Modernist Split

Despite the horrific devastation of the Civil War, when it was over, many evangelicals still retained great hopes for the nation's future. Slavery had been ended, and since most white evangelicals failed to grapple with the depth of the nation's racism, for many northern evangelicals it seemed the biggest barrier to the postmillennial golden age they anticipated had been removed. There were a variety of reasons why their optimism of the mid-nineteenth century continued apace.

Evangelicals still dominated the nation's colleges, where their theology was supported by Scottish "common sense" realism; this optimistic epistemology was opposed to the skepticism of philosophers like David Hume and held that the human mind could apprehend truth directly.[5] For evangelicals, both "common sense" and science supported the conclusions about God's nature and work they drew from Scripture. Both the natural world and the Bible were witnesses of the same set of truths. Furthermore, revivals continued with regularity, and some major Protestant denominations saw their membership triple between 1860 and 1900.[6] The most prominent revivalist of the postwar era was Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), a Chicago businessman who turned to evangelism. A two-year preaching tour with his song-leading partner Ira Sankey (1840-1908) in Great Britain brought him acclaim back home, and Moody returned to the United States to embark on a career that made him the most widely heard preacher in America during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

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5. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 15.

6. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 100.

The postwar years also saw a concerted effort to increase America's missionary presence around the world. Here, too, Moody was influential. Missions conferences he initiated near his Northfield, Massachusetts, home led to the 1876 founding of the Student Volunteer Movement; its motto—"the evangelization of the world in this generation"—encapsulated the optimism and sense of possibility felt by many evangelicals.[7] SVM was but one such missionary effort; denominations like the Presbyterians and Baptists also increased their international mission efforts.

At home, evangelicals engaged in vigorous reform efforts; perhaps as many as 85 percent of the social reformers at the turn of twentieth century were connected in some way to evangelicalism.[8] This is not to suggest that all evangelicals espoused the same agendas; evangelicalism was so widespread and pervasive in American society that one could find evangelicals on multiple sides of any given issue. Nevertheless, evangelicals provided much of the energy for reform efforts, including temperance, anti-poverty efforts,[9] and legislation aimed at limiting commerce on Sundays. The broader Progressive movement—with its agenda that included fighting government corruption, increasing democratic participation, protecting consumers, lessening the gap between rich and poor, and introducing women's suffrage—was fueled in large part by an evangelical sense of civic responsibility that had its roots in colonial Puritanism.[10] The fact that

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7. Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 290.

8. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 96.

9. The Salvation Army, for example, sought to help the poor through the charitable provision of food and coal, but also attempted to ameliorate the conditions that led to poverty through job training and apprenticeship programs, elementary schooling, and legal aid. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 304.

10. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 97.

delegates to the 1912 Progressive Party convention could sing the hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers" illustrates this linkage.[11]

Nevertheless, even as those "Christian soldiers" marched, the ground under their feet was shaking. Numerous changes, both social and intellectual, were about to pose formidable challenges to the evangelical dominance of American culture. The related processes of urbanization, immigration, and industrialization were reshaping the ways Americans lived, worked and related to one another.[12] None of these changes posed an existential threat to evangelicalism; indeed, evangelicals, with their decentralized—even fragmented—church organizations and pragmatic spirit were well-suited to adapt quickly to a less rural environment. But alongside these changes were intellectual challenges that posed a greater threat to evangelical theology. The differing ways that evangelicals would respond to these challenges would eventually split the movement.

Challenges to Evangelical Faith

Evangelicals are, above all else, "people of the Book." As noted in the introduction, "biblicism"—a high degree of reverence for the Bible—is one of the key

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11. Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans in the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 220.

12. A few statistics illustrate those changes. The federal census of 1870 was the last time that a majority of American workers were agricultural; by 1900, the agricultural workforce had declined to 37 percent. The percentage of urbanized Americans—those living in towns with populations of 2,500 or more—doubled between 1860 and 1900, from 20 to 40 percent. The pace of immigration, too, accelerated tremendously in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Between 1840 and 1870, an average of two million immigrants entered the United States each decade; between 1870 and 1900, that figure doubled to four million. Not all immigrants stayed; many eventually returned to their homelands. But perhaps 75 percent remained in America. A large percentage of those immigrants were from southern and eastern Europe, and they helped make the nation a more diverse place, in terms of language, culture, and—since many of them were Roman Catholics or Jews—religion. These immigrants also helped make the United States a rising industrial powerhouse. Steel production is a remarkable indicator, rising from 19,000 tons in 1867 to ten million in 1900. William L. Barney, *The Passage of the Republic: An Interdisciplinary History of Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1987), 293-295, 298.

characteristics of the movement. Evangelical theology was—and is—built on a belief in the supernatural character of the Bible, asserting that it was "inspired" by God who supervised its creation.

Thus, when the authority of the Bible began to be challenged in the second half of the nineteenth century, evangelicals would begin to feel that the very foundations of their faith were under attack. As historian George Marsden writes, the "old order of American Protestantism was based on the interrelationship of faith, science, the Bible, morality, and civilization. It was about to crumble."[13]

Even as evangelicals celebrated their visible successes in the later nineteenth century, there were forces of secularization at work. Intellectual inquiry increasingly began to look to naturalistic rather than supernatural sources of truth. In one sense, this was nothing new. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment had celebrated the power of human reason to unlock the secrets of the universe; for some Enlightenment thinkers, this meant reason needed little or no assistance from divine revelation. In the nineteenth century, some proponents of the new social sciences—like Auguste Comte (1798-1857)—argued that social law no longer needed divine sanction, for society could be founded on science rather than religion. Some held the belief that science and religion were in conflict. For example, Andrew Dickson White, a founder and first president of Cornell University, made clear his allegiance in that supposed war. His university, he promised, would "afford an asylum for Science—where truth shall be sought for truth's

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13. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 17.

sake, where it shall not be the main purpose of the Faculty to stretch or cut sciences

exactly to fit 'Revealed Religion.'"[14]

For others, empirical science was a less sure guide to truth than were feeling and

intuition. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), a German theologian, argued that

feeling was at the very core of religion. For Schleiermacher, theological truth was

founded not on propositional statements about God but on a feeling of "absolute

dependence" or "God-consciousness." Creedal statements did not communicate objective

truth; rather, they reflected the intuitive knowledge of God that their creators had

experienced. Theological truth thus became for Schleiermacher radically subjective.[15]

This stress on the importance of intuition and feeling was echoed in the Romantic

movement of literature and art, although most of its leaders had even less interest than

Schleiermacher in engaging with traditional orthodoxy. In America, Ralph Waldo

Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and other "transcendentalists" sought a direct intuition of

truth, often through the contemplation of nature. For both Thoreau and Emerson, this

direct apprehension of truth, unmediated through sacred texts or historic dogma, led to a

vigorous individualism. "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature," wrote

Emerson. "Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only

right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it."[16]

Thus, traditional religious authority underwent substantial questioning by a

variety of intellectuals in the latter nineteenth century. The "higher criticism" of the Bible

14. Noll, *A History of the United States and Canada*, 366.

15. W. A. Hoffecker, "Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2d ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

16. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. George Stade (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004), 116.

fueled this suspicion. Scholars of the Bible had long used so-called "lower" or textual

criticism as part of their methodology; this was the practice of comparing small variants

in the copies of the ancient texts in an effort to determine which was most likely the

original. Higher criticism, however, was the application of techniques of literary criticism

to the Bible. This new methodology—developed especially in German theological

schools like the one in Tübingen—went far beyond the attempt to determine the content

of the original text; practitioners of this methodology began to treat the Bible as they

would any other collection of literary documents, asking questions of authorship, the

circumstances of the documents' creation, how and when they were formed and

transmitted, and what belief system and traditions may have informed their creation.

While it was possible to address these questions while still holding to the inspiration of

the Bible,[17] most practitioners of this method did not feel constrained by any belief in its

supernatural origin. Believing that theirs was a properly scientific method, these biblical

interpreters were willing to question, for example, whether the stated author of a biblical

book actually was. One of the earliest arguments from higher critics was that the

Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) was not written by Moses, as

traditionally assumed, but rather had a number of authors and had evolved over a long

period.[18] In time, these methods were also applied to the New Testament. In the 1830s,

David Friedrich Strauss, a German theologian, produced his *Life of Jesus, Critically

Examined*, arguing that while the New Testament accounts of Jesus may have contained

spiritual truth, they were nevertheless embellished stories and were historically

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17. Richard L. Shultz, "Higher Criticism," in Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*.

18. Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 25.

inaccurate. Joseph Renan, a French scholar, published a similarly named *Life of Jesus* (1863), and also argued that the New Testament was not literally true.

Coupled with—and at times reinforcing—these new approaches to understanding the Bible was a new way of understanding the origins of life. This, too, challenged the familiar way of understanding Scripture. In 1859, Charles Darwin, an English biologist, published *The Origin of Species*, which argued that random mutations coupled with the competition for scarce resources over eons explained the development of complex organisms from simple ones. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), he applied this evolutionary theory directly to human beings. "We thus learn," he wrote, "that man is descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped, probably arboreal in its habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World."[19]

Perhaps surprisingly, given the vehemence with which later fundamentalists attacked evolutionary theory, the initial reaction by theologically conservative Protestants to Darwinian evolution was somewhat mixed. There were those who saw in Darwinian theory a dangerous attack on Christian faith. Charles Hodge (1797-1878), Presbyterian theologian and professor at Princeton Seminary, published a book in 1874 under the title *What is Darwinism?* The answer, he argued, was that "[i]t is atheism. This does not mean…that Mr. Darwin himself and all who adopt his views are atheists; but it means that his theory is atheistic; that the exclusion of design from nature is…tantamount to atheism."[20] Yet there were others who adopted a more favorable view. Benjamin

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19. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, in *Sources of Western Society*, vol. 2, *From the Age of Exploration to the Present*, 2nd ed., ed. John Beeler and Charles Clark (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011), 422.

20. Charles Hodge, *What is Darwinism?* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Company, 1874), 177.

Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921), also a Princeton theologian, was a staunch defender

of the doctrine of "inerrancy," which holds that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is

without error. For Warfield, the theory of evolution did not require one to become an

atheist or surrender belief in an error-free Bible. Throughout his career, Warfield was

open to non-naturalistic versions of evolution, and held that God could have used and

guided evolution as a means of creation.[21] So was James Orr, a Scottish theologian whose

essay on the question was included in *The Fundamentals*, the series of booklets published

between 1910 and 1915 that helped give the fundamentalist movement its name. While

suspicious of any version of evolution that relied on random chance, Orr suggested that

the theory of evolution could be reconciled with an inerrantist view of Scripture.

"'Evolution'…is coming to be recognized as but a new name for 'creation,' only that the

creative power now works from *within*, instead of, as in the old conception, in an

external, plastic fashion. It is, however, creation none the less."[22] By the 1920s, however,

it would be Hodge's critical view that would be far more influential among

fundamentalists.

<div align="center">The Growth of Liberal Theology</div>

Thus, the nation in the late nineteenth century was fast becoming a more

urbanized, more industrialized, and more secular place, and some American Protestants

increasingly believed that their theology would have to be adapted for the times if their

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21. David N. Livingstone and Mark A. Noll, "B. B. Warfield (1851-1921): A Biblical Inerrantist as Evolutionist," *Isis* 91, no. 2 (June 2000): 283-304. See also Alister McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 78; David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984).

22. James Orr, "Science and Christian Faith," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, vol. 1. (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917), 346.

faith was to remain relevant. This was the option taken by those who would eventually become known as "modernists" (because they sought to adapt their faith to the modern world) or or "liberals" (because they emphasized freedom from tradition). Marsden has suggested that three strategies typified their efforts.

First, they deified historical processes. That is, rather than believe that Scripture was the supreme source of truth for all time, they believed that God was continuing to reveal truth through history and through the development of human culture. Truth was not static but constantly developing, and Scripture should be interpreted as the record of the religious experience of one ancient people, rather than God's final word to all humanity. For the liberal, the benefit of this understanding meant that such a theology was immune to higher criticism and Darwinian challenges to Scripture, for it did not depend on defending Scripture as containing scientific and historical truth.

Second, liberals or modernists stressed the ethical. Traditional theology, they believed, had put too much emphasis on doctrine. This had led to theological disputes and to a fractured church; liberals also believed that such an approach was susceptible to the critical approaches to Scripture. The true test of a Christian was not doctrine, but a life lived in accordance with the ethics of Jesus. One of the primary ways this was manifested was the development of the Social Gospel. This movement, which was influential from about 1880 through the start of the Great Depression, emphasized the social implications of Jesus' teaching. Gladden, for instance, in 1876 published *Working People and Their Employers*, in which he called for fair treatment of labor. His congregation in Ohio included mine owners; Gladden believed in the justice of their workers' demands for higher wages and improved working conditions, and called for the application of the

Golden Rule to labor relations. Charles Sheldon, a minister in Topeka, Kansas, published the novel *In His Steps* (1897), in which a congregation learned to ask itself "What would Jesus do?" and to live according to the answers. Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), perhaps the best-known advocate of the Social Gospel, was influenced by New York City socialists, and saw progressive political reform as a way of bringing about the kingdom of God. Rauschenbusch believed that the Christian message affected not just personal moral issues like adultery and drunkenness, but should address the root causes of such social ills as poverty and inequality. Rauschenbusch advocated the value of labor unions and the socialization of industry, and attacked greed and laissez-faire capitalism. The kingdom of God, he argued, "is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into a harmony of heaven."[23]

Third, Marsden suggests, liberal theology stressed the centrality of religious feelings. Schleiermacher had led the way here, arguing that the essence of religion was a feeling of dependence. Other liberal theologians followed his path, again de-emphasizing the importance of reason and dogma and elevating matters of the "heart." Horace Bushnell (1802-1876), for example, came to believe that "truth" was something that had to be experienced rather than gleaned from the Bible; its writings should be taken as symbolic and figurative rather than as real and historic. Christ's death, Bushnell believed, was not a substitute for guilty sinners, as evangelicals had believed. Rather, it was a symbol of God's love, and "not a sacrifice in any literal sense."[24] As with the other two strategies, this one, too, had the advantage of being immune to scientific challenges and

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23. Noll, 305-306; Ed. L. Miller and Stanley J. Grenz, *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 25-26.

24. Hankins, *American Evangelicals*, 21.

historical criticism. Religion and science dealt with two different spheres, according to this way of thinking. Let the intellectuals say what they would about the origins of Scripture and the universe; religion still dealt with an area of truth untouched by science.[25]

<p style="text-align:center">Conservative Responses to Theological Challenges</p>

Other Protestants in America and Europe viewed both the secularizing intellectual trends and the liberal responses to them with alarm. For them, the challenges to the traditional understanding of Scripture were things to combat, not cause for theological invention. Nothing less than orthodoxy and the eternal fate of human souls hung in the balance, in their view, for liberal theologians were leading people away from basic message of the Christian faith. That message was that individuals could be spared condemnation in hell and gain eternal life by faith in the real, historical Christ as revealed in the Bible. Conservatives believed that by not defending the historicity of Scripture, by de-emphasizing doctrine, and by suggesting that religious feelings were at the heart of the Christian message, liberals were a threat to Christian orthodoxy.

Since these Protestants felt that the Bible was under attack, they rallied to its defense. Theologians at Princeton Seminary—Warfield, Charles Hodge, his son Archibald Alexander Hodge, and J. Gresham Machen—led the way in formulating the doctrine of inerrancy. The idea was not new; many Christians for centuries had believed that the Bible was without error, when interpreted according to the intention of its original authors. But now that critics were attacking its historical trustworthiness, these theologians believed that its defense required an explicit statement. Charles Hodge's

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25. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 33-36.

Systematic Theology (1871), asserted that the Bible is "free from all error, whether of doctrine, fact, or precept." For Hodge, the Bible was a "store-house of facts," and the theologian ought to approach it as a scientist approached nature. The task was "to ascertain, collect, and combine all the facts which God has revealed concerning himself and our relation to him."[26] Those who followed Hodge at Princeton—his son A.A. Hodge and Warfield—carried the same banner, asserting that the Bible not only *contained* the Word of God, but actually was divine instruction, errorless and binding.[27]

The doctrine of inerrancy became something of a litmus test of orthodoxy, and during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries most Protestant denominations underwent at least one heresy trial, often of a seminary professor whose teachings challenged the idea of an error-free Bible. The case of Charles Briggs (1841-1913), a Presbyterian, was perhaps the most famous. Briggs, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, believed that the Bible was authoritative and defended the supernatural elements of Christianity. Nevertheless, he argued in the 1890s that the Bible did contain errors that were secondary to its primary teachings, and for this, he was put on trial by the Presbyterian church, which suspended him from ministry. Both he and his seminary left the Presbyterian church.[28] The case of Union is illustrative of the fact that heresy trials were not sufficient to stem the tide of liberalism, and by the early twentieth century, many of the nation's seminaries had come under liberal control.

26. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, (1871; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed February 19, 2014, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/hodge/theology1.txt.

27. Stanley J. Grenz, "Nurturing the Soul, Informing the Mind: The Genesis of the Evangelical Scripture Principle," in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez and Dennis L. Ockholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 31.

28. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 38.

For many ordinary evangelicals who filled the pews on Sunday mornings, these battles for control of the seminaries and denominations might have been only distant rumblings, but they were disconcerting nonetheless. The threats of secularism and liberalism seemed to be growing, and what they saw as orthodox Christianity was on the defensive. Dispensational premillennialism offered an explanation for these unsettling times: the Bible had predicted that things would get far worse before the return of Christ. Christians should expect a general "falling away" from the truth. Thus, for some—and perhaps paradoxically—the challenges to traditional evangelical faith confirmed rather than falsified the prophetic power of Scripture.

Dispensationalism directly countered the optimistic postmillennialism espoused by most nineteenth-century evangelicals. Postmillennialism held that things would improve until Christ returned; the "millennium"—a golden age—would culminate in the return of Christ. Dispensationalism, on the other hand, was "premillennial"; its proponents believed that Christ would return *before* the millennium, in close association with various horrific events on the earth.

As eschatological frameworks go, dispensational premillennialism was relatively young, originating in the nineteenth century with the British leader of the Plymouth Brethren movement, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Darby was born in London, and began his career as a lawyer in Ireland. Following his conversion, he entered the ministry in the Church of Ireland. Disconcerted by what he saw as a lack of spiritual vitality in the established church, he joined the Brethren movement in Dublin, which rejected the idea of ordained ministers. This group itself split in the 1840s, with Darby as the leader of the

stricter faction, and Darby began to travel widely, including trips to the United States, teaching his interpretation of biblical prophecy.

Darby divided all of human history into "dispensations," periods in which God structured his relationship with humanity differently. While this type of reading of the Bible was not entirely new, Darby's interpretive scheme was unique in two ways. First, he taught a definite distinction between Israel and the Church—that is, between God's Old Testament people and those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. God had made promises to Israel that had not yet been fulfilled, not even by the formation of the Church in the New Testament; the Church did not replace Israel in God's plan for the world. This meant that Darby's system was opposed to two common interpretations: he taught that the Church was not the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, nor was America, or any other nation, a "New Israel." In Darby's framework, both were impossible. The "Church age"—that is, the period from the time of Christ until the present—was merely a "parenthesis" in God's plan for Israel, and God's program for Israel awaited literal fulfillment. Soon, Darby taught, Jews would create a nation in their "Promised Land" and rebuild the Temple.

A second distinctive of Darby's teaching was that Christ's return would happen in two phases. The first would be the "Rapture," when true believers would taken up in the air to meet Christ; this event, in dispensationalist terminology, was "imminent," in the sense that it could happen at any time. With the Rapture, the Church age would conclude and the prophetic program for Israel would restart with the "tribulation" period spelled out in the book of Revelation. During these seven years, God would pour out great wrath upon the earth, and the Antichrist would rise to power. His reign would be ended with the

second return of Christ and the battle of Armageddon. Christ would then establish a thousand-year kingdom on earth. At the conclusion of that millennium, Satan would lead a doomed rebellion against Christ's rule and be finally defeated, the dead would be resurrected, all humanity would face the Last Judgment.[29]

Darby's teaching soon gained adherents on both sides of the Atlantic. There were various reasons for this popularity. Darby himself traveled widely, making extensive preaching tours between 1859 and 1872. His interpretive framework also seemed to be rigorously biblical, and dispensationalists supported their arguments with abundant biblical evidence. Fundamentalists defending the Bible from the liberal "assault" welcomed this emphasis on the literal truth of the Bible, even of the most difficult prophetic passages. Dispensationalists were some of the strongest defenders of the inerrancy of Scripture. Beyond the biblical arguments, however, the shifting cultural milieu in the late nineteenth century made dispensationalism seem plausible. Increasing secularism, an influx of Catholic immigrants, theological liberalism that eroded trust in a literal Bible, and the Civil War itself all made postmillennialism more difficult to believe for some. In the same way, the twentieth century with its world wars, nuclear threat, and liberalized mores would seem to confirm the validity of premillennialism. Furthermore, postmillennial thinking was "guilty by association" in that the Social Gospel was built on its premise; for fundamentalists, this itself made it suspect.

Dispensationalism would soon carry the day among the growing fundamentalist movement. Moody himself, whose own influence was widespread, began to preach the premillennial return of Christ, although Moody was never as fervent a dispensationalist

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29. Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1992), 87-88.

as some. Numerous other evangelists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

taught dispensationalism, including Billy Sunday, and by the 1930s, this way of

interpreting Scripture was taught in the vast majority of fundamentalist churches.[30] Bible

conferences, which were extended meetings at which attendees would worship together

and hear various preachers, sprang up to teach dispensationalism and other conservative

concerns. A number of Bible schools—including Moody Bible Institute (Chicago), the

Bible Institute of Los Angeles, and Northwestern Bible Training School (Minneapolis)—

were founded with dispensationalism as one of their doctrinal emphases. These schools

graduated numerous pastors who spread dispensationalism to their churches.

Furthermore, the publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909 by Cyrus Ingerson

Scofield (1843-1921) helped make dispensationalism the most common eschatology

among fundamentalists. This study Bible included Scofield's notes teaching Darby's

system alongside the biblical text; for many readers unfamiliar with any other way of

interpreting Scripture, dispensationalism became the only possible way to read the

Bible.[31]

<center>The First World War and Fundamentalist Separatism</center>

By the time of the First World War, the rift between liberals and conservatives

was deepening, and by the end of the 1920s, the separation was nearly complete, with

modernists largely in control of the major denominations and fundamentalists

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30. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism,* 71.

31. Richard Kyle, *Evangelicalism: An Americanized Christianity* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 90-92.

proclaiming the imperative to separate from these bodies. Yet in the first few years of the twentieth century, there were attempts at ecumenical cooperation.

The Federal Council of Churches of Christ, formed in 1908, sought cooperation on social issues among its eighteen million members representing thirty-three denominations. While conservatives would eventually criticize the FCC for what they saw as insufficient focus on individual redemption, others initially praised its efforts.[32] The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, marshalled support for global evangelistic efforts and was supported across the theological spectrum.[33] The war itself united conservatives and liberals in an outpouring of patriotism. "Christianity and Patriotism are synonymous terms," said Billy Sunday, "and hell and traitors are synonymous." Shailer Matthews, dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School and a champion of modernist thinking, echoed the sentiment: "For an American to refuse to share in the present war…is not Christian."[34] Prohibition, a cause dear to the hearts of many social reformers both conservative and liberal, was finally victorious in 1919 with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment.

But following the war, the split between conservatives and liberals would become final. The theological groundwork for the split had already been laid with earlier inerrancy battles, and further theological lines were drawn with the publication of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, a series of twelve booklets that were published between 1910 and 1915. These volumes consisted of nearly one hundred articles that

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32. For example, James M. Gray, president of Moody Bible Institute from 1904 to 1934, was supportive of the FCC during its early years. Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 40-41.

33. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 294.

34. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism,* 51-52.

defended a variety of beliefs conservatives believed crucial, including the virgin

conception of Christ, the inerrancy and authority of the Bible, the salvific efficacy of the

death of Jesus Christ and the reality of his resurrection, and importance of evangelism.

The war produced, as Joel A. Carpenter notes, a "sense of cultural peril," and

liberals and conservatives alike accused each other of endangering American civilization.

Some liberals charged premillennialists with being insufficiently patriotic or even

disloyal for failing to affirm that the war would "make the world safe for democracy"; in

premillennial theology, no war—or any other development—would lead to real and

lasting "progress." Conservatives, on the other, attempted to link liberal theology with

German militarism, asserting that that nation's cultural decay resulted from its denial of

biblical authority and acceptance of evolutionary philosophy. Liberals in America who

espoused the same things were threats.[35] In 1919, a group of conservative Protestants

formed the World's Christian Fundamentals Association to combat these ideologies in

churches and schools. Increasingly, conservatives also reacted against the changing

mores in American society. Sex—the discussion of which had been largely taboo in

polite society—was now addressed more frankly in the movies and tabloid newspapers.

Some women—the "flappers" of the era—began to wear their hair and their dresses short

and smoked in public. New dance styles brought "the bodies of men and women in

unusual relations to each other," according to one Southern Methodist leader.[36]

This emerging movement—a reaction against both cultural and theological

trends—was finally given the name that stuck by Curtis Lee Laws, editor of the Baptist

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35. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 7.

36. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 56.

paper the *Watchman-Examiner*: a "fundamentalist," he wrote in 1920, was someone willing to do "battle royal" for the fundamentals of the faith.[37] The battle commenced in earnest in the 1920s, especially in the Northern Baptist Convention and the Presbyterian Church. To a lesser extent, the Protestant Episcopal church and the Northern Methodists experienced conflict. Southern denominations—like the Southern Baptist Convention and southern Presbyterians—did not; in the South, conservatives were already dominant and remained largely unchallenged. For many southerners, modernism was a Yankee innovation and thus was never seriously considered.[38] Furthermore, many southern evangelicals were already accustomed to the idea of the "spiritualization of the church." This concept—especially useful for those seeking to defend slavery in the antebellum years and Jim Crow laws after the Civil War—held that the church should concern itself only with "spiritual" matters and not meddle in politics. Northern liberals who sought to bring in the kingdom of God through politics were thus suspect on several grounds.[39]

The contest between fundamentalists and modernists played out in pulpits, the religious press and in denominational gatherings. In 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Baptist ministering for a time in a New York City Presbyterian church, preached a sermon opposing fundamentalism titled "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" Fundamentalists, he argued, were "essentially illiberal and intolerant" when what was needed were those who could blend the "new knowledge and the old faith." Fosdick took issue with those who insisted on belief in the virgin birth of Jesus, an inerrantist view of

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37. Hankins, *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barry Hankins (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 5.

38. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism,* 58.

39. Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement,* 139.

the Bible, a substitutionary view of the atonement—the belief that Jesus' death was a

punishment in the place of sinners—and premillennialism. Fundamentalists, he argued,

were attempting to "deny the Christian name" to those who did not agree with them.[40]

Clarence E. Macartney, a Presbyterian pastor in Philadelphia, responded with "Shall

Unbelief Win?" While taking the label "conservative" rather than "fundamentalist"—

unlike many fundamentalists, he did not believe that one's eschatology was of crucial

importance—Macartney argued that Fosdick's version of Christianity was irreconcilable

with traditional belief.[41] Such a view was echoed by Machen in his book *Christianity and

Liberalism* (1923), probably the most famous response to liberalism. Machen argued that

liberalism was not a variant of Christianity, but a new religion altogether, since it denied

that salvation was dependent on Jesus' death. The "many varieties of modern liberal

religion," he wrote, "are rooted in naturalism—that is, in the denial of any entrance of the

creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection

with the origin of Christianity." In his view, liberals should admit that they were no

longer part of churches that had been founded on the basis of biblical Christianity.[42]

In the 1920s, it would be Machen and his fundamentalist allies who would lose

control of their institutions. Their attempt to force their denominations, schools, and

mission groups to subscribe to traditional evangelical doctrine largely failed, and

increasingly, fundamentalists believed that separatism was the best course of action.

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40. Fosdick, Harry Emerson. "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" in *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit 1630-1967*, ed. DeWitte Holland (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 339-340.

41. Clarence E. Macartney, "Shall Unbelief Win?," in *Sermons in American History*, 349-352.

42. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company 2009), 2. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 58.

After all, the Bible said that "he that believeth" had no part with "an infidel," and the "temple of God" none with idols. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate."[43] When Princeton Seminary, where Machen taught, revised its theological stance to be more inclusivist in 1929, Machen and others withdrew to form Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Eventually, Machen would be instrumental in founding a new denomination entirely, the Presbyterian Church of America, later renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.[44] The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches was formed in 1932 by conservatives who had left the Northern Baptist Convention. Thousands of independent Baptist churches would be founded during the 1930s and '40s. J. Frank Norris, a southern Baptist preacher, started the World Baptist Fellowship in the 1930s, out of which was later formed the Bible Baptist Fellowship. Both were dedicated to fundamentalist principles.[45]

If control of religious institutions was one front on which fundamentalists and modernists battled, the cultural front was another, centering on the theory of evolution. For fundamentalists, Darwinian evolution was a symbol of much that was going wrong with America, similar to how later fundamentalists would view both Communism and "secular humanism." Evolution represented a weakening of biblical authority, an attack on supernaturalist Christianity, and led—they believed—to a reduction of human worth to that of animals. The First World War intensified these convictions, as many fundamentalists linked Germany with evolution. Thus, the fundamentalist attack on

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43. II Cor. 6:15-16. King James Version.

44. Christopher H. Evans, *Histories of American Christianity: An Introduction* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 291.

45. Timothy P. Weber, "Fundamentalism," in Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America*.

evolution was more than merely a theological dispute; they saw it as a defense of American civilization, and in the 1920s succeeded in getting statutes passed in a number of southern states forbidding the teaching of evolution in the public schools. Famously, this led to the Scopes trial in 1925, when John Scopes was charged and tried for teaching evolution in Dayton, Tennessee. The case would have received a great deal of attention anyway, but it was elevated into a major national event by the personalities on both sides. Clarence Darrow, a well-known lawyer and an agnostic, joined Scopes' defense team, and William Jennings Bryan—three-time presidential candidate, orator and fundamentalist spokesman—joined the prosecution. Scopes was found guilty, although the verdict was later overturned on a technicality. But the case from the outset was about far more than Scopes' guilt or innocence. Fundamentalism itself seemed to be on trial, with its belief in the historicity of miracles, the inerrancy of Scripture including a literal six-day creation, and a dogged insistence that these be taught in public schools. In the eyes of many in the national press, fundamentalism was intellectually backwards and culturally unsophisticated. For a writer like H.L. Mencken, Bryan's inability to offer an satisfactory response to Darrow's challenges to his beliefs meant that fundamentalism was suitable only for the "gaping primates of the upland valleys."[46] In the minds of many, the press coverage of the Scopes trial helped cement fundamentalism's reputation as obscurantist and rural, even though it had long been largely a northern, eastern, and urban movement.

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46. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 185-188.

The Hope for Revival and Neo-Evangelicalism

By the mid-1920s, then, fundamentalism was on the defensive. It had lost control of major denominations, it had a negative reputation among intellectual elites, and it no longer occupied a place of cultural power. To some observers, it seemed that fundamentalism was a dying movement, "an event now passed," in the words of a writer in the magazine *Christian Century*.[47] Fundamentalists renewed their call to live a "separated life," one characterized by a turning away from "worldly" amusements and adherence to a strict moral code.

This loss of cultural influence had implications for how fundamentalists viewed political action, for now not only their eschatology but their experience seemed to confirm their pessimism regarding the future. Yet it was not as if fundamentalists retreated entirely, and suggesting as one observer has that the decades between the 1930s and the 1970s were ones of "self-imposed isolation" goes a bit too far.[48] While they did retreat from much overt political action, they still harbored a deep-seated belief that theirs was a "Christian nation," and held out hope that it could return to its previous exalted position. For many, their political retreat was short-lived; by the 1940s, some fundamentalists were eager to leave their movement's militant separatism behind and re-engage with the broader intellectual culture, including in the political sphere. Furthermore, the concept of "revival" was not merely an individualistic one. While it was true that evangelicals had always believed that an individual needed to *personally* profess faith in Jesus Christ to be saved, fundamentalists believed that this had sweeping social

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47. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 13.

48. Boyer, "The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce J. Shulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 29.

effects: revival was the only sure and effective means of cultural transformation. Thus, in the 1930s and '40s, fundamentalists were, as Joel Carpenter writes, "not content to remain in sectarian isolation and quietude. Prompted by their revivalist heritage to dream of another great religious awakening in America, they set about to make it happen."[49]

<center>The "Great Reversal": From Reform to Revival</center>

After the Scopes trial, it may have appeared to some that fundamentalism was in decline. In reality, the 1930s and 1940s were a period in which the movement was regrouping. Having lost control of the institutions and denominations that had been so dominant in the nineteenth century, fundamentalists set about creating an alternative network to nourish their faith. Fundamentalism may have been a largely ignored subculture in America during the interwar years, but it was a resilient and even thriving one.

As noted above, the grandiosely named World's Christian Fundamentals Association, was founded in 1919. It grew out of a series of prophecy conferences, and its members, including men like William B. Riley, Lewis S. Chafer, and Reuben Torrey, sought to combat liberalism and evolution. The method they advocated was the creation of "Bible institutes"—ministry training schools—and Bible conferences. Over the next several decades, fundamentalists would develop these and other institutions.[50]

Concerned that theological graduate schools were rife with modernist thinking, fundamentalists sought to develop alternative training facilities. Some of the many Bible

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49. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 3.

50. C.E. Hall, "World's Christian Fundamentals Association," in Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America*.

institutes founded in these years were small and loosely organized; others had older roots,

like Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and were important hubs of fundamentalist

activity. Westminster Theological Seminary, as noted above, was founded in 1929 by

Machen and others. The Evangelical Theological College, later Dallas Theological

Seminary, began in 1926 by associates of C. I. Scofield, and maintained his

dispensationalist emphasis.

Other fundamentalist enterprises were more geared for the masses. Bible

conferences were often week-long events that combined the appeal of resort-style

activities at an appealing location with biblical teaching on personal holiness or

dispensationalist prophecy. Thousands each year would attend these conferences at

locations ranging from Rumney Bible Conference in New Hampshire to Winona Lake in

Indiana. Radio reached many more in an era in which broadcasting was a rapidly growing

industry. Hundreds of programs dedicated to fundamentalist teaching were scattered

across the nations' airwaves, some of them with large audiences. In 1939, Charles E.

Fuller's *Old Fashioned Revival Hour*, for example, had an estimated audience of fifteen

to twenty million. Fundamentalists also developed a thriving publishing industry of

books, materials to be used in Sunday schools, and magazines.[51]

Fundamentalists also looked abroad, believing that their divine mandate was to

take the "gospel" to all lands. The older missions agencies had suffered as a result of the

fundamentalist-modernist controversy; the doctrinal battles in the denominations had

spread to the boards of those groups. Liberalism had caused some to question the

necessity of the evangelization of other cultures. Fundamentalists, however, were

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51. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 16-28.

successful in increasing their missionary presence; by one estimate, between the 1930s

and the 1950s, the fundamentalist percentage of the North American missionary

population had doubled to about 30 percent.[52]

Thus, while it may have been off the radar of many observers of American

culture, fundamentalism was a vigorous movement. The question was, to what end would

that vigor be directed? The answer: revival. Harry Ironside, dispensationalist pastor of

Moody Memorial Church, declared that "if there is world-wide brokenness of

spirit…God will delight to do some mighty work before the coming again of His blessed

Son."[53] Fundamentalists formed a variety of groups with the aim of stirring revival to a

flame, and sought to find signs that something like another "Great Awakening" was

beginning. Donald Grey Barnhouse, fundamentalist pastor and journalist, announced in

1934 that despite the economic depression, new missionaries were being sent out,

students were enrolling in Bible institutes, and numerous "witnesses to the truth" were

broadcasting on the airwaves.[54]

While it is something of a caricature, the 1930s marked a shift in fundamentalists'

political attitudes from *reform* to *revival*. From the inception of the evangelical

movement in the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century, most

evangelicals had been willing to seek social change through political action; this

willingness provided much of the energy, for example, for the reforms of the Progressive

era and Prohibition. But in the 1930s, in what some have referred to as "the Great

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52. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 29.

53. Ibid., 112.

54. Ibid., 121.

Reversal,"[55] fundamentalists shifted to a much more inward and individualized strategy, that of calling non-believers into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

There were at least two reasons for this. First, their recent setbacks had soured them on political action; their successes in passing anti-evolution legislation and Prohibition had proven to be only temporary. Second, their eschatology taught them that wickedness, crime, natural disasters, persecution of faithful Christians and political oppression would all increase before the return of Christ.[56] Fundamentalists directed their energy toward revival because it seemed to them that real, lasting political reform was impossible. "Expect as little as possible from churches, or governments, under the present dispensation," declared a British evangelical in 1878. Moody echoed the assessment: "Each dispensation…end[s] in failure…I don't find anyplace where God says the world is grow better and better…I find that the earth is to grow worse and worse."[57] This pessimism continued into the twentieth century, and could foster, as Paul Boyer notes, an antigovernment, antireform ideology.[58] Barnhouse argued that the Bible gave Christians no mandate "to go out and crusade for political righteousness."[59]

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55. David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelicalism and Social Concern*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1977), 28-45. Moberg acknowledged that the term itself comes from Timothy L. Smith.

56. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 89.

57. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More,* 92, 94. Perhaps Moody's most famous statement along these lines was that he viewed the world "as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a life-boat, and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.'" Yet Carpenter notes that Moody was not as world-abdicating as this quote would imply. For instance, Moody admonished a fellow evangelical who advocated an apolitical stance during the 1896 presidential election because his citizenship was in heaven. "Better get it down to earth for the next sixty days," Moody told him. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 117-118.

58. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 96

59. Ibid., 107.

Despite such proclamations, fundamentalists during the 1930s and '40s were not entirely apolitical. They continued to vote, although they were not united behind a single party, at least outside of the South—in that region, white fundamentalists, like other white southerners, were solidly Democratic. Nationwide, a majority of conservative Protestants do seem to have been Democrats during this period.[60] Yet others like Billy Sunday, were probusiness Republicans,[61] and some fundamentalists rallied against the Democratic presidential candidate Al Smith, a Roman Catholic, in the 1928 election. Anti-Catholic prejudice still loomed large in some fundamentalist thinking.

Some fundamentalists were sympathetic to right-wing campaigns like that of Gerald Winrod (1900-1957), a Kansas religious publisher and one-time U.S. Senate candidate. Many of Winrod's concerns were ones common among fundamentalists: he opposed biblical higher criticism, alcohol, and the Social Gospel. But he was also strongly opposed to the New Deal, and urged that President Franklin D. Roosevelt be impeached. Winrod's antagonism to the expansion of the federal government was fueled in part by anti-Semitism; Winrod believed the New Deal was part of a Jewish conspiracy to implement socialism. He was charged in a 1942 sedition case—eventually dropped— that alleged he was a Nazi sympathizer.[62] The Ku Klux Klan also revived after the First World War. The Klan presented itself as a Protestant organization with the aim of

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60. Lyman Kellstedt, John Green, Corwin Smidt and James Guth, "Faith Transformed: Religion and Politics from FDR to George W. Bush," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 270.

61. Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

62. William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 20; L. B. Sullivan, "Winrod, Gerald Burton," in Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America*.

protecting white privilege and a "Christian" moral order, through violence against African Americans if necessary. Some fundamentalists, especially in the South, supported the Klan, although many other leaders denounced it. Nevertheless, the racism it embodied was widespread, as was its theme that American civilization was under attack from secularism, Catholicism, immigration and immorality.[63] Other demagogues also found an audience during the economic turmoil of the Great Depression. Gerald L. K. Smith was a Disciples of Christ preacher who allied first with Louisiana's Huey Long, whose Share Our Wealth plan called for the confiscation of wealth from the rich and a redistribution of income to the poor. When Long was assassinated in 1935, Smith joined forces with Father Charles E. Coughlin, a Catholic priest from Detroit who blended anti-Communism and anti-Semitism. Their new Union Party ran a candidate for president in 1936, and attracted a fervent following with Smith's proto-fascist and racist message, although the candidate won less than 2 percent of the popular vote.[64] There were fundamentalists who were sympathetic to such views, and prominent fundamentalist publications gave some credence to theories about an international, socialist Jewish conspiracy.[65] Such theories played on the anti-Semitism and the fears of socialism common to the period, not only among fundamentalists.

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63. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture,* 188.

64. Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1993), 277-278; Glen Jeansonne, "Gerald L. K. Smith: From Wisconsin Roots to National Notoriety," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 86, no. 2 (winter 2002-2003), 18-29; Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 21-22.

65. Publications like *Moody Bible Institute Monthly*, for example, gave credence to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a spurious document of Russian origin that purported to reveal the Jewish plans for the spread of alcoholism, pornography, evolution, and socialism. However, the dispensationalism espoused by many fundamentalists reined in any anti-Semitism, for they strongly believed that Israel was God's chosen nation and that he had many prophecies yet to be fulfilled to that nation. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 102-105.

Nevertheless, most fundamentalists rejected the radicalism of demagogues like Winrod and Smith. Their hopes lay elsewhere. While they may have believed that permanent spiritual progress was an illusion, fundamentalists had hardly given up on real social and cultural change. In what Marsden refers to as the "paradox of fundamentalist revivalism,"[66] fundamentalists could believe that the world was sliding into moral degeneracy and that Armageddon was quickly approaching while at the same time working for a revival that they hoped would bring a wave of godliness to the nation. Revival was a method of social change all fundamentalists could espouse. And many believed that it would effect the only sort of social change that was meaningful and lasting. Fundamentalist theology tended to be individualistic, with an understanding of sin that saw it as almost entirely a product of individual persons rather than something embedded in societal structures and institutions. Thus, reforming society through laws and the legal system would do little good as long as that society was made up of unregenerate individuals. What was needed was revival on the personal level. While they may have pulled back from overt political action, fundamentalists had not given up on social change; they hoped that the transformation of individuals through the "gospel" would bring about the transformation of the culture.

Indeed, fundamentalists still retained a powerful belief in the nation's Christian heritage and in the possibility of the resurrection of that heritage. Moreover, they had a deep sense of responsibility for the nation's spiritual well-being, seeing themselves as a "godly remnant" that could someday redeem it.[67] This was somewhat at odds with their

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66. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 43.

eschatology, perhaps the result of what Marsden calls a "residual postmillennialism,"[68] a carry-over from the nineteenth century when most evangelicals believed that they could help usher in a golden age through their own actions. They may have been dispensationalists, but fundamentalists still harbored hopes for the nation's future. If nothing else, they hoped for a temporary reprieve from the long-term moral decay that presaged the end of days.

Neo-Evangelical Optimism

By the end of the 1930s, a growing number of younger fundamentalists were becoming discontented with their movement's separatist tendencies and anti-intellectual reputation. Believing that conservative Protestants needed to engage with rather than simply react against the broader culture, they constituted a reform movement within fundamentalism that became known as "neo-evangelicalism." Neo-evangelicals—or simply evangelicals—retained some of the emphases of fundamentalism, such as inerrancy and the revivalist goal of "saving souls." But they also attempted to soften some of fundamentalism's militant tone, and they created a number of institutions that would lead conservative Protestants out of their subculture.

Among the most prominent of these evangelicals were Harold John Ockenga, Carl F. H. Henry, and Billy Graham. Ockenga (1905-1985) was a Congregational pastor who

67. Grant Wacker has suggested that two ideals have informed the church-state relationship in America: the "custodial ideal," which has held that civil authorities are responsible for the spiritual well-being of society as well as its physical well-being, and the "plural ideal," which assumes that religion is largely a spiritual concern. Evangelicals, he writes, have been the chief spokespersons for the custodial ideal. While they have believed in the separation of church and state, they have also felt called to be the "moral custodians of the culture." Wacker, "Uneasy in Zion: Evangelicals in Postmodern Society," in *Evangelicals and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 22-24.

68. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 112.

had attended Princeton Theological Seminary during the upheaval caused by Machen's

departure, and Ockenga was among those students who followed Machen to the new

Westminster Theological Seminary, from which he graduated. Ockenga became the

pastor of the influential Park Street Congregational Church in Boston in 1936, a position

he held until 1969. During those years, Ockenga helped found several important

evangelical institutions, including the National Association of Evangelicals in 1943.[69]

The NAE was founded as an alternative to two other organizations. The Federal

Council of Churches—after 1950, the National Council of Churches—was created in

1908 with the aim of promoting a Christian influence in society, and its doctrinal

statement was left intentionally vague so as to garner support from as wide a variety of

Christian groups as possible. By the 1920s, fundamentalists like Carl McIntire were

criticizing the FCC as being too focused on the social gospel to the exclusion of personal

salvation, and being soft on communism.[70] McIntire and others founded the American

Council of Christian Churches (1941) expressly as a counterweight to the FCC; McIntire

insisted, for example, that only those denominations willing to reject modernism and

separate themselves from the FCC would be welcome to join the ACCC.[71] The founders

of the National Association of Evangelicals saw it as taking something of middle road

between the FCC and the ACCC; in their view, the former was too compromised with

modernism, while McIntire's group was too militantly fundamentalist. The NAE, said J.

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69. The NAE was officially constituted in 1943 at a convention in Chicago, but it had its beginnings a year earlier in St. Louis, when about two hundred people gathered for a "National Conference for United Action among Evangelicals."

70. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 307-308. B.V. Hillis, "Federal Council of Churches" in Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America*.

71. Garth M. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 95.

Elwin Wright, ought to express the "essential solidarity as evangelicals," while cultivating "a spirit of love and consideration toward those with whom we differ on less essential matters."[72] By 1947, thirty denominations—with membership totaling over one million—had joined the NAE.[73]

While disavowing militancy, the founders of the NAE had high hopes for its influence. In a statement evoking the long tradition of American religious exceptionalism, Ockenga stated at the opening conference that the United States "has been assigned a destiny comparable to that of ancient Israel." The nation was beset with "rampant secularism" and "indifference to God." The choice was clear: "One is the road of the rescue of western civilization by a re-emphasis on and revival of evangelical Christianity. The other is a return to the Dark Ages of heathendom which powerful force is emerging in every phase of world life today." Ockenga called for an evangelical witness in all segments of society. No longer should evangelicals be content to build their own institutions and contemplate the end times. Evangelical leaders were needed in the academy, in politics and in the business.[74]

This same sort of call was echoed by Carl F. H. Henry in his book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947). Henry, a journalist and eventual professor who at the time of publication was completing a doctorate in theology at Boston University, inveighed against fundamentalism's tendency to focus on individual salvation to the exclusion of social ills. "An evangelical message vitally related to world

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72. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God*, 96.

73. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 70.

74. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God*, 12-13.

conditions is not precluded by New Testament doctrine," he wrote.[75] Evangelicals needed

to move beyond narrow questions of private morality and engage in the kind of social

activism that had been prevalent in the nineteenth century. Evangelism and social reform

should be linked. A message of personal regeneration was the church's primary task, but

it should be not be forgotten that Christianity is a "world-and-life view." He envisioned

Christians competent in all fields of study, including Christian statesmen standing for

"the great evangelical affirmations throughout world politics."[76]

There was a ready audience for this message, and a number of fundamentalism's

reformers, including Ockenga and Henry, believed that a new graduate school was

needed. Fuller Theological Seminary was founded in 1947 with the help of radio

evangelist Charles Fuller, with Ockenga as its first president and Henry on its faculty.

Fuller would come to be known as the flagship institution of the new evangelicalism. The

magazine *Christianity Today*, founded 1956, would be its primary mouthpiece, and

Henry would serve as its first editor, until 1968.

A major force behind the creation of *Christianity Today* was the evangelist Billy

Graham. Born in North Carolina, Graham had attended Bob Jones College, Florida Bible

Institute and Wheaton College before briefly serving as a pastor. In 1944, he joined

Youth for Christ, a newly formed organization that had the goal of evangelizing

America's young people. Formed during the tumultuous years of the Second World War,

Youth for Christ sought to avoid compromising with modernism while using a variety of

"modern" methods to reach its target audience. Its rallies, attracting thousands, featured a

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75. Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 6.

76. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 202.

variety of musical and theatrical entertainment, capped off with a sermon. Graham was a

traveling evangelist with the organization, and gained a great deal of attention after

William Randolph Hearst's newspapers featured the movement. Graham soon traveled to

England for evangelistic tours, and in 1949 came into national fame for his series of

revival meetings in Los Angeles.[77]

Youth for Christ organizers, like many of evangelicalism's leaders, sought to

avoid overt politicization, and explicitly distanced themselves from right-wing groups

like that of Gerald Winrod. Torrey Johnson, a Youth for Christ leader, told *Time*

magazine that his organizers had no "political axes to grind," and that its only goals were

"the spiritual revitalization of America" and "the complete evangelization of the world in

our generation."[78] Nevertheless, Youth for Christ leaders and other evangelicals freely

blended their faith with patriotism and anti-Communism. A 1945 Youth for Christ rally

in Chicago, for example, drew seventy thousand participants to a flag-bedecked Soldier

Field, where they sang the national anthem, cheered returning soldiers, and listened to an

appeal to buy war bonds.[79] Graham's sermons in the 1940s began increasingly to play on

the fear of Communism's spread as he sought to create a sense of urgency in his

audiences, holding out national repentance as America's only sure hope. In this theme,

Graham was hardly alone. President Truman, speaking to the Federal Council of

Churches in March 1946, only one day after hearing Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain"

speech in Fulton, Missouri, warned that without a "moral and spiritual awakening"

America was doomed. General Dwight Eisenhower, speaking the following month, told a

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77. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 25-27.

78. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 170.

79. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 26-27.

group of Army chaplains that humanity's only hope lay in "moral regeneration."[80] As tensions with the Soviet Union increased and Cold War fears spread, evangelicals found that their goals were in sync with much of the national mood. It was a convergence that Graham utilized to gain publicity for his evangelistic efforts, and he cultivated relationships with every American president beginning with Eisenhower's election in 1952.[81]

Evangelicals were the beneficiaries, along with other religious groups, of something of a post-war "religious boom" in the United States. The economy, fully recovered from the Great Depression as a result of wartime investment, brought a new prosperity to families, and returning soldiers seemed ready along with the rest of the country to settle into a domestic pattern. New families were created as the the "baby boom" generation, usually defined as those born between 1946 and 1964, added millions to the nation's population, and many of those families joined churches. By a variety of measures, the postwar period was a remarkably religious one. Church membership, the construction of houses of worship, and enrollment in clergy-training institutions all increased rapidly in the decade following the war.[82] Americans reported that they trusted in churches far more than other institutions, be they schools, the government and the media. In 1954, nine of ten Americans surveyed said that they believed in the divinity of Christ; roughly two-thirds believed in the existence of Satan.[83]

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80. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 171.

81. Graham and some associates met briefly with Truman in the White House in 1950, but angered the president when he later related their conversation to reporters, and allowed the group to be photographed kneeling on the White House lawn. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 30.

82. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 437.

The fear of Communism strengthened the link between Christianity and patriotism. Communism as a system was atheistic, and for some Americans, opposing Communism meant embracing Christianity—or at least religion of some sort. "Our form of government," said president-elect Dwight Eisenhower in 1952, "has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept but it must be a religion that all men are created equal."[84] During Eisenhower's presidency, the phrase "In God We Trust" would be adopted as the nation's motto and printed on its currency (1955), and "Under God" added to the Pledge of Allegiance (1954). Historian Stephen J. Whitfield has suggested that what revived in the 1950s was "not so much religious belief as belief in the *value* of religion."[85] For some, this is surely true: religion was seen as providing a spiritual foundation for "the American Way" in contrast to Communism. The contrast with the Soviet Union during the Cold War heightened for some the sense that America was founded with religious roots. Americans were "a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being," wrote Supreme Court justice William O. Douglas.[86]

Conservative Protestants, then, found a ready audience for their belief that the Cold War was not just a global struggle for political dominance, but a cosmic battle between spiritual forces of good and evil. "Either Communism must die, or Christianity must die," wrote Graham, "because it is actually a battle between Christ and anti-

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83. Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 83.

84. Mark Silk, "Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 65.

85. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 86.

86. Ibid., 87.

Christ."[87] Charles Lowry, writing in 1956 in the pages of the new *Christianity Today*,

argued that Communism was directly opposed to Christianity: "It is rather an opposed

and a competing system, controlled by diametrically antagonistic premises; and it is in a

very nearly exact sense the expression in twentieth-century terms of the spirit of

Antichrist. It seeks deliberately, strategically, uncompromisingly and with fierce,

inhuman hostility to extirpate the influence, teaching and name of Jesus Christ."[88]

<center>Political Engagement</center>

Thus, in the decades following the Second World War, a variety of forces began

to push conservative Protestants toward political action. Their belief about the nature of

America's founding—that theirs was a "Christian nation" in some sense—always

underlay their thinking about political engagement. During the Cold War, this belief was

heightened by its contrast with "godless Communism," and even mainstream political

leaders played up the nation's purported religious roots; for some, international politics

took on the character of a moral crusade. Among evangelicals, some of their leaders were

advocating a greater involvement in all aspects of society, including politics. Billy

Graham's popularity and his acceptance among the nation's political elite encouraged

many evangelicals to believe that political influence was both possible and desirable.

That slowing growing belief would increasingly benefit the Republican rather than the

Democratic Party, a shift described more fully in the chapters that follow.

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87. Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents* (New York: Hachette Book Group USA, 2007), 42.

88. Charles Lowry, "Judgment on the Christian West," *Christianity Today*, January 7, 1957, 24.

CHAPTER 3

CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANTS, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND CULTURAL CHANGE

If as much effort could be put into winning people to Jesus Christ across the land as is being exerted in the present civil rights movement, America would be turned upside down for God.

—Jerry Falwell, "Ministers and Marches" sermon, 1965

March 21, 1965, was a Sunday. In Selma, Alabama, some three thousand marchers began the trek from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital, fifty-four miles away. The first attempt at such a march had been two weeks earlier on March 7, when some six hundred marchers had set out for Montgomery as a way of calling for a federal voting rights bill to protect the constitutional rights of African Americans. On that day the marchers had been met at Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge by deputies and Alabama state troopers, some on horseback, who fired tear gas and charged into the crowd, beating and clubbing marchers with nightsticks. Two days later, three white out-of-town ministers who had come to Selma in support of the demonstrations were attacked by locals armed with a club; one of them, James Reeb, a Unitarian Universalist minister, later died of his injuries.[1]

The brutality at the bridge was broadcast on national television, and Reeb's death, too, received widespread publicity. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered a eulogy for him in

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1. Gustav Neibuhr, "Religion Journal; Remembering a Martyr in this Season of Hope," *New York Times*, April 8, 2000, accessed July 30, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/08/us/religion-journal-remembering-a-martyr-in-this-season-of-hope.html.

Selma on March 15, in which he praised Reeb as a "witness to the truth that men of different races and classes might live, eat, and work together as brothers."[2]

Now, on March 21 as the march from Selma began for a second time, another southern preacher offered his assessment of ministers like Reeb. Jerry Falwell, preaching a sermon titled "Ministers and Marches" to a crowded sanctuary in Lynchburg, Virginia, was sharply critical of pastors who participated in civil rights activism, although he did not mention Reeb by name. Such pastors needed to be off the streets and behind their pulpits, proclaiming the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. "Preachers are not called to be politicians but to be soul-winners," he said. "We have a message of redeeming grace through a crucified and risen Lord. This message is designed to go right to the heart of man and there meet his deep spiritual need." Christians were not called to "reform the externals," he said, or wage war against sin, whether that sin be gambling, alcohol consumption, prostitution, "prejudiced person or institutions," or anything else. "Our ministry is not reformation but transformation. The gospel does not clean up the outside but rather regenerates the inside."[3]

Falwell's speech is notable for several reasons. First, there is the obvious irony of it, given that within fifteen years Falwell's own actions would be contradicting this statement as he himself would be heavily involved in political action and in making an effort to "reform the externals" through his lobbying group, Moral Majority.[4] Nor was he

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2. Martin Luther King, Jr. "A Witness to the Truth." Eulogy for the Rev. James J. Reeb, March 15, 1965, uuworld.org, accessed July 30, 2013, http://www.uuworld.org/pdfs/reebeulogymayjune01.pdf.

3. Jerry Falwell, "Ministers and Marches," Falwell Speeches and Sermons, FAL 4-2, series 2, folder 3, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

separated from politics even before 1965. As noted below, Falwell was involved in the political fight against integration that arose in Virginia following the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in 1954. Second, his sermon is illustrative of the deep ambivalence that many white conservative Protestants felt toward political action. Not all of them shared Falwell's segregationist beliefs, even in the South. But many of them would have echoed his statement that Christians were called to "save souls," not to change society. Partly because of their individualist conception of sin and salvation, partly because of the dispensationalist theology held by many, and partly because most of them were comfortable with the status quo and saw little reason to challenge it, most white evangelicals and fundamentalists had no desire to be politically engaged beyond casting a ballot. Third, Falwell's speech hints at the complex connections between the civil rights movement and the rise of the Christian Right, connections I sketch in this chapter.

Race was not the only issue to confront white evangelicals and fundamentalists in the 1950s through the 1970s. These decades saw the growth of the federal government, as the Depression-era "New Deal" was expanded in President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society." The Supreme Court put new limits on Bible reading and prayer in public schools. Following the trail blazed by African-American civil rights activists, other groups—racial minorities, women and homosexuals—began to call for a redressing of their unequal treatment. Abortion was legalized in the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973. Drug use, divorce and sex outside of marriage were on the rise and

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4. Falwell recognized this, and in 1980 repudiated his 1965 sermon, calling it a "false prophecy." Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 22.

treated with greater openness. The Vietnam War deeply divided Americans, the events of Watergate shook their faith in elected officials, and a stagnant economy and oil embargo threatened their prosperity.

Such a simplistic listing hardly suffices as a summary of the events of three decades. But it is a reminder that these were turbulent times, and white theologically conservative Protestants varied in their responses to them. Some—a definite minority— saw in the Bible justification for an evangelical progressive politics. In 1971, for example, a few students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, an evangelical institution near Chicago, formed The People's Christian Coalition, which would eventually become the Sojourners Community; its magazine would become a mouthpiece for the evangelical left. Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield would also be a spokesman for evangelicals who were uncomfortable with what they saw as the nation's militarism, racism and lack of social justice.[5]

Yet by the end of the 1970s, it would not be an evangelical left that had politically mobilized America's white evangelicals, but the Christian Right. Increasingly during these decades, many evangelicals and fundamentalists began to believe that the federal government was not an ally in their fight to bring revival to the nation. Because of their antipathy toward some of its actions, they were willing to be led into the ranks of political conservatism. The 1960s and early 1970s saw a number of changes that eventually became fodder for the Christian Right's claims that the nation had abandoned its religious

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5. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 74-75. See also "Unexpected Political Hero," editorial, *Christianity Today*, October 2011, accessed Febuary 12, 2014, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/ october/ political-hero-mark-hatfield.html. For a thorough discussion of the evangelical left that coalesced in the early 1970s, see David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

roots. Slowly, they began to overcome their antipathy to political activism and to see mobilization as a key strategy in returning to those roots.

Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, and Civil Rights

The struggle by and for African Americans to be treated as full citizens was, of course, a long one, with many important milestones. But events of the mid-1950s quickened the pace of change. The 1954 Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* declared racially segregated schools unconstitutional; the court ruled the following year that schools should be integrated "with all deliberate speed." Also in 1955, African Americans boycotted the Montgomery, Alabama, bus system after Rosa Parks declined to give up her seat to a white man; the year-long boycott saw the rise to national fame of a young minister named Martin Luther King, Jr. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 strengthened the ability of the federal government to enforce voting rights for African Americans. The same year, the Little Rock, Arkansas, public schools were integrated, but only after President Dwight Eisenhower used federal troops to do so.[6]

The subsequent events of the civil rights movement—with its sit-ins, boycotts, protest marches, voter registration efforts, sermons, arrests, violence and bloodshed—divided theologically conservative Protestants, as they divided America as a whole. Committed segregationists defended the system of white supremacy that had been created in the American South, and at times used Christian rhetoric to justify their racist ideology. The Ku Klux Klan used violence and intimidation to defend white privilege in what its members saw as a "Christian" society, a label they limited to Protestants. White

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6. For a survey of these events, see Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 10-17.

Citizens' Councils, which arose in the South as a more "respectable" alternative to the

Klan, also saw biblical support for segregation. For some, integration was but one more

manifestation of liberal theology, more concerned with the "social gospel" than with

saving souls. Historian Joseph Crespino, focusing on Mississippi, notes that liberal

theologians were often satirized in the Council newsletter.[7] Some segregationists sought

to defend segregation as God's plan for races to co-exist peacefully, pointing to the

divine command that Jews in the Old Testament were not to intermarry with other

peoples, and to Acts 17:26, which noted that God had determined the "bounds of [all

nations'] habitation."[8] Some also argued that the "curse of Ham," the punishment

inflicted on one of Noah's sons, had fallen on Africans and thus their American

descendants.[9] Others did not believe that Scripture mandated segregation, but that God

allowed segregation as a legitimate form of social organization.[10] This view could be

found among northern evangelicals, too. Writing in the pages of the evangelical magazine

Christianity Today in 1957, E. Earle Ellis—at the time a professor of Bible at Aurora

College in Illinois—defended segregation. While dismissing the "curse of Ham" and the

Acts 17:26 arguments as poor interpretations of the Bible, he nevertheless argued that

segregation per se did not violate biblical ethics. "Segregation does not necessitate bad

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7. Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 64.

8. The force of this verse as a support for segregation was undercut by the fact that it began with "…And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth…" King James Version.

9. Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 69.

10. Ibid., 67-68.

race relations, nor does integration guarantee good ones," he wrote. "On the contrary, the very opposite often appears to be true."[11]

One of the southern preachers who supported segregation during the 1950s and 1960s was Jerry Falwell. Born in Lynchburg, Virginia, in 1933, Falwell was converted to fundamentalist Christianity in 1952, partly through the radio ministry of Charles Fuller.[12] After graduating from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, in 1956, he returned to Lynchburg and founded the Thomas Road Baptist Church with thirty-five initial members. The church grew quickly, in large part because of Falwell's tireless efforts of door-to-door evangelism and his radio ministry, which he launched soon after his church's inception.[13]

Although few of his early sermons survive, Falwell's own racial beliefs during this period are clear. In 1958, a few weeks after the governor of Virginia ordered some of the state's public schools to close rather than admit African-American students,[14] Falwell preached a sermon titled "Segregation or Integration: Which?" God had ordained each race a certain place to live, he said, referring to Acts 17:26, and that commandment had been violated when Africans were forcibly brought to America as slaves. "In spite of this unchangeable condition, we can and should maintain God's plan for the races, as well as possible, here in this nation." After disavowing any hatred toward other races, Falwell

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11. E. Earle Ellis, "Segregation and the Kingdom of God," *Christianity Today*, March 18, 1957, 6.

12. Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 102-109.

13. Ibid., 189-209.

14. Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 46.

argued that "[w]hen God has drawn a line of distinction, we should not attempt to cross

that line." African Americans were under the curse of Ham, which meant that they were

to be perpetual "servants." Furthermore, he said, "we see the hand of Moscow in the

background" and the Devil himself behind integrationists' efforts, and integration "will

destroy our race eventually" as it will lead to interracial marriage.[15] The next year, in

1959, Falwell was the first chaplain of Lynchburg's chapter of the Defenders of State

Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, a state-wide organization birthed as part of the

"Massive Resistance" movement against integration, and dedicated to preserving

segregated schools and a "society based on racial separatedness."[16]

Other theologically conservative Protestants were more moderate. The

Presbyterian Church in the United States—a southern denomination—passed a resolution

shortly before the *Brown* decision of 1954 supporting desegregation and calling for

peaceful compliance with that effort. The Southern Baptist Convention passed a similar

resolution immediately after the decision.[17] These resolutions do not indicate active

support for the civil rights movement, nor do they mean that all members of those

denominations agreed with the resolutions of their delegates, but the fact remains that

these bodies were on record as opposing segregation. Indeed, David L. Chappell has

argued that one of the reasons for the success of the civil rights movement was the

weakness of the theological arguments marshalled against it. Compared with the

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15. Falwell, "Segregation or Integration: Which?" Sermon, reprinted in *Word of Life,* October 1958.

16. James Murdock, "New Defenders Group Will Open Campaign At Mass Meet April 1," *Daily Advance* (Lynchburg, VA), March 24, 1959, 11.

17. David L. Chappell, *Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 107-108.

overwhelming support white clergy gave slavery before the Civil War, the opposition to

civil rights during the 1950s and 1960s by white clergy appears limited and indecisive.[18]

A small minority of evangelicals—like Frank Gaebelein, who among other things

was an associate editor of *Christianity Today*—actively supported the civil rights

movement.[19] Dozens of white evangelicals joined the march from Selma to Montgomery.

Members of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a college campus group, overwhelmingly

supported federal intervention in southern states.[20] Billy Graham, although generally of

conservative political convictions, was cautiously supportive of civil rights, desegregated

his evangelistic meetings in the early 1950s and invited Martin Luther King, Jr. to give

the opening prayer one night during Graham's 1957 crusade in New York City.[21] Mark

Hatfield, evangelical Republican governor of Oregon from 1959-1967, was a member of

the NAACP, helped end discrimination in Oregon hotels in 1953, and consistently

supported civil rights throughout his long U.S. Senate career.[22]

Most northern evangelicals and fundamentalists, though, were of mixed mind on

the question of civil rights for African Americans. On the one hand, their theology told

them that all races were created by the same God, and they knew that African-American

evangelicals shared their core theological convictions. Their basic sense of justice was

offended by the mistreatment of demonstrators in places like Birmingham, where the

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18. Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 106-111.

19. Mark A. Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 132-133.

20. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 27.

21. Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents* (New York: Hachette Book Group USA, 2007), 74.

22. Swartz, *Moral Minority*, 68-85.

police turned fire hoses and dogs loose on peaceful marchers, and a bomb planted in a church killed four young girls.

On the other hand, for several different reasons they were often skeptical of civil rights activism. Pervasive racism, shared by Americans across the nation, was one reason. In 1958, for example, just under two-thirds of all Americans said that they would not be willing to vote for a well-qualified African American for president.[23] By 1963, 49 percent of white Americans thought they might move if an African-American family moved in next door; 80 percent thought they might if a great number moved in.[24] George Wallace's success in gaining northern support during his presidential campaigns is another illustration of white attitudes. Wallace, in his first inaugural address as governor of Alabama in 1963, famously pledged to uphold "segregation forever" and later that same year attempted to block the admission of African-American students to the University of Alabama.[25] Wallace's rhetoric was an amalgamation of race-baiting, bombastic anti-Communism, and assertions that a federal government led by liberal elites was assaulting local and states' rights. Yet he clearly had appeal among whites outside the South, winning more than third of the votes in the Wisconsin Democratic primary during the 1964 presidential campaign and 30 percent in Indiana.[26]

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23. Frank Newport, David W. Moore and Lydia Saad, "Long-Term Gallup Poll Trends: A Portrait of American Public Opinion Through the Century," Gallup, accessed February 19, 2014, http://www.gallup.com/poll/3400/LongTerm-Gallup-Poll-Trends-Portrait-American-Public-Opinion.aspx.

24. Lawson and Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, 134.

25. Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 108, 133-155.

26. Ibid., 208-211.

A second reason many theologically conservative Protestants hesitated to embrace the civil rights movement was the fear of Communism. In the mid-twentieth century, suspicion that Communists were behind any form of cultural change bordered on paranoia. In his "Ministers and Marches" sermon, for example, Falwell asserted that Martin Luther King, James Farmer, and other civil rights leaders were "known to have left-wing associations" and that Communists were exploiting American dissension for their own benefit.[27] Falwell was hardly alone in making these allegations. During the mid-1960s, following urban riots in several African-American neighborhoods, half of all Americans believed that Communists were at least partially responsible for *both* the civil-rights demonstrations and the riots.[28] J. Edgar Hoover, at the time director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations, warned President John F. Kennedy that King was under Communist influence, and the White House authorized the FBI to wiretap King and other members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.[29] The civil rights-Communist link was false, but during the 1950s and 1960s, the fear of Communism made it easy for segregationists to brand the civil rights movement as not only disruptive, but subversive.

A third reason for the ambivalence of white theologically conservative Protestants toward the civil rights movement was certain aspects of their theology. As noted in chapter 2, the premillennialist dispensationalist theology held by many worked against their support for social reform. The belief that the world would get worse until the return of Christ could easily feed a kind of passivity about working for change—especially among white evangelicals who did not suffer the deprivations African Americans did

27. Falwell, "Ministers and Marches."

28. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 306.

29 Lawson and Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, 37.

during the Jim Crow era. Even Billy Graham, who was largely supportive of civil rights

for African Americans, expressed his doubt about such change. Following the 1963

March on Washington, in which King spoke of his dream that white and black children in

Alabama would someday be able to walk hand in hand, Graham found it hard to believe

that such fellowship would happen this side of the Rapture. "Only when Christ comes

again will little white children of Alabama walk hand in hand with black children."[30]

Graham was not alleging that King's dream was undesirable; rather, he viewed it as

unrealistic.

Their view of sin and salvation, too, caused many white evangelicals and

fundamentalists to be suspicious of social reform as a legitimate activity for Christians.

The old arguments of the fundamentalist-modernist split still loomed large. Evangelicals

and fundamentalists tended to see social reform as liberal "Social Gospel," and therefore

suspect. Their revivalist heritage caused them to see their primary—if not their only—

goal as "getting people saved." That is, in their view, humans' basic problem was their

estrangement from God because of their sin; it was a problem that only individual

repentance and confession of faith in Jesus Christ could overcome. This diagnosis could

lead some to see little merit in social reforms that did not entail "heart change," a

theological motif that Michael O. Emerson and J. Russell Hawkins have labeled

"antistructuralism." Rather than see social problems as rooted in society's structures—

laws, cultural practices, or institutions—white evangelicals tended to see all social

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30. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 47.

problems as a result of individual sin, with regeneration the only remedy.[31] "Jesus' stress

on the universal need of regeneration speaks to our own turbulent times: 'Ye must be

born again,'" wrote the editors of *Christianity Today* in 1957. "The possibilities of fallen

human nature are fancifully romanticized by those who expect a full solution of the race

problem while they neglect this dimension of life." Segregation is a moral wrong, this

editorial went on to declare, and the sufferings of African Americans "suggest the deep

need for soul-searching and repentance in the churches," as well as action. "The early

Church unleashed a flood of kindness in a world of racial strife; the modern Church has

too often unleashed a flood of resolutions." However, "[f]orced integration is as contrary

to Christian principles as is forced segregation. The reliance on pressure rather than on

persuasion has resulted in a marked increase of racial tensions in some areas. Christianity

ideally moves upon the life of the community by spiritual means; the secular agencies, on

the other hand, tend to resort to force, with the result that their achievements are

continually endangered."[32]

Thus, white theologically conservative Protestants were usually bystanders to or

critics of the civil rights movement. Many of them viewed segregation unfavorably. But

many also, for a variety of reasons, had an equally unfavorable view of activists.[33]

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31. Michael O. Emerson and J. Russell Hawkins, "Viewed in Black and White: Conservative Protestantism, Racial Issues, and Oppositional Politics," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 330-331.

32. "The Church and the Race Problem," editorial, *Christianity Today*, March 18, 1957, 21.

33. In this, they were hardly alone. A 1963 poll revealed that slightly less than half of all Americans supported a bill integrating public accommodations. About the same percentage believed that the Kennedy administration was too hasty in its civil rights efforts. Seventy-two percent did not oppose giving federal aid to segregated schools, and 60 percent thought that demonstrations did more harm than good to the African-American cause. Lawson and Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, 134.

Nevertheless, in at least two important ways, the civil rights movement helped lay the groundwork for later political engagement among white evangelicals.

First, the civil rights movement explicitly linked morality and politics. In their call for the nation to give equal treatment to all citizens, regardless of race, both leaders and ordinary activists claimed that their movement reflected something higher than merely political pragmatism: it was the right thing to do. As historian Mark Noll writes, "[the civil rights movement] reinvigorated the possibility that some moral principles deserved higher loyalty than the established law of the land."[34] In this, African-American Protestant civil rights activists were heirs of the evangelical reform tradition of the nineteenth century; it was white evangelicals' ambivalence about the civil rights movement that was out of step with that tradition. In making claims about the morality of their movement, civil rights activists were paving the way for some later white evangelicals to make similar claims, albeit in the support of conservative rather than progressive politics. Thus, the civil rights movement bequeathed to evangelical conservatives the possibility that government power could be used for moral ends. In one sense, this was nothing new; a long tradition, going back to the Puritans in the colonial period, saw a positive role for the state as moral enforcer.[35] Yet it was a strand that had largely disappeared from fundamentalist and evangelical thinking following the failures of Prohibition and anti-evolution legislation. As Chappell argues, many African-American civil rights activists, including King, had a pessimistic view of human nature and the intractability of evil. Because of this belief, they "were conspicuous for their

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34. Noll, *God and Race in American Politics*, 142.

35. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 87.

unwillingness to let social processes work themselves out and for their lack of faith in the power of education and economic development to cure society of oppressive evils." It would take "coercion"—for King and others in the SCLC, this meant nonviolent resistance—for the oppressors to relinquish their power. [36]

Interestingly, white evangelicals shared this pessimism regarding human nature; they, too, rejected the liberal hope in the innate goodness of humanity. This shared belief also shared a source: the Bible's teaching on the sinfulness of humanity. For King at least, this view was mediated by Reinhold Niebuhr, whose writings King absorbed during his academic career, especially during his graduate study at Boston University. For evangelicals, who tended to see Niebuhr as a "liberal" because of his emphasis on ethics rather than on salvation offered by Christ, this pessimism regarding human nature was rooted more directly in the doctrine of original sin and in a Calvinistic stress on "total depravity." Yet in the mid-twentieth century, this gloomy anthropology led to different conclusions regarding the efficacy of political action. For King and other African-American civil rights activists, it meant political action was necessary. For many white evangelicals, it meant that even those who sympathized with the plight of African Americans were suspicious of political efforts, for they believed that such efforts were unable to touch the center of the problem, which was the corrupt human heart. It would not be until the 1970s, when many white evangelicals came to believe that the federal government was leading the nation away from its "godly roots," that they, too, would mobilize politically.

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36. Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 45-66.

Second, the civil rights movement did far more than present a model of political engagement for white evangelical conservatives. It also helped create the conditions for that engagement. The expansion of the federal government that occurred in an effort to enforce equal treatment of African Americans led some evangelicals, especially in the South, to view it with antipathy. The *Brown* Supreme Court decision (1954) and its subsequent enforcement with federal troops, the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Voting Rights Act (1965), and the 1968 Civil Rights Act (the "Fair Housing Act") all involved the federal government overruling state and local authorities. While leaders of the Christian Right like Falwell would later denounce the segregation and racism some of them espoused in the 1960s,[37] the battle over integration predisposed them to believe that the federal government had grown too large and too prone to intervention in local affairs. This concern meshed with a revitalized conservative movement that was coalescing in the 1960s, as conservative activists sought to stop the growth of government that had begun in the "New Deal" era.[38] As described in chapter 5, one of the precipitating events of the Christian Right was the Internal Revenue Service's increased scrutiny in the 1970s of private religious-based schools on the grounds that they might be discriminatory and therefore undeserving of tax-exempt status.

Conservatives appealed to these fears of an expansive federal government in language that sometimes played on old racial ones. Wallace was hardly a conservative;

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37. During the 1980 presidential campaign, after Falwell and others founded the Moral Majority, reporters uncovered his "Ministers and Marches" sermon, as well as his past support for segregated schools. Whether motivated by political expediency or a genuine change of heart, Falwell apologized for his past, both to individual African-American ministers in Lynchburg and publicly before a community group. William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 219.

38. Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

small-government conservatives tended to see him as another New Deal southerner who welcomed federal money for his state and region.[39] But Wallace pioneered a new way of talking about race as the language of blatant bigotry became less acceptable. As his biographer Dan Carter notes, Wallace could recalibrate his rhetoric based on his audience. In the South during the mid-1960s, he used racist language much more freely. To national audiences, however, he was "careful to couch his message in the more congenial terrain of economic conservatism, states' rights, anticommunism, and the public's fear of social disorder."[40] To what extent the appeal of such rhetoric was because of the racism of his audiences is difficult to determine. But the fact remains that it was the federal government that was enforcing civil rights legislation, and any complaint about that power could be readily interpreted as expressing dislike of civil rights efforts. Barry Goldwater supported voting rights for African Americans, but as a senator voted against the 1964 Civil Rights Act on constitutional grounds; he argued that portions of the bill were unconstitutional because they allowed for federal intervention into private enterprise.[41] Regardless of Goldwater's own personal beliefs regarding race, this message of resisting federal interference played well in South where "states' rights" had long been a battle-cry for maintaining segregation, and Goldwater's only electoral college victories outside of his home state of Arizona were in the South. Richard Nixon's so-called "southern strategy" during his 1968 presidential campaign, too, included soliciting the support of Strom Thurmond, the South Carolina senator who had opposed civil rights

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39. Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 85.

40. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 161.

41. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy*, 72.

legislation for years. Nixon had supported the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, but he also assured southerners during the campaign that he would not vigorously pursue federal enforcement of desegregation mandates.[42]

"The Times They Are a-Changin'"

Race was not the only or even the primary factor in the increasing political conservatism of evangelicals. The civil rights era was one in which the federal government was expanding its reach in a variety of areas. Thus, as Noll notes, while complaints of "big government" were a smokescreen for segregationists whose true goal was a rollback of civil rights efforts, the role of the federal government did become a more honestly debatable topic.[43] Escalating American involvement in the Vietnam conflict and the military draft meant that millions of young men felt federal power in a most direct and immediate way.

Federal spending overall as a percentage of GNP continued to grow in the decades following the Second World War.[44] Federal aid for education expanded during the 1960s, and President Johnson's "Great Society" programs included the creation of Medicare and Medicaid, health insurance programs for the elderly and poor, respectively. Federal regulation of matters affecting the public health increased, including higher standards for automotive safety, the Clean Air Act (1963) and the Clean Waters Act (1966). The surgeon general's office issued its first warnings about the links between

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42. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 326-329.

43. Noll, *God and Race in American Politics*, 147.

44. In 1936, federal spending was 10.5 percent of GNP; in the period of 1947-1960 it averaged 17.3 percent. Robert C. Collins, "Growth Liberalism in the Sixties: Great Societies at Home and Grand Designs Abroad," in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, ed. David Farber (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 14.

cigarette smoke and cancer. The National Endowment for the Arts was created in the mid-1960s, as was the National Endowment for the Humanities.

<div align="center">School Prayer and Bible Reading</div>

The Supreme Court, too, extended its reach with several rulings that Christian Right leaders would later identify as evidence of America's purported jettisoning of its godly heritage. In the early 1960s, the court moved against Bible reading and teacher-led prayer in public schools. The first decision, *Engel v. Vitale*, dealt with a prayer adopted by the New York Regents in the 1950s: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, and our teachers." A group of parents, including Steven Engel, sued William Vitale, a New York school board president, arguing that the prayer violated their religious beliefs and the first amendment's clause prohibiting the establishment of religion. The Supreme Court agreed in 1962. Justice Hugo Black, writing for the 6-1 majority, cited Jefferson's "wall of separation" phrase in support of the ruling; the Establishment Clause, he wrote, "must at least mean that in this country it is no part of the official business of government to compose official prayers for any group of American people to recite as part of a religious program carried out by government."[45]

The ruling was immediately criticized by politicians from both parties.[46] Billy Graham reported that he was "shocked and disappointed." [47] Yet perhaps surprisingly, given how this decision would later be denounced by the Christian Right, evangelicals

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45. Peter Irons, *A People's History of the Supreme Court: The Men and Women Whose Cases and Decisions Have Shaped Our Constitution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 410.

46. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 62-63.

47. Irons, *A People's History of the Supreme Court*, 411.

and fundamentalists on the whole did not see the *Engel* decision as a threat. The bland

nature of the prayer, and the fact that it was composed and recited rather than

spontaneous, led many of them to accord it little meaning anyway. *Christianity Today*

noted that such a "corporate prayer" encouraged a "least-common-denominator type of

religion." *Eternity* and *Moody Monthly*, evangelical magazines, also noted their support

for *Engel* and suggested that the matter of teaching prayer to young people was best left

to churches and parents.

A second Supreme Court ruling the following year, however, prompted greater

antipathy from conservative Protestants. This one, *Abington Township v. Schempp*, barred

the Lord's Prayer and Bible readings from classrooms. A Pennsylvania law had mandated

the classroom reading of ten verses from the Bible each morning and the recitation of the

Lord's Prayer; children could be excused from this ritual if their parents objected. The

Schempp family did, and also argued in its suit that requiring the two Schempp children

to stand in the hallway while their classmates prayed amounted to punishment. The suit

was supported by the American Civil Liberties Union, and the case made it to the highest

court in 1963. The court ruled in favor of the Schempps. The state must be neutral on

matters of religion, wrote justice Tom Clark for the majority. "The breach of neutrality

that is today a trickling stream may all too soon become a raging torrent."[48]

Evangelicals were quick to express their dislike of *Abington*, perhaps because a

ruling against the classroom reading of the King James Bible seemed to strike more

closely to the foundation of their faith than the prohibition of a generic composed prayer.

The National Association of Evangelicals began to advocate a constitutional amendment

48. Irons, *A People's History of the Supreme Court*, 411-412.

restoring prayer and Bible reading in public schools. Harold Ockenga, a leader in the

post-war resurgence of neo-evangelicalism, argued that "a neutral or secular state, while

preserving the nation from dominion by a denomination, leaves America in the same

position as Communist Russia." Fundamentalists weighed in, too. Carl McIntire wrote

that a "greater issue is at stake than simply Bible reading in the schools. At stake is

whether or not America may continue to honor and recognize God in the life of the

nation." Conservative Protestants were not alone in their affirmation of classroom

religious practices; over 70 percent of Americans favored school prayer, and during the

two years following the Engel decision, 111 congressmen introduced 147 proposals for a

school-prayer constitutional amendment.[49] George Wallace, in the midst of his fight

against school integration and always ready to inveigh against Earl Warren's Supreme

Court, found another reason to do so. The "chief, if not the only, beneficiaries of the

present court's Constitutional rulings have been duly and lawfully convicted criminals,

communists, atheists and clients of the NAACP," he said after the *Abington* decision.

And now, "we find the court ruling against God."[50]

Youth Protest

The 1960s and early 1970s were also years of other cultural and social changes,

ones that many conservative Protestants found deeply unsettling. The era was one of

protests, and for many Americans accustomed to the comparative consensus of the 1950s,

the dissent was disruptive and disturbing. The protests of the civil rights movement were

the earliest, but as American involvement in the Vietnam conflict increased, so did

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49. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 64-65.

50. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 162.

opposition to the war. For young American men of draft-age, the possibility of being sent to Vietnam was a cause for protest. Initially supportive of that involvement, the American public soured on the war as casualties increased with no clear path to victory—and uncertainty regarding what that victory would look like.

Other issues, often overlapping with the anti-war and civil rights causes, served as catalysts for dissent. *The Port Huron Statement*, a 1962 manifesto from the Students for a Democratic Society, criticized the nation's militarism, buildup of nuclear weapons, anti-Communist paranoia, racial bigotry, influence of big corporations, and unequal distribution of wealth. The influence of the statement was probably limited, but it did suggest that a growing number of people, especially young people, were willing to "question authority," as a bumper sticker from later in the decade would phrase it.[51] College students protested *in loco parentis* rules—"in the place of the parents"—on campuses because they felt that rules addressing curfews and male-female contact were paternalistic and restrictive.[52] Hippies in the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco and elsewhere shocked those of more conventional sensibilities by wearing granny dresses, leather vests, beads, and anything colorful; young men let their hair and beards grow. "I feel like letting my freak flag fly," sang David Crosby. Musicians provided the anthems for Baby Boomers coming of age in an America they believed was racist, imperialistic, and unthinkingly conforming. "The times they are a-changin'," sang Bob Dylan, and indeed they were. By the mid-1960s, a counterculture was emerging with liberation from cultural norms and self-expression as its primary themes.

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51. Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America From Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62-63, 251.

52. Ibid., 97-108.

Social Permissiveness

Charges that the era was one of "sex, drugs, and rock and roll," could be overwrought, of course. But the 1960s and 1970s did see many people loosen their understanding of what sorts of behavior were appropriate. Between 1959 and 1973, the percentage of Americans who said that premarital sex was wrong dropped from 80 percent to less than 50 percent.[53] The *practice* of premarital sex increased as well, and the age of first sexual intercourse decreased.[54] This shift took place in the context of other changes that gave women greater control over their own reproductivity. Oral contraception—"the Pill"—came on the market in 1960. The case of *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) established the right of married couples to obtain and use contraceptives, overturning a Connecticut law forbidding their use. In *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972), the court ruled that unmarried women had the same right.[55]

Movies and television shows began to treat sexual matters with far greater frankness; the Supreme Court in effect loosened the restrictions on obscenity in *Miller v. California* (1973), which allowed local communities to set their own standards. As a result, in many places pornography became less regulated and more widely available.[56] Drug use increased, especially of marijuana,[57] a drug that in the minds of many became

53. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990), 267.

54. Lawrence B. Finer, "Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States, 1954-2003," Public Health Report 122, no. 1 (January-February 2007): 73-78, accessed February 19, 2014, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih. gov/pmc/articles/PMC1802108/.

55. Irons, *A People's History of the Supreme Court*, 428-431; Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History From Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 93.

56. Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 163-167.

almost synonymous with the counterculture. Other drugs—like LSD and heroin—were available to those who sought them.

Gay Rights

Gays and lesbians were also becoming more vocal about the prejudice they faced during the 1960s and 1970s. Long disdained and vilified in mainstream culture, homosexual activity was illegal in every state prior to 1961; the American Psychiatric Association considered homosexuality sociopathic, a designation that was not removed until 1973.[58] In the mid-twentieth century, many gays and lesbians remained "closeted"—keeping their sexuality private—in the face of social pressure; a few organizations, like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, offered support and quietly worked for anti-discrimination laws. In 1969, however, events in Greenwich Village, New York, gave notice to the American public that some gays and lesbians were not content to remain in the shadows. The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar, was raided by police, ostensibly on the charge that it was selling liquor without a license. Patrons viewed the raid as another instance of law enforcement harassment, and fought back; a police crackdown the next night resulted in further rioting by gay men.[59] Social acceptance of gays and lesbians was slow, but there was evidence during the 1970s of a growing "live and let live" attitude toward homosexuality; a society loosening its standards on premarital sex, divorce and what was considered obscene found it difficult to justify condemnations of homosexuality. Some states repealed their anti-sodomy laws, the U.S.

57. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, 260.

58. Melinda D. Kane, "Timing Matters: Shifts in the Causal Determinants of Sodomy Law Decriminalization," *Social Problems* 54, no. 2 (May 2007): 213; Williams, *God's Own Party*, 146.

59. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, 317-318.

Civil Service Commission began in 1975 to allow the hiring of homosexuals, and the

Democratic Party in 1980 for the first time included a gay rights plank.[60]

Marriage and Gender

The 1960s and 1970s were also years that saw several challenges to the traditional

understandings of marriage and gender roles. Divorce rates increased rapidly, as most

states—beginning with California in 1969—adopted some version of "no-fault divorce"

laws, allowing couples to divorce without alleging specific wrongdoing. Disapproval of

divorce also dropped significantly.[61] In part taking their cue from civil rights activists,

women began to challenge societal limitations, such as inequalities in legal standing and

pay and fewer job opportunities. An important milestone in this "second wave

feminism"—the first wave resulted in women gaining the right to vote in the early

twentieth century—was the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

Friedan wrote of educated woman who felt trapped in their roles as homemakers, wives

and mothers, suggesting that the suburban home was in reality a "comfortable

concentration camp."[62] For some women, involvement in the civil rights movement

opened their eyes both to the power of mobilization around one's identity and to the

patronizing attitudes even among men seeking to end racial inequality.[63] The National

Organization for Women, with Friedan as one of its founders in 1966, provided a forum

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60. Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 106.

61. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 267.

62. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 307.

63. On the relationship between the civil rights movement and women's liberation, see especially Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

for women to voice their discontent with discrimination they faced and also worked for legislative change. A success of that effort was the passage in 1972 of Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act, which mandated equal treatment of the sexes by any institution receiving federal money; one of the most obvious results of Title IX was the rush by high schools and colleges to create varsity sports programs for females.[64]

Perhaps the highest profile issue of the "women's liberation movement" was the Equal Rights Amendment. Initially proposed in 1921, the ERA had languished in obscurity until 1970, when the Women's Strike for Equality—a multi-city demonstration organized by NOW—helped raise the issue.[65] The proposed constitutional amendment, which stated in its basic provision that "[e]quality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex," initially seemed to be headed for quick adoption. Sent to the states in 1972, it needed to be ratified by three-fourths of them by 1982 for adoption into the U.S. constitution. Twenty-two states approved it within the first year, but the pace of ratification soon slowed to a trickle, and by 1977—after five states had rescinded their previous approval—the amendment was still short three states. Some of the strongest opposition to the ERA came from women, including Phyllis Schlafly. Her Eagle Forum group argued that the amendment was unnecessary, given the "equal protection" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and that it could result in what anti-ERA forces saw as undesirable consequences: unisex toilets, legalized homosexual marriage, women in military combat,

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64. Benjamin G. Rader, *American Ways: A History of American Cultures*, vol. II, *1865-Present*, 2nd ed. (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 330-331.

65. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, 358-359.

and husbands freed of financial responsibility for their families.[66] Schlafly also warned

that the ERA would encourage lesbianism, an association strengthened in the minds of

some when delegates at the 1977 National Women's Conference approved a resolution

calling for an end to discrimination against homosexuals.[67] The ratification time limit

expired in 1982, and the ERA died, a victim of the increasingly heated culture wars.

<div align="center">Abortion</div>

No issue would eventually come to exemplify the culture wars more than

abortion, but in the 1960s, abortion was not a hotly debated issue, nor was it one

particularly associated with women's rights. All but one state had laws generally banning

the practice; the majority allowed them if the woman's life was in danger. Such laws did

not eliminate all abortions; illegal ones could be had by women willing to have them

performed by "back-alley" practitioners, often under dangerous conditions. But there was

no organized movement seeking the expansion of abortion rights. The birth control

movement, with Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) as a prominent spokesperson, focused

almost entirely on contraception rather than abortion, and after women won the right to

vote in 1920, women's rights groups devoted most of their energy to the passage of the

ERA. Abortion did become a matter of national debate for a brief period in 1962, when

Sherri Finkbine was denied an abortion at an Arizona hospital. Finkbine had been taking

thalidomide for headaches when she became pregnant; she and her doctor believed that

she had a high risk of having a deformed child. Finkbine was the local host of a

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66. William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 162.

67. Ibid., 164.

children's television show, and her situation received national media attention in the form

of *Life* and *Newsweek* stories. She and her husband traveled to Sweden for an abortion,

and a Gallup poll that year revealed that 52 percent of respondents believed that abortion

was right in her case; 32 percent disagreed.[68]

By the early 1970s, a number of states had loosened their restrictions on abortion,

including California, where in 1967 governor and future president Ronald Reagan signed

into law a bill allowing abortions in the cases of rape and incest and when the pregnancy

endangered the health of the mother.[69] Four states had removed almost all such

restrictions by 1971; an additional thirteen had broadened the legal reasons for abortion

to include a woman's mental and physical health as well as her life. Thirty states still

allowed abortions only if the pregnant woman's life was in danger, and three states made

every abortion illegal.

During these years of slowly loosening restrictions, Romans Catholics were the

most prominent religious voices against abortion. Catholics drew on a centuries-long

history of opposition to the practice; church teaching, including that resulting from the

Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s, condemned it. The Right to Life League, the

nation's first anti-abortion group, was formed in 1967 primarily by Catholics.[70] Most

Protestants, however, tended to be less vocal on the issue, partly because of historic

suspicion of anything associated with Catholicism, and partly because the Bible—the

final authority in their theology—did not address abortion specifically. Thus,

68. Irons, *A People's History of the Supreme Court*, 424-426.

69. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 113.

70. Ibid.; Donald T. Critchlow, *Intended Consequences : Birth Control, Abortion, and the Federal Government in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 137.

conservative Protestants took a variety of positions. Some fundamentalists, like John R. Rice, independent Baptist editor of *The Sword of the Lord*, sharply condemned abortion. The Southern Baptist Convention, on the other hand, passed a resolution in 1971 calling for states to *loosen* their restrictions on abortion. The resolution favored allowing "the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother." Other conservative Protestants were somewhere in the middle. *Christianity Today*, for example, printed an article 1968 written by a Christian physician who suggested that Scripture was not explicit on the issue and that those who would forbid all abortions were guilty of a "hyperlegalistic distortion of true Christian ethics;" abortions performed before the point of fetal viability were probably permissible in some cases.[71] In the midst of this lack of Protestant unanimity, abortion was not a topic that caused evangelicals and fundamentalists to politically mobilize.

The Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 did eventually change that political calculus, but not immediately. The *Roe v. Wade* case originated in Texas, where Norma McCorvey—publically known as "Jane Roe" until 1984, when she revealed her identity—initially sought an abortion in 1970. She was denied, and a suit was filed on her behalf by two lawyers seeking a plaintiff to challenge Texas' law, which allowed abortions only if the woman's life was threatened.[72] McCorvey never had an abortion and

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71. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 114-116; Robert D. Visscher, "Therapeutic Abortion: Blessing or Murder?" *Christianity Today,* September 27, 1968, 6-8.

72. Irons, *A People's History of the Supreme Court*, 431-435.

gave birth to a girl, who was adopted.[73] Her case, however, continued its legal journey

and found its way to the Supreme Court in 1970, with a decision finally issued in 1973.

The 7-2 decision made abortion legal during the first two trimesters of pregnancy; states

were allowed to restrict abortion after the fetus became "viable." The court found, Harry

Blackmun wrote in his majority opinion, that the Constitution includes the "right of

privacy," and the Fourteenth Amendment, with its guarantees of life, liberty and property,

"is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her

pregnancy." [74]

Roman Catholic clerics were predictably opposed to *Roe v. Wade*. Terence

Cardinal Cooke of New York, for example, found the ruling "shocking" and

"horrifying."[75] Conservative Protestants, as before the ruling, were of mixed minds on the

decision. Southern Baptists, for example, in 1974 reaffirmed their earlier resolution,

asserting that it was a middle ground between "the extreme of abortion on demand and

the opposite extreme of all abortion as murder." W.A. Criswell, a Texas pastor who had

served as the SBC's president from 1968 to 1970, approved the *Roe* decision, noting that

he had always believed that a child became an individual person only after birth, and that

decisions before birth should be made on the basis of what was best for the mother.[76]

Other voices, however, were raised in protest against *Roe*. Billy James Hargis, founder of

Christian Crusade, had long been preaching fundamentalism and anti-Communism; he

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73. Douglas S. Wood, "Who is 'Jane Roe'?" CNN, accessed February 14, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/ 2003/LAW/01/21/mccorvey.interview/.

74. Irons, *A People's History of the Supreme Court*, 436-447.

75. Ibid., 449.

76. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 117.

now added the anti-abortion cause to his efforts, creating the group Americans against

Abortion. The National Association of Evangelicals issued a statement after *Roe*

deploring the decision, "which has made it legal to terminate a pregnancy for no better

reason than personal convenience or sociological considerations."[77] *Christianity Today*

echoed the criticism, and there were other signs that evangelicals were rallying against

abortion.[78]

Signs of Evangelical Political Awakening

Nevertheless, the *Roe* decision did not cause immediate political mobilization.

Falwell, for instance, did not begin to highlight abortion as prominent among America's

"national sins" until several years later, although he wrote later that the decision caused

him immediate consternation.[79] Paul Weyrich, a Catholic conservative activist and a key

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77. "Abortion 1973," National Association of Evangelicals Policy Resolutions, accessed February 14, 2014, http://www.nae.net/government-relations/policy-resolutions/59-abortion-1973.

78. In 1975, Ruth Bell Graham, wife of Billy Graham, organized an anti-abortion conference. In the same year, Harold O. J. Brown, an editor at *Christianity Today*, created the Christian Action Council, asserting that Protestants, too, should be concerned with the liberalization of abortion laws. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 119.

79. When precisely Falwell began to preach against abortion is uncertain. In both versions of his autobiography, Falwell asserts that the *Roe* decision caused him "horror and disbelief" as he read about it in a newspaper the day after it was announced; he also writes that by the time the Supreme Court made its decision that he had preached on abortion, counseled women who had regretted their abortions, researched the physical and psychological effects on women who chose abortion, and had read articles by Francis Schaeffer on the topic. Falwell, *Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography*, 334-335; Falwell, *Falwell: An Autobiography* (Lynchburg: Liberty House Publishers, 1997), 357-358. Some of this may be true; a 1973 book co-written with Elmer Towns—a close associate of Falwell's at Thomas Road Baptist Church—refers to a young father who regretted pressuring his wife to get an abortion and wondered "if God would forgive him for murdering an unborn child." Falwell and Elmer Towns, *Capturing a Town for Christ: Saturation Evangelism in Action* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), 53. And a Falwell sermon from 1976 also refers to abortion as murder. "How Christians Can Best Serve Their Country," sermon transcript, *Old Time Gospel Hour*, September 19, 1976, Falwell Publications, FAL 2-3, series 1, folder 1c, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA. However, it is unlikely that he had read anything by Schaeffer on abortion since Schaeffer himself did not become engaged with the subject until years after *Roe*. Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 175; Frank Schaeffer, *Crazy for God: How I Grew Up as One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of It Back* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2008),

player in the New Right movement of the 1970s, later said that he had tried to use the anti-abortion cause as a means of involving conservative Protestants in politics, but had "utterly failed."[80]

There were, however, other signs that conservative Protestants were beginning to move further away from their relatively apolitical stance. Several incidents, scattered around the country, revealed that evangelicals and fundamentalists were willing to fight against trends that they believed were weakening local sexual mores. One battleground issue was sex education in public schools, and an early fight took place in Anaheim, California, in 1968. Advocates of such education, including those associated with the Sex Information and Education Council of the U.S., argued that students needed scientifically accurate information. Opponents protested that such programs were too sexually explicit, that they could encourage sexual experimentation, and that their amoral content did not condemn behaviors like premarital sex, homosexuality and bestiality. Various groups against sex education formed across the country; some of them, along with existing organizations like the John Birch Society and Hargis's Christian Crusade, linked sex education with the familiar bogeyman of Communism. A popular film among the anti-sex education groups was *Pavlov's Children*, which alleged that the Soviet Union was using UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization)

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265. And Towns later recalled that it was *he* who had encouraged Falwell, in the spring of 1978, to finally speak out at length on the subject and himself wrote Falwell's first sermon giving abortion extended treatment. Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 303, fn. 5. This sermon, apparently, was "Abortion-on-Demand: Is It Murder?" February 26, 1978, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA. In any case, what is clear is that the *Roe* decision did not immediately cause Falwell to increase his political involvement.

80. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 173.

to weaken American resolve against totalitarianism. As Daniel Williams notes, the sex education battles helped forge a link between anticommunists and social conservatives.[81]

A similar battle took place in the early 1970s in Kanawha County, West Virginia. There, the battle was not over sex education, but it did concern what children were being taught in the public schools. The dispute was born when the school board sought to adopt a number of books for use in its curriculum; the books were intended to be used as resources for K-12 teachers developing their own individualized instruction. Opponents of the textbooks objected to the sexual themes in some of the books, as well as material that in their view disparaged America, criticized a free enterprise economic system, used non-standard English, relegated the Bible to one among many of the world's mythological systems, and taught that values were relative rather than absolute. Proponents of the books pointed to the books' inclusion of multicultural perspectives— they included a number of selections from minority writers—and to their "realism" in describing a variety of lifestyles and perspective. The dispute quickly grew far beyond the confines of the school-board meeting room, as many county residents chose up sides. It also turned violent: several schools were dynamited or firebombed, two people were wounded by gunfire, and school buses were fired upon; both sides were apparently involved in the violence. The battle gained the attention of national media, and a variety of outside groups became involved, including the John Birch Society and the newly founded Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank.[82]

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81. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 82-83; Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 100-116.

82. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 117-143.

Most of the books were eventually adopted, although with several accommodations for parents who objected to their use in the teaching of their children, and the dispute died down. It did, however, highlight the growing concern among some evangelical and fundamentalist parents regarding public schools. The growth of private, Christian schools was fueled in part by the desire to maintain segregated schools, as discussed further in chapter 6. But for many other parents, race had nothing do with their desire to form such schools. In their view, public schools were becoming captive to an anti-God, anti-American, anti-Bible ideology, and the solution was to form schools of their own.

A third sign in the 1970s that indicated a growing willingness to politically mobilize were protests against the push for homosexual rights, an effort that was growing in visibility. A number of cities passed gay-rights ordinances, and social conservatives began to organize opposition in the forms of petitions and resolutions. The Southern Baptist Convention, for example, passed its first resolution opposing homosexuality in 1976. One of the highest profile campaigns was in Dade County, Florida, where Anita Bryant, a Christian singer and former pageant queen, rallied social conservatives in 1977 against an ordinance that prohibited Miami schools from discriminating against homosexuals in hiring. Bryant created the group Save Our Children, arguing that homosexual teachers would seek to recruit youths to their "perverted, unnatural, and ungodly lifestyle." Her campaign was successful in Miami, where residents passed an anti-gay-rights referendum; Jerry Falwell, by then a well-known figure in fundamentalist circles with his television program, *Old Time Gospel Hour*, traveled to Florida during the campaign to stage a rally in support of the referendum. Meanwhile, Save Our Children

had moved beyond Florida to agitate against similar gay-rights ordinances in other states, and the organization—later renamed Protect America's Children—had broadened its agenda to include anti-pornography efforts and the promotion of school prayer. By 1980, Bryant herself was disillusioned with the culture wars; her own marriage had ended in divorce. But her campaigns had given notice that social conservatives were becoming more willing to fight against what they saw as attacks on "family values."[83]

One of the questions raised by these instances is why issues related to sex and gender—abortion, the ERA, homosexuality, and sexual education—were becoming so central to evangelicals and fundamentalists' social concern. Why were these fast becoming some, though not all, of the "hot button" issues that caused them such consternation? Some observers have argued that they represented an effort by white men to maintain their place in a gendered hierarchy as a *racial* hierarchy became less acceptable in the post-civil rights era. Others have suggested that economic concerns underlay these issues, and that women especially sought to defend the "traditional" family as a way of protecting their own status in a time of economic turmoil.[84] Still others have posited that these concerns can be attributed to the designs of conservative political operatives who sought allies wherever they could find them, and who learned that theological conservatives would run to the anti-abortion banner even if those who waved it held economic beliefs that would not help them.[85]

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83. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 147-151.

84. Bethany Moreton, "Why Is There So Much Sex in Christian Conservatism and Why Do So Few Historians Care Anything about It?" *The Journal of Southern History* LXXV, no. 3 (August 2009): 717-738.

85. Perhaps the best-known popularizer of this thesis is Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

There may be some truth in these theses, and they may be helpful in explaining some aspects of the nascent Christian Right as it became allied with the broader New Right in the 1970s. But they fail to locate these issues against the backdrop of theologically conservative theology, and thus ignore the obvious explanation: evangelicals and fundamentalists were concerned about these issues because they believed that the Bible spoke clearly to them. The Bible condemned fornication (sex before marriage), adultery (sex outside of marriage), and, they believed, all homosexual activity.[86] Jesus had commanded his followers to avoid sexual lust, equating it with adultery on the moral scale.[87] Additionally, theological conservatives had long believed that the Bible taught that the husband was the head of the home, and that the wife's duty was to submit to his leadership;[88] how that relationship was to be practiced might be a matter of some debate, but the principle of hierarchy, they believed, was clear. Certainty about the Bible's teaching on abortion was slower in coming, as noted above, but during the 1970s there was a growing belief that Scripture was decidedly opposed to the practice.

Furthermore, the nature of the fundamentalist and evangelical social ethic as it had developed by the mid-twentieth century helps explain the salience of these issues in the 1970s. In response to the old fundamentalist-modernist controversy, fundamentalists had developed a fairly privatized ethic, in which "personal holiness" and separatedness from "worldliness" were paramount. As we have seen, for example, many theologically conservative Protestants were suspicious of the civil rights movement as a manifestation

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86. As one biblical example, see I Cor. 6:9-10.

87. Matt. 5:27-30.

88. See, for instance, Eph. 5:22-24.

of the old Social Gospel. While evangelicals had attempted to expand their ethical

concern to other areas—Carl Henry was an early proponent of this—avoiding sexual sin

was still an important marker of both fundamentalist and evangelical identity. God's

word, they believed, clearly prohibited certain activities, and protecting what they saw as

proper gender roles was important in maintaining the home as a redoubt against a

growing cultural secularism.

Clearly, the cultural terrain on these issues was shifting in the 1960s and 1970s,

and it was obvious that many in the broader culture no longer accepted what theological

conservatives believed the Bible plainly taught. Divorce, acceptance of premarital sex

and homosexuality, and pornography were on the rise, the Pill and abortion seemed to

encourage promiscuity, and the ERA represented a challenge to what they saw as the

basic unit of society: the family. To many of them, these were not just external issues, but

were threats to their ability to raise their children as they saw fit.[89]

Given this theological backdrop, then, it is hardly surprising that evangelicals and

fundamentalists were concerned about the sexual revolution and other changes in

American society. What *was* new—at least when compared with their relatively apolitical

stance of the mid-twentieth century—was their willingness to publicly protest such

changes. By the end the 1970s, theologically conservative Protestants were increasingly

turning toward political action as their preferred method of attempting social change.

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89. For further elaboration of this defensive posture, see Matthew Lassiter, "Inventing Family Values," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce J. Shulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 21-26.

CHAPTER 4

THE DIAGNOSIS OF "SECULAR HUMANISM"

> Beginning about eighty years ago we began to move from a Judeo-Christian consensus in this country to a humanist consensus, and it has come to a special climax in the last forty years.
>
> —Francis Schaeffer, Speech, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C., 1982

The Christian Right came into being during the 1970s. Its roots went deep in American history, as we have seen. Theologically conservative Protestants had long believed that they were the moral custodians of American culture,[1] inheritors of the religious heritage that they increasingly believed the nation was now forsaking. Their theology had long been blended with American patriotism, and they had for some time held out hope that the nation would turn "back to God." Yet the decades of the 1930s through the 1960s had been ones in which evangelicals and fundamentalists had largely been content to seek social change through revival, as individuals placed their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and were "born again."

However, during the 1970s the reformist strand of their heritage began to gain more prominence in their thinking. As they had during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they began to use politics as a way of carrying out their mission to be "ambassadors" for Christ.[2] For most of them, the political ideology they believed Scripture sanctioned was conservatism.

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1. Grant Wacker, "Uneasy in Zion: Evangelicals in Postmodern Society," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George M. Marsden (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 22-24.

2. II Cor. 5:20.

Few evangelical leaders exemplified the commitment to revival and personal trust in Jesus Christ more than Bill Bright. Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, Bright had dedicated his life to spreading the "gospel" message that eternal salvation was found only through Christ. Yet Bright also was a leader in the early 1970s of the political engagement that became increasingly common among evangelicals and fundamentalists during the decade. Bright's efforts would not have the same staying power that Falwell's would a few years later, but his belief that political engagement was a non-negotiable for faithful Christians was accepted by more and more of his fellow evangelicals.

Bright was only one of the writers and thinkers who helped meld an evangelical, politically conservative ideology. Perhaps surprisingly, the man who provided evangelicals with much of the ideological ammunition for that mobilization was Francis Schaeffer, a goateed American fundamentalist who dressed like a Swiss farmer and talked about Albert Camus. It would be Schaeffer's articulation of "secular humanism" that would enable Falwell and other conservative Protestants to view many of the cultural changes of the era as part of the same anti-God conspiracy. Others helped forge a version of American history that justified their political engagement. Still others helped popularize premillennial dispensationalism, which gave them a sense of a urgency and impeding doom: the clock was ticking away, and the time to act was now. In these remaining four chapters, then, I describe the contributions of a number of writers who aided the consolidation of an ideology that viewed the federal government with suspicion while at the same time retaining great faith in the power of politics to change that government.

Bill Bright and Third Century Publishers

Bill Bright was born in 1921 in Coweta, Oklahoma, a small town near Tulsa, the son of a cattle rancher. In 1944, he moved to Los Angeles, where he took over and expanded a fancy foods business. He also began attending First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, where he had a conversion experience in large part due to the teaching ministry of Henrietta Mears, the church's director of Christian education.[3]

Bright believed that God was calling him into full-time ministry, and entered first Princeton Seminary and then Fuller Theological Seminary. His passion for practical evangelism and his belief that Christ's return could happen soon, however, made these academic stints brief and half-hearted. In 1951, Bright left academic life for good and founded Campus Crusade for Christ. The new organization was designed to lead college students into a born-again conversion experience, and Bright's initial efforts on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles met with success. By the early 1960s, the organization had chapters on more than one hundred campuses, with nearly three hundred staff members; eventually, Campus Crusade would be an international movement with a presence in about 150 countries.[4]

Bright's primary concern was always evangelism, which for him and other evangelicals meant something personal and individual; the goal was to lead individuals to make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Bright's background in business and marketing showed in his distillation of the gospel into "Four Spiritual Laws," which were

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3. John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), chap. 1, Kindle.

4. Turner, chap. 4. "Bright, William ('Bill') Rohl," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. ed. Daniel G. Reid, Robert D. Linder, Bruce L. Shelley, Harry S. Stout (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

packaged into small tracts. The laws, supported by relevant Scripture passages, presented the "plan of salvation": 1) "God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life," 2) "Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life." 3) "Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life." 4) "We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives."[5]

Yet for Bright, seeking to bring about revival on college campuses was never entirely an apolitical effort. For Bright, as with many other postwar evangelicals and fundamentalists including Billy Graham, bringing young people to faith in Christ was in part a defense against Communism. Communism was growing rapidly, he warned in the mid-1950s, and its leaders were ready to take advantage of the spiritual vacuum on college campuses by targeting college students, since they would be the leaders of the nation. "Either students will serve the true God," Bright predicted in 1955, "or they will follow materialism and communism."[6]

<div align="center">Revival Through Politics</div>

In the mid-1970s, Bright's political efforts became much more explicit, as he became even more concerned about what he saw as increasing secularism in American society. While Campus Crusade continued to find success in its personal evangelism efforts, Bright worried that it was not enough to keep the nation from descending into

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5. Bill Bright, "Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?" (repr., Peachtree City: Campus Crusade for Christ, 2007).

6. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ*, chap. 2.

moral and spiritual "bankruptcy." Bright's efforts took several forms. In keeping with the evangelical focus on revival and conversion, Bright created "Here's Life, America!," a campaign with the goal of saturating the nation with the gospel message through five million trained church volunteers and extensive advertising campaign. The Christian Embassy was intended as an evangelistic outreach and spiritual resource for people working in national government, and furnished a building on Capitol Hill for that purpose.

Much more political in nature were two additional organizations. Intercessors for America was a lobbying group that encouraged conservative Protestants to contact their congressional representatives; one of its activities in 1976 was to encourage pastors to buy and distribute Bright's pamphlet, *Your Five Duties As a Christian Citizen*, which encouraged Christians to get involved in politics. The second organization was Third Century Publishers, begun in 1974. Third Century was the creation of Bright and John Conlan, a Republican congressman from Arizona, and its mission was to produce materials that blended conservative politics and biblical principles to educate evangelicals at the grass-roots level so that they would elect suitable candidates. Funded primarily by wealthy evangelical businessmen, Third Century created home-study kits—similar to the Bible studies already familiar to evangelicals—that showed them how to run a local political campaign. These kits also included the "Third Century Index," a scorecard for congressional representatives showing how they voted compared to conservative principles.[7]

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7. Robert C. Liebman, "Mobilizing the Moral Majority," in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*, ed. Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1983), 50-53.

As Robert Liebman notes, these organizations were the first major effort to rally evangelicals to political conservatism. While not as successful as efforts later in the decade like Moral Majority—in large part because Bright did not have access to a large television audience like Falwell—they do indicate that some evangelicals at least were willing to link evangelism with political activism. Not all evangelicals were comfortable with that link; Graham criticized Bright for his politicization, and when *Sojourners* magazine, produced by left-wing evangelicals, described Bright's partisan activities, he ended his explicitly political activities.[8]

The publications of these organizations, however, give insight into evangelicalism's developing political ideology in the 1970s.[9] First published in 1976, Bright's short pamphlet—twenty-four pages—was not explicitly partisan; rather, in *Your Five Duties* he encouraged Christians to shoulder their responsibilities to pray, register to vote, become informed, help elect "godly people," and vote. What was meant by "godly" Bright did not specify, but he argued strongly that electing "ungodly" people would lead to America's ruin, which would threaten world evangelism. The blame lay with politically passive Christians. "We have ceased to be the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world," he wrote. "As a result, the moral fiber of America is rotting away—and our priceless freedom is in grave jeopardy." If only a portion of the "half of the people of the United States" who "profess faith in Jesus Christ" would fulfill their God-given duty, God might "set this nation on a new course of righteousness for His glory." Relying heavily on Old Testament passages that describe God's commands for the governance of

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8. Liebman, "Mobilizing the Moral Majority," 50; Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 120-122.

9. Liebman, "Mobilizing the Moral Majority," 50-52.

biblical Israel, Bright argued that the "God warns against ungodly leaders. The rule of the wicked is a direct violation of His will…Instead, God's plan is for us to have leaders who know Him and will rule according to His Word…Godly people must vote for godly rulers."[10]

Your Five Duties contained a fair bit of alarmist rhetoric, a sign that Bright felt deeply about the changes that the nation had undergone in the mid-twentieth century. "We are in danger of losing our nation by default," he wrote, "and with it our individual freedoms and possibly our very lives." His booklet indicated just how far removed he was by 1976 from any sort of fundamentalist separatism, in which being "salt and light" meant only a focus on individual holiness and personal evangelism. For Bright, evangelism was insufficient to combat the moral crisis he believed America was facing. Godly people would have to act politically if America was going to be preserved. "America is one of the last strongholds of freedom on earth—and citizens who are dedicated to God are the only resource for the preservation of our freedoms, including the freedom to serve Him," he wrote. Only Christians, Bright appeared to be saying, could be trusted to maintain the American republic; non-Christians—in some malevolent way he did not specify—would apparently vote to end freedom.

Rus Walton and *One Nation Under God*

While Bright argued that Christians should vote for "godly leaders" regardless of party, the primary publication of Third Century Publishers contained no doubt about what end of the political spectrum Christians should favor. This publication was *One Nation*

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10. Bill Bright, "Your 5 Duties As a Christian Citizen" (Peachtree City: New Life Resources, 2008). The pamphlet was first published in 1976.

Under God, written by Rus Walton. Walton had a long history of involvement in Republican politics in California, first as campaign manager for Joe Shell, who unsuccessfully sought the Republican nomination for governor in 1962, and then as a campaign operative for Barry Goldwater during the 1964 presidential campaign. During that campaign, Walton produced brochures and a film—later disavowed by the candidate—that played on the fears of white conservatives by using a blizzard of images of black rioters, criminals being arrested, topless dancers and advertisements for sex shops, all in an effort to link supposed increasing immorality and social disorder with Lyndon Johnson.[11]

His book for Bright's organization, published in 1975, was somewhat more measured, but its message was clear: individual freedom was a gift from God, and its existence was being threatened by government expansion, taxation, inflation and immorality. Walton freely blended providential history, biblical verses, frightening economic statistics, and paeans to the free market. In essence, Walton's book promoted a version of Christian libertarianism: the best government was that which governed least, since small government forced people to develop virtue and trust in God.

In his view, individual freedom was paramount in God's design for humanity. God had created people with the inalienable right to the pursuit of life, liberty, property and happiness, and Christ had died and risen to make individuals free not only from the "wages and the death of sin," but from the "savagery of demagogues and kings."[12]

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11. Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 486-487, 494-496.

12. Rus Walton, *One Nation Under God* (Washington, D.C.: Third Century Publishers, Inc., 1975), 23.

According to Walton, the federal Constitution was not a secular document, but was designed to perpetuate Christian governance with individual freedom at its heart. "The rock, the power, and the beauty and the light that was the Spirit of the American Republic and its Constitution had been on earth since the beginning of time," he wrote. "Since The Creation. It was there when Christ, with God, created the heavens and the earth—and man."[13]

But that freedom was now being attacked by a host of enemies, including the expansion of the federal government. This Walton blamed primarily on President Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal: "It was then, more than ever before, that socialism sank its roots deep into the nation's heart. It was then the republic took its hardest lumps."[14] Walton rejected entirely the liberal belief that government could empower individuals and create equal opportunities for them; rather, for him, any expansion of government meant a loss of liberty, for it took control away from the people. Even worse, government could become an idol, as people began to trust in the "State" rather than in God.[15] For Walton, then, the most virtuous government was the smallest one possible.

Walton attacked other aspects of American society as entailing a threat to individual freedom. Progressive taxation, inflation, and any attempt to redistribute wealth were "legalized plunder," for they took wealth away from individuals without their consent. Busing children to schools outside their local neighborhoods—which some districts had adopted in an effort to desegregate their schools—was coercive. So were minimum wage laws, for in Walton's logic they took jobs away from young people

13. Walton, *One Nation Under God*, 22.

14. Ibid., 36.

15. Ibid., 46.

because they forced employers to reduce their work force. Laws designed to prevent discrimination in hiring violated the individual liberty of employers to hire and fire whom they wished. Medicaid-financed abortions violated the liberty of taxpayers who were opposed to abortions, the ERA—if enacted—would take away more power from the states, and compulsory education in public schools that taught evolutionary theory and "situational ethics" took away the freedom of parents to have their children educated as they saw fit.[16] Walton's prose could be over-the-top; for instance, in discussing public education he suggested that supporters of it adhered to a new mantra that parodied Jesus' words: "Suffer, little children. Come unto the State; it will be your new religion."[17]

Walton's book shows that the idea that evangelicals and fundamentalists only cared about "social" issues—like abortion, pornography, or the ERA—is false. Walton did sharply critique these things, but his agenda was far broader than that, and much of his book dealt with economic issues. This concern was shared by other Christian Right activists, as we will see. Furthermore, *Under God* and the Bright-inspired effort it represents highlights the growing affection some evangelicals and fundamentalists had for conservative politics in the early 1970s. As a case in point, evangelicals voted for Richard Nixon by a more than 4-to-1 margin in 1972.[18] While a majority of them would not identify as Republicans until the 1980s, their presidential voting habits began to favor Republican candidates beginning in 1952. The exception was 1964, when only 38 percent

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16. Walton, *One Nation Under God*, 122.

17. Ibid., 107.

18. Lyman Kellstedt, John Green, Corwin Smidt and James Guth, "Faith Transformed: Religion and Politics From FDR to George W. Bush," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 272-273.

of them voted for Goldwater, as illustrated in figure 2.[19] This Republican shift, which

would continue into the twenty-first century, meant that white evangelicals began

consistently voting Republican at rates at or greater than the national average. There were

regional differences in this overall pattern; the South lagged in this evangelical rightward

turn. Until 1972, a majority of southern evangelicals voted Democratic, a continuation of

the "Solid South" born out of Civil War-era antipathy for the party of Lincoln.[20] But by

the end of the 1970s, both northern and southern evangelicals were solidly Republican.
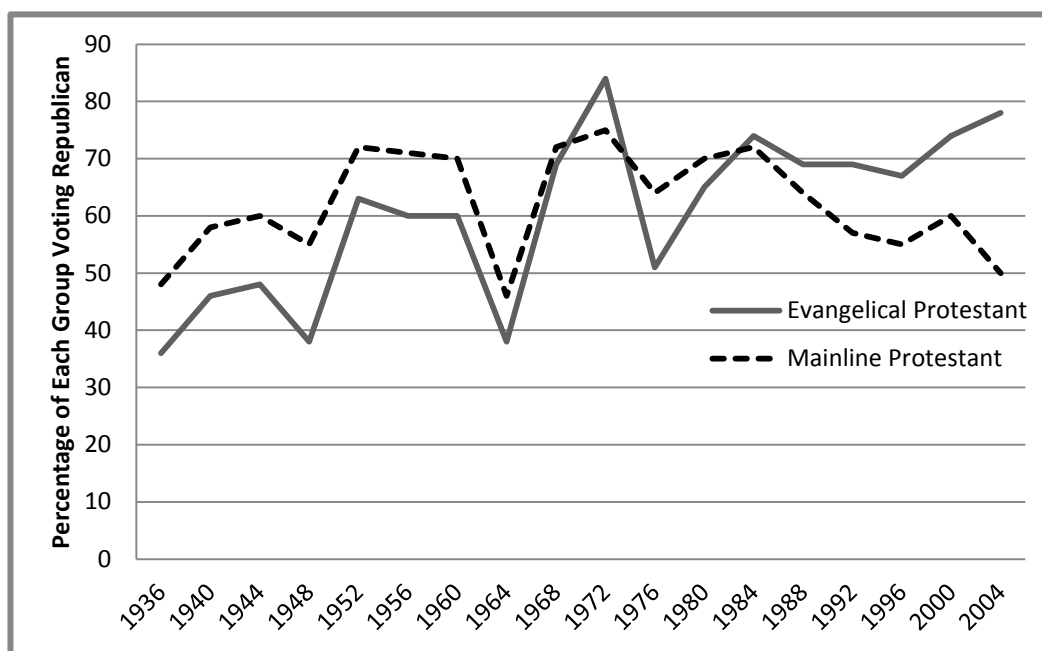

Figure 2. Republican percentage of evangelical and mainline vote for U.S. president, 1936-2004.

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19. The data in fig. 2 comes from Kellstedt et al., "Faith Transformed," 272-273.

20. Ibid. The exceptions to the Democratic "Solid South" were 1948, when Strom Thurmond's States' Rights Democratic party won four Southern states; 1964, when the Republican Barry Goldwater won five Southern states plus his native state of Arizona, and 1968, when George Wallace's American Independent Party also won five Southern states.

Rushdoony and Reconstructionism

Throughout his book, Walton frequently quoted from Rousas John Rushdoony, and *Under God* illustrates the influence on the Christian Right exercised by Rushdoony and the movement he founded, Christian Reconstructionism. Reconstructionism[21] is the belief that the Old Testament law that governed biblical Israel is still God's will for nations today; the name refers to the idea that society should be "reconstructed" to reflect that biblical blueprint—including the death penalty for such things as adultery, homosexual acts, adult children who repeatedly disobey their parents, witchcraft, bestiality and Sabbath-breaking. It is also known as "dominion theology," for the belief that God's people are to take dominion over all aspects of society,[22] or "theonomy"—a combination of the Greek words "theos" (God) and "nomos" (law)—to point to the movement's focus on God's law.

Reconstructionism has its roots in Reformed theology, and its leaders have found inspiration in John Calvin's sixteenth-century theocratic government in Geneva and in Puritan New England. But its founder was Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001), a pastor and missionary associated with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian offshoot founded in part by J. Gresham Machen. Beginning in the 1950s, Rushdoony began to publish prolifically; his seminal book, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (a nod to John Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion*) came out in 1973. In 1965, Rushdoony created the Chalcedon Foundation in California, dedicated to propagating reconstructionist ideas.

21. The adjective "Christian" is often added to the term to distinguish Christian Reconstructionists from Jewish Reconstructionists who desire to set up a Jewish state based on the Mosaic law.

22. A key verse here is Gen. 1:26-28, where God commands humans to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, "subdue" it and "rule" over all living things.

Rushdoony and other reconstructionist writers who followed him, like Greg

Bahnsen and Gary North, argued that the Bible provided a complete guide for the proper

ordering of society. The movement has five basic tenets. First, its understanding of

salvation is Calvinistic. Regeneration—the new spiritual life Christ makes possible—is

only by God's grace. Second, reconstructionism is postmillennial, holding to the belief

that Christ will return only after the millennium, the thousand-year earthly reign of the

saints. Third, reconstructionists follow the presuppositionalism of Cornelius Van Til

(1895-1987), a professor at Westminster Theological Society, although Van Til himself

had nothing to do with reconstructionism. Van Til taught that epistemologically, there is

no neutral ground. All thought is based on presuppositions—foundational assumptions—

and genuine discourse is impossible among those who hold different presuppositions.

While this has definite apologetic implications—it ruled out all evidentialist attempts to

reason an unbeliever into faith, for instance—what it means politically is that

reconstructionists accept no system that is not based entirely on God's revelation, which

they believe is contained in the Bible. Any system based on natural law is illegitimate

because it is an outgrowth of alien presuppositions. Fourth, the reconstructionist political

system is deeply anti-statist, with a decentralized vision of society in which civil

government is only one among many authorities. In this, Rushdoony was influenced by

postwar libertarian writers like Friedrich Hayek, whose 1944 book *The Road to Serfdom*

protested what he saw as the loss of individual liberty caused by government expansion,

and writers in the Austrian school of economics like Ludwig von Mises. Finally,

reconstructionists hold to the validity of the "whole law of God," believing in the

desirability of enacting the entire Old Testament law code into modern civil statutes.[23] As noted above, this would include making into capital crimes a variety of acts no longer even considered criminal offences by the vast majority of Americans. This latter vision has been reconstructionism's best-known and most controversial aspect, and some observers have seen reconstructionism as a prominent strand within the Christian Right and as an ominous portent of that movement's true goals of establishing a theocracy in which those determined to be "sinners" are publically executed.[24] Reconstructionists themselves have always been careful to dissociate their movement from any sort of plan for violent takeover. Rather, Rushdoony's postmillennial eschatology meant that he envisioned a slow transformation of society as individuals become regenerate.[25]

Rushdoony never saw himself as a political activist; indeed, he viewed the attempt by Christian conservatives to influence government as misguided. For him, the longed-for reconstruction of society was a grassroots approach, whereas Christian Right activism was top-down.[26] Thus, the relationship between Rushdoony and the nascent Christian Right in the 1970s was always one of partial mutual suspicion. Rushdoony's postmillennialism was anathema to most American evangelicals and fundamentalists, and they explicitly disavowed his advocacy of a biblical theocracy, no matter how it was to be implemented. But his writings still had a certain appeal for writers like Walton. For one

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23. Molly Worthen, "The Chalcedon Problem: Rousas John Rushdoony and the Origins of Christian Reconstructionism," *Church History* 77, no. 2 (June 2008), 401-406.

24. See, for example, Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007); Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); John Sugg, "A Nation Under God," *Mother Jones*, December 2005, accessed February 19, 2014, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2005/12/nation-under-god.

25. Worthen, "The Chalcedon Problem," 425.

26. Ibid., 403.

thing, Rushdoony helped fill a lacuna in their thinking: whereas they had done little thinking in the area of political theology, Rushdoony presented a complete vision. They might disagree with the details, but they could appreciate Rushdoony's effort to provide a rigorously biblical political vision. Second, and perhaps of far greater influence, Rushdoony was convinced that America had been founded as a Christian nation, an emphasis that was ubiquitous in Christian Right rhetoric.[27] Walton, for instance, quoted Rushdoony favorably: "To read the Constitution as the charter for a secular state is to misread history, and to misread it radically. The Constitution was designed to *perpetuate* a Christian order." The First Amendment, according to Rushdoony and seconded by Walton, was designed not to remove religion from government, but to protect the state establishments of religion from federal interference.[28]

Francis Schaeffer and "Secular Humanism"

Walton's impact on the Christian Right of the 1970s was fairly limited. Bright severely restricted his own explicitly political activities after 1976, and Walton moved on to join the conservative Plymouth Rock Foundation.[29] But Rushdoony's reconstructionism movement would be influential on one of the key thinkers who helped lay the groundwork for Falwell's Moral Majority: Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer, like most other conservative Protestants, would never fully embrace reconstructionist thinking. But in important ways, reconstructionism helped shape his thinking.

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27. Worthen, "The Chalcedon Problem," 417.

28. Walton, *One Nation Under God*, 23-24.

29. Liebman, "Mobilizing the Moral Majority," 51.

Schaeffer was born in 1912 in Philadelphia, the child of working-class Presbyterian parents. His parents were not deeply devout, and in his teens Schaeffer decided that he was an agnostic. In 1930, however, he became a Christian at a tent-meeting revival led by evangelist Anthony Zeoli. He graduated from Hampden-Sydney College, a liberal arts school in Virginia, in 1935, and married Edith Seville, the daughter of American missionaries to China, the same year. The Schaeffers then moved to Francis' hometown of Philadelphia, where he began training for the Presbyterian ministry at Westminster Seminary, the school that had been founded six years earlier by Machen and others who believed Princeton Seminary had become too liberal. Westminster itself underwent a split in 1937 during Schaeffer's second year there, and he left with a group of faculty and students led by Carl McIntire as part of the first class at the new Faith Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware. The split—indicative of fundamentalism's tendency to fragment over doctrinal issues—seems to have been over the proper understanding of Calvinism, temperance, and premillennialism. The Faith Seminary group adopted positions of moderate Calvinism, total abstinence from alcohol, and an emphasis on premillennial eschatology. After graduating from Faith Seminary in 1938, Schaeffer spent the next decade as a Bible Presbyterian pastor at churches in Pennsylvania and Missouri. In 1948, the Schaeffers moved to Switzerland under the auspices of McIntire's organization, American Council of Christian Churches; their goal was help establish in postwar Europe the kind of resistance to modernism that characterized American fundamentalism, including a commitment to biblical inerrancy. Eventually, the Schaeffers established L'Abri ("The Shelter") in a Swiss chalet; by the 1960s L'Abri had became a center for philosophical discussion for those interested in the intersection of

Christian faith and contemporary thought, and a destination for American and European young people seeking spiritual answers.[30]

The Loss of the "Christian Base"

Barry Hankins, a recent Schaeffer biographer, suggests that Schaeffer's career can be divided into three parts: his years as a pastor in the United States, his initial years at L'Abri, and his later years as a culture warrior especially consumed by his antagonism to abortion. The first and the third eras were ones in which Schaeffer exhibited the militancy characteristic of fundamentalism. The middle era, as he and Edith welcomed and sought to respond to spiritually adrift young adults at L'Abri, saw Schaeffer adopt a less combative and more creative approach.[31] It was during his years at L'Abri that Schaeffer began to gain fame, first as a lecturer and then as an author; he eventually published twenty-four books, as well as two film series—based on his books—that were produced with the help of his son, Franky.

Schaeffer's scope in his books was sweeping, attempting no less than a description of what he saw as the cultural and moral decay of Western—that is, American and European—civilization. This he rooted in the loss of a belief in absolute truth and an adoption of what he termed "secular humanism." For Schaeffer, ideas were of paramount importance, for the ideas accepted by a culture amounted to its "worldview," its basic way of viewing truth and the universe. He believed that its worldview shaped everything else, including its governance and the moral choices of its members. Thus, like Van Til,

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30. Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 1-27.

31. Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America*, 135.

Schaeffer stressed the importance of presuppositions, the assumptions one makes before building a rational system of thought. Unlike Van Til, however, Schaeffer believed that Christians could reason with non-Christians on the basis of their shared rationality and engage intellectually, as he was doing with the young people who were increasingly flocking to L'Abri.

Schaeffer's primary message was that Western civilization had moved away from what he described as its "Christian base," by which he meant not that all members of that culture were Christians, but that they held in common a basic understanding of truth. In a trilogy of books published between 1968 and 1972—*The God Who Is There*, *Escape From Reason*, and *He is There and He is Not Silent*—Schaeffer sketched this worldview and the consequences of its abandonment, themes that he developed in subsequent writings, including the book *How Should We Then Live?* and its associated film (1976). Until the early twentieth century,[32] Schaeffer argued, people generally agreed that God existed and that there were such things as moral absolutes. While people might disagree on what they were, "nevertheless they could reason together on the classical basis of antithesis. So if anything was true, the opposite was false."[33] In essence, Schaeffer was describing a "correspondence theory" of truth—although he did not use the term—in which statements were believed to be true in accordance with whether or not they adhered to reality. But now, Schaeffer wrote, many people had left that way of thinking behind.

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32. In *The God Who Is There*, Schaeffer dated this shift—without explanation—to about 1890 in Europe and about 1935 in the United States. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There: Speaking Historic Christianity Into the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 13.

33. Ibid., 14.

One of Schaeffer's key terms—and one that would appear in the rhetoric of Christian Right activists in the 1970s and beyond—was "humanism." By this, Schaeffer meant a worldview that excluded God, "a value system rooted in the belief that man is his own measure, that man is autonomous, totally independent."[34] Schaeffer sometimes equated humanism with naturalism, or materialism—the belief that matter is all there is and that the supernatural does not exist. In this worldview, humans were simply the result of chance plus time.[35] Schaeffer believed that such a worldview posed insoluble epistemological and moral problems for modern people. Epistemologically, humanism leads to meaninglessness, he asserted. If matter is all there is, and a man believes that there is no outside intelligence that has created the material world, then there is no reason for him to believe that his own senses are trustworthy. "Starting with himself, a person cannot establish an adequate explanation for the amazing possibility that he can observe the world around him and be assured that his observations match up with reality."[36] Regarding the moral problem, Schaeffer asserted that humanism gave no basis for values. "Those who begin with the material universe can *describe* but they can never *define*."[37] The problem, Schaeffer believed, was that humans had to have a source of values outside themselves, or they would simply create value systems of relative morality—which was exactly what he believed was happening. "Given time, even the 'certainties' of our

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34. Francis A. Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1979), 60.

35. Ibid., 122.

36. Schaeffer and Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, 134.

37. Ibid., 136.

ethical systems can be undone—the bills of rights, the charters of freedom, and principles of justice, everything."[38]

The result of the adoption of the humanistic worldview, Schaeffer argued, was that moderns had cut themselves off from God, who alone could give meaning and purpose to their lives, and were now living below what he called "the line of despair." Believing as they did that matters of "purpose, significance, [and] the validity of love" were impossible to know with certainty, they were left with "only particulars, no purpose, no meaning. Man is a machine."[39] According to Schaeffer, this loss of meaning explained much of the drug culture, the hedonistic pursuit of sexual pleasure, non-representational modern art, the chance-based music of John Cage, and the pessimism of certain art films of the 1960 and 1970s. Ever the evangelist, Schaeffer saw this as a profound tragedy, for it meant not only that many modern people were living lives of despair—if they followed their presuppositions to their logical conclusions—but it also meant that they were eternally lost, because they were missing the salvation found only in Jesus Christ. His duty, he believed, was to help those under the line of despair see that their worldview was unable to account for major components of human experience; only Christianity was able to provide a consistent and tenable worldview.[40]

Schaeffer attempted not only to describe the characteristics and results of this shift from a "Christian base" to humanism, but its development. In several of his books—and in a somewhat idiosyncratic and superficial treatment of the intellectual history of Europe—Schaeffer sketched the growth of humanism through thinkers as diverse as

38. Schaeffer and Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, 137.

39. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There,* 22.

40. Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of American Evangelicalism*, 90.

Thomas Aquinas, Dante Alighieri, Francis Bacon, Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques

Rousseau, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Søren Kierkegaard. He also sought to

show how humanism was illustrated in the works of a diverse host of artists, musicians

and filmmakers. In *How Should We Then Live?*, for instance, Schaeffer could range from

Marcel Duchamp to Jackson Pollock to Gustav Mahler and Arnold Schoenberg in the

span of three pages, and he was sometimes criticized by Christian scholars for

oversimplification or outright errors.[41] Yet for many conservative Protestants—especially

college students—his engagement with the Western intellectual tradition and with

popular culture was exhilarating. At a time when many Christian colleges forbade their

students from attending movies of any sort and rock music was off-limits, Schaeffer was

discussing the films of Federico Fellini and the music of the Beatles and Led Zeppelin.

For many evangelicals, Schaeffer helped them believe that their faith not only was

intellectually viable, but that it was the solution for the ills of the modern age.

<div align="center">Schaeffer's Contribution to Christian Right Ideology</div>

Schaeffer was crucial for the development of the ideology of the Christian Right

for several different reasons. First, he drew attention to the issue of abortion. As noted in

chapter 3, many evangelicals in the mid-1970s took fairly equivocating stands on the

practice; for many evangelicals and fundamentalists, abortion was still largely a "Catholic

issue" in the mid-1970s. Schaeffer would do much to change that perception.

Soon after the publication of *How Should We Then Live?*, Schaeffer began work

on a new book and film that focused on what would become known as "sanctity of life"

issues—abortion and euthanasia. The new productions were a cooperative effort with C.

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41. Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of American Evangelicalism*, 96-102.

Everett Koop, a surgeon at Philadelphia Children's Hospital. Decades earlier, Koop had performed surgery on one of the Schaeffers' daughters, and he and Schaeffer met again in 1977 on a Canadian university campus where both were lecturing. After a further meeting in Switzerland, Francis and Franky Schaeffer and Koop determined, according to Koop, "to awaken the evangelical world—and anyone else who would listen—to the Christian imperative to do something to reverse the perilous realignment of American values on these life-and-death issues."[42] Both the book and film versions of *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* were released in 1979.

The problem with abortion, according to Schaeffer and Koop, was not just that it was morally reprehensible. They believed that it was that, and the book contained graphic descriptions of abortion techniques, as well as instances in which infants had been born alive and allowed to die.[43] But the deeper issue was that the acceptance of abortion revealed that Western society had jettisoned the Christian worldview and replaced it with a humanist one that did not sufficiently value human life. This was a theme that Schaeffer had begun to explore in *How Should We Then Live?*; in that work, Schaeffer castigated the *Roe v. Wade* decision, describing it as medically and legally arbitrary, in that it ignored both the lack of medical consensus regarding when life began and the constitutional guarantees of the equal treatment of persons. Furthermore, he wrote that "this arbitrary decision is at complete variance with the past Christian consensus." He also employed a slippery-slope argument, suggesting that if the Supreme Court could end

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42. Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of American Evangelicalism*, 180-181.

43. Schaeffer and Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, 41-52.

the lives of unborn children, then it could do the same with the elderly and those in vegetative states.[44]

These arguments were developed further in *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* "[W]e feel strongly that we stand today on the edge of a great abyss," Koop and Schaeffer wrote.[45] In one of the more striking scenes in the film, Koop describes abortion techniques while the camera pans across hundreds of dolls lying on what could be ice or snow. The substance is then revealed to be salt on the shoreline of the Dead Sea, and Koop asserts that he is standing at the site of the ancient city of Sodom. "Sodom comes readily to mind when one contemplates the evils of abortion and the death of moral law," Koop intones. "The secular forces of humanism have scoffed at Christian morality and ethics and the Christian idea that man was created in the image of God. These theories of so-called liberation from biblical absolutes are bearing their bitter fruit."[46] The loss of those absolutes meant that there was no belief in the inherent worth of humans, and in such a society, the young and the old were the most vulnerable. Schaeffer and Koop warned that such a worldview had led both to the Nazi regime, with its genocide and grotesque medical experimentation, and to Communism's inhumane system.[47] The same fate could await other societies, and the authors quoted from a variety of ethicists and medical professionals who had raised the possibility of eliminating children with birth defects and the euthanasia of the elderly and terminally ill. "[I]f a human being is *not*

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44. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1976), 222-223.

45. Schaeffer and Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, 16.

46. *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Franky Schaeffer V Productions, Gospel Films, Inc., 1979) accessed January 4, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EN8yYcTJRUM.

47. Schaeffer and Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, 103.

made in the image of God, why shouldn't the malformed young and the elderly be put out of the way for the good of society—once society and the courts separate life and personhood?"[48]

Perhaps surprisingly, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* was not a battle-cry for political action, although its final chapter did include a brief appeal to "use every constitutional practice to offset the rise of authoritarian governments and the loss of humanness in our society." Christians should be willing to use all available means, the authors suggested, including legislation and "social action."[49] But the primary response they called for was a personal commitment to treat all human beings, including the unborn, with the dignity Koop and Schaeffer believed they deserved. It is clear why this was so. Having framed the abortion issue as one rooted in a humanistic worldview, Koop and Schaeffer could hardly make political activism their focus, for political change would not go to the root of the problem. What was needed was for Christians to live out a God-centered worldview that valued human life, and to present it in an attractive way, as the Schaeffers had been seeking to do at L'Abri. Thus, they urged Christians to value all humans, submitting to the lordship of Jesus Christ in all things. "He is Lord not just in religious things and not just in cultural things such as art and music, but in our intellectual lives and in business and our attitude toward the devaluation of people's humanness in our culture."[50] Schaeffer had for years argued that the adoption of a humanistic worldview meant that the dominant cultural values were those of "personal peace and affluence": most people simply wanted to be left alone, untroubled by the

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48. Schaeffer and Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, 101.

49. Ibid., 194.

50. Schaeffer and Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, 191.

needs of others, free to pursue material prosperity.[51] Now, in *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, he and Koop argued that opposition to abortion should entail a willingness to sacrifice those values. Churches and individual Christians must be willing to extend practical and financial help to both married and unmarried pregnant women considering abortion, suggesting that this might mean providing a place to stay for unmarried women or providing child care for mothers whose need to work might prompt them to seek an abortion. "Merely to say…'You must not have an abortion'—without being ready to involve ourselves in the problem—is another way of being inhuman."[52]

Nevertheless, Schaeffer was not opposed to political activism in principle, and his opposition to abortion would increasingly lead him in that direction. His articulation of reasons for political action would be a second contribution to the ideology of the Christian Right. Until the mid-1970s, Schaeffer's career had been almost entirely apolitical. His writings primarily dealt with the intellectual validity of Christianity and its cultural implications; an exception was a booklet published in 1970 that outlined a Christian ecological ethic.[53] But by the late 1970s, Schaeffer had begun to move to the right politically, and he would, in Hankins' view, become the movement's "intellectual guru."[54]

The seeds of this politicization were already present in *How Should We Then Live?*, although it was hardly a clarion call to political action. But in that book, Schaeffer

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51. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 205.

52. Schaeffer and Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, 113.

53. Francis A. Schaeffer and Udo Middelmann, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1970).

54. Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of American Evangelicalism*, 204.

spoke in ominous tones about the possible results of the abandonment of a transcendent moral law. Only such a law could guarantee the worth of individuals, regardless of their lack of utilitarian value; without such a law, there was nothing to restrain humans from doing whatever they wanted. "If there are no absolutes by which to judge society, then society is absolute," he wrote. The alternatives were stark: either society would descend into anarchic hedonism, or an unprincipled majority would rule, or an elite—perhaps a dictator—would take over while promising to maintain the "personal peace and affluence" of the masses. The adoption of humanism meant that law was arbitrary, and if it was arbitrary then there was nothing to stop the destruction of freedom, as had already happened in the Communist world.[55]

Schaeffer's political views were shaped in part by reconstructionist theology. By the 1960s, Schaeffer was aware of Rushdoony's work and had read his writings; people who visited L'Abri during this decade recalled him speaking favorably about Rushdoony. Like many conservative Protestants, as a premillennialist Schaeffer was uncomfortable with Rushdoony's postmillennial eschatology, and also distanced himself from the idea that the specifics of the Old Testament law, rather than its principles, were applicable to modern societies. Nevertheless, Rushdoony's attempt to set out a Christian political ethic was intriguing to Schaeffer, and it seems that the latter's belief that America had been founded on a "Christian base" may have come in part from Rushdoony.[56]

Schaeffer also helped lay the groundwork for the rise of the Christian Right by contributing the idea of "co-belligerency." As noted above, conservative Protestants,

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55. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 224-227.

56. Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of American Evangelicalism*, 193-194.

especially fundamentalists, were reluctant to collaborate with non-fundamentalists in any way; their separatist instincts usually led to denominational fragmentation rather than cooperation. Schaeffer, however, began to teach them that their theological commitments should not prevent them from working together with non-fundamentalists—even non-Christians—on some social issues. Falwell would eventually attribute his own move away from fundamentalist separatism to Schaeffer, writing in his autobiography that it was Schaeffer who taught him that "there is no Biblical mandate against evangelical Christians joining hands for political and social causes as long as there was no compromise of theological integrity."[57]

Schaeffer's greatest contribution to the Christian Right, however, was the idea of "worldview." Schaeffer's constant message in his books was that Christians must learn to think about the culture as a whole and not in parts; that is, they should see the cultural changes they were witnessing not as separate moral issues, but as ones rooted in the shift from a Christian worldview to a "secular humanistic" one. This had two profound effects on the thinking of Christian Right activists like Falwell. First, it awakened them to the fact that they were not the only ones with a belief system to defend. Living as they did in a culture whose elites largely dismissed their beliefs as irrational, they were accustomed to a defensive posture intellectually. Schaeffer pointed out, however, that everyone had a worldview that depended on first-order, faith-based presuppositions. The naturalistic materialism of the "secular humanists" was an unproven assumption that they were obliged to defend just as Christians needed to defend their belief in a creator God. Thus, no one stood on some sort of intellectual neutral ground, a realization that some

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57. Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 361.

conservative Protestants found empowering. Although this was in some ways similar to later postmodernist assertions, for Schaeffer this observation did not lead into radical subjectivity. Rather, he believed that the Christian worldview was the only one that could adequately account for the fullness of human experience.

The second effect of worldview thinking was that "secular humanism" linked a great variety of issues, and it broadened the front on which Schaeffer's followers believed they needed to fight. The concept, in William Martin's description, was highly "elastic;"[58] for some activists, secular humanism became a sort of catch-all term for everything that they opposed in American society. "To understand humanism," according to one Christian magazine in 1980, "is to understand women's liberation, the ERA, gay rights, children's rights, abortion, sex education, the 'new' morality, evolution, values clarification, situational ethics, the separation of church and state, the loss of patriotism, and many of the other problems that are tearing America apart today."[59] In other words, the concept of secular humanism allowed any number of issues to be treated as "moral" ones. It also raised the stakes of political debate, because these activists believed that there were spiritual—even eternal—consequences if secular humanism was allowed to extend its reach into the culture. Thus, issues that might have been otherwise viewed as merely "political" became part of the Manichean contest of worldviews. Nowhere was the expansive nature of the secular humanism concept clearer clearer than in Tim LaHaye's 1980 book *The Battle for the Mind*, discussed in chapter 7.

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58. William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 195.

59. Ibid., 196.

CHAPTER 5

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

> In the virgin wilderness of America, God was making His most significant attempt since ancient Israel to create a "New Israel" of people living in obedience to biblical principles, through faith in Jesus Christ.
>
> —Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory,* 1977

> With the Jewish nation reborn in the land of Palestine, ancient Jerusalem once again under total Jewish control for the first time in 2600 years, and talk of rebuilding the great Temple, the most important prophetic sign of Jesus Christ's soon coming is before us…It is like the key piece of a jigsaw puzzle being found and then having the many adjacent pieces rapidly fall into place.
>
> —Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth,* 1970

During the same years that Francis Schaeffer was diagnosing the present as tainted by secular humanism, other writers were looking to America's past and creating a version of American history that helped justify evangelical political activism. According to these Christian nationalist writers, America had a special relationship with God, and had previously been a more moral, godly and blessed land. This version of America's past was not new; as described in the first and second chapters, evangelicals had often blended patriotism with their religion. But the 1960s and 1970s saw an updating of the Christian nationalist myth, resulting in a new effort to put it into political service. Other writers—and film producers—were seeing a pattern emerge in world events that they believed matched Bible prophetic passages, indicating that the end times were perilously near. This view of future events would also help shape the agenda of the Christian Right.

Looking to the Past

Christian nationalist literature was widespread in these decades. Walton's book,

One Nation Under God, has already been noted in the previous chapter. Other examples

included *The Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America*

(1960). Its author, Verna Hall, had worked in the Works Progress Administration (WPA)

in the 1930s, but had become convinced that America was falling victim to "ever-

increasing socialism." The reason, she wrote, was that Americans had forgotten the

Christian nature of the founding of their nation. For a time, she worked for the National

Association of Manufacturers, a group that had also employed Walton as a publicist

before his stint with the Goldwater campaign.[1] In 1960, she published the first volume of

Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America. This book was an

anthology of primary documents, primarily from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

that Hall believed showed the Christian roots of America.[2] *God in American History,*

published in 1966, was a work in a similar vein. Produced by Benjamin Weiss, it was a

collection of American political documents with religious sentiments. The aim, Weiss

wrote, was to show that the United States "is truly a nation 'under God.' We, the citizens,

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1. Sean J. Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 239. William Andrew Moyer III notes that a "growing fear of an encroaching socialism seemed woven into the fabric of this national business organization." Robert W. Welch, Jr., for instance, was the founder of a candy company and served in several leadership capacities with the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM); he would go on to found the right-wing, strongly anti-Communist John Birch Society in 1958. Several other early leaders in the John Birch Society had also held important positions with the NAM. William Andrew Moyer III, "Battle for the City on the Hill: Evangelical Interpretations of American History" (PhD diss., The George Washington University, 1998), 96. Robert Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (Belmont: John Birch Society), 116, accessed January 13, 2014, https://ia600502.us.archive.org/4/items/TheBlueBook/MicrosoftWord-Document1.pdf.

2. Verna Hall, *Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Allan Montgomery (San Francisco: The American Christian Constitution Press, 1960), ii-vi.

are charged with a serious and unique responsibility to perpetuate this trusting faith in

God to oncoming generations."[3]

The nation's bicentennial spurred additional interest in the role of Christianity in

America's past, and evangelical publishers capitalized on the interest. *America in History*

and Bible Prophecy was a collection of essays that originated at the Bicentennial

Congress on Prophecy in Philadelphia in 1976; the conference organizers sought to

"stress the spiritual heritage of the Christian faith in our much blessed nation" and to

describe America's role in dispensationalist theology.[4] *America: God Shed His Grace on*

Thee was written by Robert Flood, a staff member with *Moody Monthly*, a popular

fundamentalist magazine associated with Moody Bible Institute. Clearly intended for a

popular audience, the oversize book contained many photos and drawings, with text that

sketched America's religious heritage and emphasized its connection with the nation's

prosperity and power.[5]

The blockbuster of the Christian nationalist historiography, however, was *The*

Light and the Glory; this book, written by Peter Marshall and David Manuel, has sold

close to one million copies since its publication in 1977[6] and is still in print. Marshall, a

pastor when the book was published, was the son of a U.S. Senate chaplain of the same

name; Manuel was an editor at a New York publishing house and had recently become an

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3. Benjamin Weiss, *God in American History: A Documentation of America's Religious Heritage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 2.

4. Thomas McCall, ed., *America in History and Bible Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 7.

5. Robert Flood, *America: God Shed His Grace on Thee* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975).

6. John Fea, "Thirty Years of Light and Glory: The Perils of Providential History," *Touchstone* 21, no. 6 (July/August 2008), accessed January 15, 2014, http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id= 21-06-027-f.

evangelical Christian. Their book, they wrote, was "not intended to be a history textbook, but rather a search for the hand of God in the different periods of our nation's beginnings."[7] Despite that caveat, the authors nevertheless presented their book as a history, albeit a highly idiosyncratic one—they left out slavery entirely, for instance. As was the case with the other books noted here, Marshall and Manuel interacted little with academic historians; their primary point was that God had called the United States into being as a "New Israel," and that America's continued prosperity and safety depended on its continued obedience to God. *The Light and the Glory* began with Columbus and ended with the Revolutionary War; Marshall and Manuel would go on to write *From Sea to Shining Sea* (1986) and *Sounding Forth the Trumpet* (1999), which would carry the story to the Civil War, and which were equally providentialist in nature.

<div align="center">A Blessed Foundation</div>

These books had different emphases, but they held several themes in common. One of these was that America had in some sense a godly beginning. This took different forms. Some, like W. A. Criswell, pastor of the large First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, spoke broadly of America's spiritual foundations: "It is a nation built around the church and founded upon the Christian faith." The Pilgrims came to America "seeking the will of God," he wrote by way of explanation, and churches had been an important part of its history.[8] Weiss, too, argued that "the source of our nation's strength from its

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7. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1977), 22.

8. W.A. Criswell, "The Spiritual Foundations of America," in *America in History and Bible Prophecy*, ed. Thomas McCall (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 38.

beginning has been faith in God."[9] For Weiss, the references to God in such documents

as colonial charters, the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, and

references to God in presidential inaugural addresses were evidence of a national trust in

God. Flood echoed similar themes in his book, writing that the country's "general

prosperity and its position as a great world power" was due to its "spiritual foundations

and her evangelical thrust over two centuries."[10]

Others were more specific. John F. Walvoord, president of Dallas Theological

Seminary, wrote in the mid-1970s that while America was hardly a paragon of morality,

its continued prosperity was due to the fact that its Christian population had been

evangelistic, from the time of colonial missions to native Americans to the present.

"From a divine standpoint, the prosperity of America stems from its share in fulfilling the

program of God in the present age…the missionary effort coming from our shores is one

of the major reasons why God has blessed us to this hour and withheld so many divine

judgments that we undoubtedly deserve as a nation."[11] Hall identified a different reason

for God's blessing. Her book was an extensive anthology designed to support her belief

that the nation had been founded on a "Christian principle" of individual liberty. Her

book opened with a quote from II Corinthians 3:17: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is,

there is liberty." To Hall, this verse apparently was a reference to political liberty rather

than spiritual liberty; the goal of her book, she wrote, was to help each American

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9. Weiss, *God in American History*, 7.

10. Flood, *America*, 7.

11. John F. Walvoord, "America and the Cause of World Missions," in *America in History and Bible Prophecy*, 24.

"remember his Christian heritage and live so as to raise the standard of his Pilgrim and Puritan fathers into its larger and fuller expression of individual liberty."[12]

According to Hall, the Puritans had brought this idea to America, but they were not its originators. On a map in her book titled "Origin and Backgrounds of the Constitution of the United States," a chain stretched from Mt. Sinai—where the Bible says Moses received the Ten Commandments—to Greece, then Rome, then Europe and England and across the Atlantic to Jamestown and Plymouth. Along the way were labels with the names of such luminaries as the Protestant reformers John Calvin and Martin Luther, English Bible translator John Wycliffe, and the philosopher John Locke.[13] The map illustrated Hall's belief that the idea of self-government was rooted in the Bible. Her anthology included, for example, lengthy excerpts from Leonard Bacon, a nineteenth-century Congregational pastor, who described the self-governing character of first-century churches.[14] According to Bacon, this principle was lost in the Middle Ages but recovered in the Protestant Reformation, and exemplified most purely by Puritan separatists who brought it to New England.[15] At the beginning of a section titled "Local Self-Government," Hall quoted from Mark 4:26-28, verses in which Jesus compares the kingdom of God to seed that a man casts upon the ground; the seed then grows and produces mature grain. On the same page were other quotes regarding the liberty of early churches, the political ideals of the Mayflower Compact, and James Madison's

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12. Hall, *Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America*, i.

13. Ibid., 6A.

14. Moyer suggests that Hall quotes so extensively from pre-twentieth century writers because she found their providentialist worldview much more congenial to her own than twentieth-century historians who were skeptical of such a paradigm. Moyer, "Battle for the City on the Hill," 98, fn. 9.

15. Hall, *Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America*, 16-28.

celebration of the Virginia Declaration of Rights. Apparently, Hall saw the United States either as a fulfillment of Jesus' reference to the kingdom of God or as an illustration of Jesus' metaphor of growth, in that the seed of liberty had now blossomed in America.[16]

Several of these writers also argued that God had providentially arranged history to bring about the founding of America. Hall included in her anthology a nineteenth-century author, Arnold Guyot, who wrote that even America's geography was providential: Asia and Europe, he wrote, were geographically suited for fostering a diversity of races and distinct nationalities. America's geographic "unity and simplicity," on the other hand, provides for "mutual intercourse, a common life, and the blending of the entire population into one. Evidently this continent was not designed to give birth and development to a new civilization; but to receive one ready-made, and to furnish to the cultivated race of the Old World the scene most worthy of their activity." Guyot, in an ethnocentric oversight typical of his period, makes no mention of the native peoples already in North America. "America, therefore, with her cultured and progressive people, and her social organization, founded upon the principle of the equality and brotherhood of all mankind, seems destined to furnish the most complete expression of the Christian civilization; and to become the fountain of a new and higher life for all the races of men."[17] Flood, while disavowing that God had singled out America for special favor,[18] nevertheless wrote that America was an "entirely new kind of nation," one that God had reserved until the "fullness of time" (a reference to Galatians 4:4, which refers to Christ)

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16. Hall, *Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America*, 147.

17. Ibid., 3-4.

18. Flood, *America*, 7.

"when the gospel of the Savior could have free course in her formative years and when that same gospel would help lay the cornerstone of our government and our freedoms."[19] The hand of God in the history that brought forth America was unmistakable, he wrote. France had been able to stop the spread of Islam at the Battle of Tours (732), thus preserving Christian Europe so that it could later settle America, and Columbus had landed in the Caribbean instead the eastern seaboard, which remained "almost untouched" until the Reformation "had taken firm root." For Flood, Spanish settlement would have been undesirable because of its Roman Catholic faith.[20] Weiss, too, saw the hand of providence in American history, and thanked God "for guiding our forefathers to establish this wonderful nation." [21] Weiss was clearly a believer in American exceptionalism; America was "advanced," he wrote, and the "outstanding validation of the soundness of Western Christian culture and civilization," a status that he attributed to the faith its founders and citizens had displayed in its early history.[22]

Marshall and Manuel took the providential view of American history—that God had guided the nation's founding—to a new level. Writing in the first person, with a great deal of description of their own historical search through libraries and archives, they note their thrill as it dawned on them that God had a specific plan for America. He wanted it to be a "new Jerusalem, a model of the Kingdom of Christ upon earth—we Americans were intended to be living proof to the rest of the world that it *was* possible to live a life

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19. Flood, *America*, 42.

20. Ibid., 74-75.

21. Weiss, *God in American History*, 6-7.

22. Ibid., 9.

together which reflected the Two Great Commandments and put God and others ahead of self."[23]

Marshall and Manuel arrived at this conclusion for two reasons. First, they took the self-descriptions of historical figures as evidence of "God's perspective on American history." Thus, for example, they quoted Christopher Columbus's *Book of Prophecies*, in which Columbus asserted that God had chosen him as discoverer of a western route to the Indies, and take this assertion to be true.[24] In the same way, they wrote that "the first settlers [referring, apparently, to English Puritans] consciously thought of themselves as a people called into a continuation of the covenant relationship with God and one another which Israel had entered into." This, they wrote, was proof that "God had a definite and extremely demanding plan for America."[25] It is one thing to see Columbus's writings as a useful insight into his own understanding of his voyages, or to recognize that someone like John Winthrop did indeed see the Puritan migration to New England as a continuation of the Old Testament covenant with Israel. Such insights are necessary to accurately conceive the self-understanding of historical actors. But to assume that those sorts of self-descriptions actually reveal the mind of God is to go far beyond the usual bounds of historical practice and to engage in theological speculation. It is also strange, given evangelicalism's usual suspicion of non-Scriptural revelation, that Marshall and Manuel would draw this conclusion.

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23. Marshall and Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*, 23. The Two Great Commandments, according to Jesus in the Gospel accounts, are to love God fully and to love one's neighbor as oneself. See, for example, Matt. 22:37-39.

24. Marshall and Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*, 17.

25. Ibid., 19-22.

A second reason that Marshall and Manuel concluded that God intended America to be a "new Israel" was what they saw as evidence that God had orchestrated history to bring about America's founding. This sort of reasoning abounded in the book. They asserted—to cite just a few examples—that God guided the Jamestown settlers to Chesapeake Bay because the native Americans there would allow them to settle. The *Speedwell* had to turn back rather than continuing the Atlantic voyage with the *Mayflower* because God was continuing "to separate the wheat from the chaff." Squanto's time of captivity with the English, before he met the Plymouth settlers, was evidence that God was preparing him for his future role. The difficulties Washington's army faced at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-1778 was the "crucible of freedom" in which "God was forging the iron of the Continental Army into steel."[26] Furthermore, Marshall and Manuel readily identified successes and setbacks to the colonial enterprise as signs that God was, respectively, blessing or punishing the colonies. Thus, King Philip's War (1675-1678), in which Metacom's forces attacked English towns in New England, was seen by Marshall and Manuel as evidence that God was demanding "a complete amendment of life. This would necessitate a rooting out of sin and a dealing with it to a degree which had not been seen on the eastern coast of America for nearly fifty years."[27] While most Christians throughout history have held the belief that God is sovereign over human events, few have been willing to identify his hand with such specificity. Yet the popularity of *The Light and the Glory* and its sequels is evidence that

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26. Marshall and Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*, 95, 115-116, 130-131, 324.

27. Ibid., 227.

many readers appreciated Marshall and Manuel's willingness to assert that God had a special plan for America.

A Fallen Nation

These samples of Christian nationalist historiography also shared another theme: the belief that America had strayed from its lofty calling. For these writers, America's early history provided a backdrop that threw into sharp relief modern America's spiritual failings. "Godliness, loyalty, and patriotism are no longer evaluated as sterling values," according to Weiss.[28] These writers were not entirely unified in their diagnoses. Hall published her book in 1960 as noted above, and saw the problem as beginning in the 1930s with the New Deal. It was then, she wrote, that "Americans began to alter the original form of their Federal and State governments from those established upon individual and local self-government, to governments paving the way for ever-increasing socialism." In her work with the WPA, she "saw the thoroughness of socialistic organization descend like a pall upon every facet of our economy and culture, altering almost everything." This she linked with a decline in virtue and trust in God: "In proportion as Americans let go of faith in the absolute power of God, they have accepted the belief in an all powerful State."[29] Hall made no specific policy recommendations or calls to political action in *Christian History of the Constitution*, but by inclusion of certain excerpts and her comments on them, it was clear that she saw any expansion of the federal government as encroaching on liberty and virtue.

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28. Weiss, *God in American History*, 7.

29. Hall, *Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America*, ii-iii.

Marshall and Manuel, on the other hand, dated the beginning of America's

decline to the 1960s. Until that period, they wrote, the word "America" evoked feelings

of warmth and optimism. Then, "with a suddenness that is still bewildering, everything

went out of balance." Its military ventures began to fail, a president was assassinated,

young people began to revolt, the economy began to struggle, students' test scores

plummeted, sexual promiscuity increased, abortion was legalized, and moral decay—

represented by things like pervasive pornography, business scandals, and Watergate—set

in. Only as the nation returned to its calling as a nation under God would these examples

of divine retribution be reversed into blessing.[30]

Part of the reason that consumers of this type of literature—whether they were

conservative Protestants or simply conservative—may have found it appealing was that

in a time of national uncertainty and shifting social mores it offered the comfort of

nostalgia. Readers baffled by economic "stagflation," concerned with the national scandal

of Watergate, worried about rising divorce rates and the increasing acceptance of

premarital sex, could vicariously—through these somewhat mythologized histories—

return to a time when America seemed to stand firmly on its godly foundations. These

books clearly met a need for some readers at a time when academic historians had long

moved away from valorized versions of America's past. The mid-twentieth century, note

three recent observers, was a time when social history—somewhat simplistically, the

study of groups rather than individuals—and a stress on the contributions of non-white,

non-male Americans held sway in the historical field. "[S]ocial historians," they write,

"put their research on a collision course with the conventional accounts of the American

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30. Marshall and Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*, 13-16.

past, which had relied in turn upon the inevitability of progress."[31] In one sense, the

Christian nationalist writers discussed above questioned the "inevitability of progress,"

too: they believed the recent American story was one of moral declension. But they

differed from academic historians in that they saw progress up to the point of America's

founding: indeed, they saw the United States as the culmination of world history and as a

key part of God's plan.

These Christian histories also offered a solution to America's perceived ills. In

that, they functioned as the Puritan jeremiads of the colonial period. Descriptions of

America's "godly past" and divine blessings were also calls to "return to God." The

works of these writers were not particularly political. But by the end of the 1970s and

early 1980s, this type of history would soon be pressed into political service, as activists

like Jerry Falwell would use this sort of jeremiad as a call for political action.

Looking to the Future

In addition to turning their attention to the past, many conservative Protestants in

the 1970s looked to the future. In one sense, Christianity as a whole is a future-oriented

religion, and orthodox Christians have always maintained that Christ will return and that

believers will spend a glorious eternity with him. But Christians have often differed on

how precisely that will happen, and many—though not all—evangelicals and

fundamentalists have had a special vision of the future shaped by their adherence to

premillennial dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is not only concerned with prophecy;

as noted in chapter 2, it is a broad method of interpreting the Bible that divides history,

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31. Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacobs, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1994), 152.

past and future, into different eras, or "dispensations," of God's dealings with his "chosen people," the Jews. But it does have a definite and detailed vision of the future, rooted in a literalist approach to prophetic passages.

Dispensationalism and the Future

Dispensationalism is premillennial—its adherents believe that Christ will return *before* the millennium. Other Christian traditions have also been premillennial, but John Nelson Darby's sharp distinction between Israel and the Church—all true believers in Jesus Christ—and his understanding of a "pretribulational rapture" made his system unique.[32] In Darby's view, Christians will leave the earth in the rapture before the "Great Tribulation," a time of horrific and unprecedented war, famine and disease in which much of the world's remaining population will die.

Dispensationalism, like most theological systems of belief, was not static, and during the twentieth century underwent several revisions.[33] As can be expected with any theological movement, dispensationalists differ among themselves on some of the details. The vast majority of dispensationalists, however, have believed that the rapture is the next event on the prophetic calendar. In the rapture, they believe, Christians will be "caught up" (the Latin word *rapio* has that meaning) in the air to be with Christ, along with resurrected believers who have previously died. For support, dispensationalists point

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32. "Historic premillennialism," as it is now often labelled to distinguish it from dispensational premillennialism, has held that the Church is the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises to Israel; historic premillennialists have typically held to a posttribulational rapture. For a discussion of these views by an exponent of premillennial posttribulationalism, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 859-863, 1109-1135.

33. For a brief survey of these changes, see C. Blaising, "Dispensation, Dispensationalism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001). See also Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-to-Date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Thought* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993).

to passages like I Corinthians 15:51-54 ("…for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed") and I Thessalonians 4:16-17 ("For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first").[34]

After the Church is raptured, the world will experience the "tribulation" period: seven years of war, famine and destruction, a time dispensationalists believe is described in Revelation and whose length is specified in Daniel 9, which speaks of "seventy weeks." These weeks are understood as years; dispensationalists believe that sixty-nine of them have already taken place. A common dispensationalist interpretation is that the sixty-nine "weeks" of years (thus, 483 years) ran from the time of the Persian decree to rebuild the Temple following the Jewish exile to the time of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.[35] Because most Jews rejected Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, God put his plan for Israel on hold—thus postponing the seventieth "week"—and established the Church. But with the Church out of the way following the rapture, God's program for Israel will restart with the final "week," seven years in which the Great Tribulation will take place. During that time, the Antichrist—Satan's representative—will rise to global power. He will initially make a peace treaty with Israel, but then will break that treaty and unleash a period of terrible destruction. At the conclusion of those seven years, Jesus will return to earth—this event, not the rapture, is the "second coming" of Christ in dispensationalist theology—and lead his forces in the gigantic battle of Armageddon, centered in the valley of Megiddo southwest of the Sea of Galilee, against the armies of the Antichrist.

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34. New American Standard Bible.

35. See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 239-246. The years are calculated as 360 days each.

When the Antichrist is defeated, Jesus will establish his kingdom on earth and usher in the millennium, the thousand-year period in which Satan will be bound in "the abyss" (Revelation 20:2-3) and the earth will be filled with peace and harmony. At the end of that thousand years, dispensationalists believe, Satan will be released for a short time, deceive the nations, and lead them in one final rebellion. He will be defeated, cast into the lake of fire, all of humanity will be judged, the wicked will be cast into hell, and Christians will enter eternity in the "new heavens and new earth" (Revelation 21:2).[36]

Dispensationalist Popularizers in the 1970s

As described earlier, dispensationalists typically see things getting worse—much worse—before the rapture. Thus, the conventional wisdom has usually been that dispensationalism tends to push its adherents toward political quietism: why bother with social reform and political activism when such efforts are doomed?[37] In the middle decades of the twentieth century, this conventional wisdom generally held true. Dispensationalists did, for the most part, focus on "saving souls" and on charity work that was designed to ameliorate rather than reform social conditions. But the rise of the Christian Right in the late 1970s proved that dispensationalism was not inherently apolitical. Indeed, in surprising ways the prophetic aspects of premillennial

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36. This sketch might seem complex to the uninitiated, but is actually a much simplified version of the detailed chronology that some dispensationalists hold. For a somewhat more expansive sketch of dispensationalist eschatology, see "Outline of End-Time Events Predicted in the Bible," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 1319-1322.

37. As Russell D. Moore summarizes this "conventional wisdom": "From its very beginnings within J. N. Darby's Plymouth Brethren, dispensationalism has engendered a skeptical view of governmental and ecclesiastical power structures that historically has not lent itself to animated political participation." Moore, "Till Every Foe Is Vanquished: Emerging Sociopolitical Implications of Progressive Dispensational Eschatology," in *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 342.

dispensationalism *were* politically salient, and prophecy writers helped lay the groundwork for the Christian Right.

Dispensationalist pastors and professional theologians continued to produce prophetic literature throughout the post-Second World War period. The founding of the modern state of Israel and the Cold War with its nuclear threat were two factors that prompted prophetic reflection. Since prophetic passages in the Bible seemed to assume that Jews would be in their "Promised Land" when the end times commenced,[38] the existence of Israel and increased migration of Jews there was tremendously exciting for dispensationalists, for it meant that God's timetable was progressing. Atomic weapons seemed to fill out the biblical picture of Armageddon; a writer in *Moody Monthly*, for instance, was only one of many to suggest that an atomic blast was an "exact picture" of the intense heat and global conflagration depicted in II Peter 3:10. In 1953, Wilbur Smith, a fundamentalist Presbyterian pastor and prophecy writer, commented that "[b]ooks on prophetic subjects are pouring from the presses…more frequently than ever before."[39]

The 1970s, however, saw an intensification of interest in biblical prophecy, according to historian Paul Boyer.[40] In part, at least, this was due to events in the Middle East, in particular the 1967 "Six-Day War" in which Israel was victorious over a coalition of Arab states. The war greatly expanded Israeli territory, but most importantly for dispensationalists, Israel gained control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and

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38. See, for example, Ezek. 38:8.

39. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1992), 117.

40. Ibid., 10-11.

Temple Mount. Given that a future "Third Temple"[41] was an important part of

dispensationalist thinking, Jewish control of the site of the biblical temple for the first

time since the year 70 was fuel to the fires of prophetic speculation.[42] As Gershom

Gorenberg writes in his analysis of apocalyptic thinking centered on Temple Mount, the

creation of Israel in 1948 and its acquisition of all of Jerusalem in 1967 are not "ordinary

history: For those inclined to hear them, they're divine proclamations that the hour is

near."[43]

Many dispensationalists were hesitant to link current events with Scripture in a

precise way, for they viewed their system as a "futurist" one: none of the prophecies

regarding the last days would be fulfilled before the rapture. Biblical prophecy remained

something that pertained to the future, and these dispensationalists sought to distinguish

their eschatology from "historicist" views that attempted to find prophetic fulfillment in

the present age, an endeavor that many dispensationalists found both dangerously

speculative and biblically unjustified.[44] However, in the 1970s, a number of writers

blurred the line between these futurist and historicist perspectives by seeing events of the

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41. The first temple, according to the Bible, was built during Solomon's reign; the second was built following the Jewish return from Babylonian exile and later expanded during the reign of Herod the Great.

42. Revelation 11:1-2, for example, speaks of the temple and its altar and those who worship there. In much dispensationalist thinking, this passage pertains to the events of the seven-year tribulation; thus the temple has to be in place, which could only happen if the site of the temple was in Jewish hands.

43. Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14.

44. Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 16. See also Craig Blaising, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," in *Progressive Dispensationalism* , 19.

mid-twentieth century as, if not *fulfillments* of prophecy, then at least as developments that set the stage for the prophetic drama.[45]

One of these was *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the most popular prophecy book of the 1970s. Indeed, it was probably the best-selling non-fiction book of *any* sort during the decade. In this book, published in 1970, Hal Lindsey displayed little caution when it came to connecting biblical prophecy with current events.[46] Lindsey was a Texan who attended Dallas Theological Seminary, a dispensationalist graduate school, and then worked with Campus Crusade for Christ at UCLA, where he began giving well-attended talks on his version of biblical prophecy.[47]

There was little in the timeline of *The Late Great Planet Earth* that dispensationalist readers were not already familiar with; some of his former seminary classmates complained that he had done little more than repackage his class notes. But Lindsey's willingness to show how the international news of his day fit the "the prophetic puzzle" set him apart from more judicious writers. His goal, he wrote, was to "present the prophecies which are related to the specific pattern of world events which are precisely predicted as coming together shortly before the coming of the Messiah the second

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45. On this idea, Susan Harding writes: "In [the dispensationalist] view, if Bible prophecies were being fulfilled in current events, Christians would not be here to witness them. But dispensationalist observers prognosticate nevertheless; they find 'signs' that prophecies are about to be fulfilled in current events. Sometimes they speak of those signs as prophecies. Sometimes events occur that seem very nearly to fulfill prophecies. This is where the free play begins." Harding, "Imagining the Last Days: The Politics of Apocalyptic Language," in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 66; See also Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 296.

46. Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970). According to Boyer, there were nine million copies of *The Late Great Planet Earth* in print by 1978, and twenty-eight million by 1990. A movie version, narrated by Orson Welles, appeared in 1977. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 5.

47. Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 94.

time."[48] And he presented his material in a way that, according to historian Barry

Hankins, "made the book read like pulp fiction or a romance novel." His book contained

breezy chapter titles like "Russia Is a Gog," "Sheik to Sheik" and "The Ultimate Trip,"

and its popularity quickly spread beyond the usual audience of fundamentalist church-

goers, especially after Bantam Books acquired the book and began marketing it widely.[49]

The world would soon see the rise of the Antichrist, which would lead to the

rapture, the tribulation and Armageddon, Lindsey wrote. "Shortly after" the restoration of

Jews in Israel, their nation would be attacked by an alliance led by a powerful nation

from the "uttermost north." This northern nation, according to Lindsey, was Russia, a

link that numerous other dispensationalist writers also made.[50] It was clear to him that the

biblical book of Ezekiel foretold it. Ezekiel 38:2 has God commanding Ezekiel to

prophesy against "Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal."

"Rosh," according to Lindsey and the eighteenth and nineteenth scholars he cited, was a

reference to Russia, and "Meschech" was Moscow. The Soviet Union, he wrote, "a

country founded upon atheism," would soon make an alliance with Iran and various

African countries to invade Israel. In like fashion, the formation of the European

Common Market "may well be the beginning of the ten-nation confederacy predicted by

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48. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 31, 67.

49. Hankins, *American Evangelicals*, 94.

50. The identification of "Gog" with Russia was widespread. C. I. Scofield's 1909 *Scofield Reference Bible*, which did much to popularize dispensationalism, made the connection, as did other twentieth-century writers. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 156. For example, J. Dwight Pentecost, a longtime professor at Dallas Theological Seminary who wrote a prophecy book that was a standard dispensationalist text for many years, suggested that the "Rosh/Russia" connection was "well authenticated and generally accepted." Pentecost, *Things To Come*, 327-328. The problem with prophecy writing was that the relevant biblical passages were cryptic enough to allow for quite varied scenarios, as Boyer's historical review makes clear. For example, for centuries during the Ottoman Empire's existence, Christian writers in Europe had identified *this* power as the "Gog" of Ezekiel 38. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 153.

Daniel and the Book of Revelation."[51] Communist China, too, was foretold in Bible,

according to Lindsey, since Revelation 16:12 spoke of the "kings of the east." Dismissive

of any talk of a Sino-Soviet split, Lindsey asserted that the Soviet Union and China had

world conquest as their shared goal, and "China is helping to shape the Orient into its

pattern of prophecy."[52]

He also came extremely close to predicting a date for the end of the world, a

practice that dispensationalists usually took great pains to disavow.[53] Matthew 24 reports

Jesus as giving his hearers a number of signs that would anticipate his return: wars,

famines, earthquakes, persecution, and false prophets, among others. Then Jesus tells a

short parable of the fig tree; his hearers were to recognize that just as new leaves were an

indication of summer, so they should recognize that his coming was near. "Truly I say to

you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."[54] According to

Lindsey, the fig tree was a symbol of national Israel; the creation of Israel in 1948 was

when the "fig tree" had put forth its leaves; clearly, the prophetic clock was ticking. "If

this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could

take place. Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that

this is so."[55] What was needed was for the temple to be rebuilt, since Matthew 24 seemed

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51. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 83.

52. Ibid., 70-76.

53. In part, this was to distinguish themselves from the premier example of date-setting: the nineteenth-century William Miller. Miller was a Baptist preacher from Vermont and a premillennialist—but not a dispensationalist—who predicted Christ's return in October, 1844. Thereafter, premillennialists sought to dissociate themselves from Miller's views. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 16.

54. Matt. 24:3-34.

55. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 43.

to presuppose temple-worship. The existence of the Muslim shrine of the Dome of the

Rock on the apparent former site of the Jewish temple was an obstacle. But, Lindsey

wrote, "[o]bstacle or no obstacle, it is certain the Temple will be rebuilt. Prophecy

demands it."[56]

Walvoord, president of Lindsey's alma mater, was slightly more circumspect than

his former student when it came to making connections between current events and

biblical prophecy. In his 1974 book *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*,

Walvoord wrote that pre-rapture events were not fulfillments, but "preliminary moves,"

which were "falling into place in rapid succession. As these moves are completed, a more

specific timetable of events can begin."[57] Yet Walvoord—writing with his son, John E.

Walvoord—was, like Lindsey, quick to describe how the power alignments among

nations were taking prophetic shape. The Walvoords' book showed that the line between

futurist and historicist understandings of prophecy could be a fine line indeed. The world

had already begun the "countdown leading to Armageddon," the Walvoords wrote, and

the rapture may be expected "momentarily."[58] They, too, saw the 1948 establishment of

the state of Israel and the 1967 war as of crucial importance; Israel had shown that it

would not be removed from the land, citing Amos 9:15.[59] The Bible predicted a

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56. Ibid., 45. Lindsey later changed his mind about the location of the ancient temple, adopting a theory from Asher Kaufman, an Israeli physicist, that it actually stood perhaps one hundred meters north of the Dome of the Rock. Kaufman's theory would allow a Jewish temple to be built without the destruction of the Dome of the Rock. In the current political environment, however, even that kind of construction is difficult to imagine. Gorenberg, *The End of Days*, 55-57.

57. John F. Walvoord and John E. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis: What the Bible Says About the Future of the Middle East and the End of Western Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 20.

58. Ibid., 7-9.

59. Ibid., 20, 32.

"Mediterranean Confederacy" that would rise near the end of the present age, and the 1973 oil embargo—the "Arab Oil Blackmail," according to the book—revealed the new power held by the region. The "atheism, materialism, and military power" of Soviet Communism was, they wrote, preparing the way for the anti-God world religion that the Antichrist would introduce.[60] The continued influence of "Russia"—the Soviet Union—in the Middle East showed that it would be ready to invade Israel, probably during the tribulation.[61] Additionally, world organizations like the United Nations, the European Common Market and the World Bank revealed the tendency to world government, which the Antichrist would introduce.[62] All in all, the end was near: "Never before in history have all the factors been present for the fulfillment of prophecy relating to end-time religious trends and events."[63]

Another work that did much to popularize the dispensationalist timeline in the early 1970s was a film, *A Thief in the Night*, released in 1972. Fundamentalists had long used charts and other visual aids to depict their understanding of biblical prophecy,[64] and World Wide Pictures, a film production company associated with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, had been producing evangelistic Christian films since the 1950s. *A Thief in the Night*—the title was a reference I Thessalonians 5:2, which warns that the "day of the Lord" will come unexpectedly, like a thief—was in a sense an

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60. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*, 109.

61. Ibid., 121-128.

62. Ibid., 135.

63. Ibid., 110.

64. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 58-59.

updating of these efforts. It, too, was clearly aimed at bringing people to faith, but it

attempted to do so through eschatology, by depicting a young woman who missed the

rapture and had to endure the horrors of the early tribulation period.

The film was produced by Russell S. Doughten, Jr., who had earlier worked on

the 1958 cult classic, *The Blob*, starring Steve McQueen.[65] *Thief* centers on a young

woman named Patty, who considers herself a Christian because she engages in religious

activities; from the perspective of the filmmakers, she clearly is not truly "saved." She

awakens to find that her husband and the rest of the world's population of genuine

Christians have disappeared in what she realizes was the rapture; those who have been

left behind are now beginning to experience the tribulation. Soon, Patty is trying to stay

out of the clutches of a one-world totalitarian government: UNITE, which stands for

United Nations Imperium for Total Emergency (an indication of how the

dispensationalist belief that the Antichrist would create a global government could feed a

conservative suspicion of the United Nations).[66] UNITE agents seek to put a binary

number equaling 666—the "mark of the beast," a reference to Revelation 13:16-18—on

all citizens' hands or foreheads. Those who do not comply are executed by guillotine.

Patty flees, is trapped on a bridge and falls, apparently to her death—then awakens to

realize it was all a dream. However, her relief is short-lived: her husband *is* missing in the

rapture, this time for real. The film's soundtrack included a song by Larry Norman, one

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65. Terry Lindvall and Andrew Quicke, *Celluloid Sermons: The Emergence of the Christian Film Industry, 1930-1986* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 172.

66. The best-known prophecy books of the 1990s and 2000s was the popular "Left Behind" series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. This sixteen-novel series, beginning with *Left Behind* (1995), also tells the story of life on earth after the rapture. And the United Nations is featured in it, too: the Antichrist is the Romanian-born U.N. Secretary-General. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995), 416.

of the pioneers of the nascent Christian rock genre, titled "I Wish We'd All Been Ready,"

to remind viewers that they too needed to be prepared for the rapture. Doughten and his

colleagues would go onto make sequel films *A Distant Thunder* (1978), *Image of the*

Beast (1981) and *Prodigal Planet* (1983), which sought to depict similar eschatological

themes.[67]

These works above were just a few examples of an interest in prophecy during the

1970s. Many of the preachers on television's "electronic church" taught

premillennialism, including Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, Kenneth Copeland, Rex

Humbard, Jim Bakker and Falwell.[68] Other writers contributed to the proliferation of

prophecy writing during the 1970s. Some of them speculated about how the Trilateral

Commission might be bringing about the one-world government of the Antichrist; how

popular interest in the occult and changes in sexual morality—including greater

acceptance of homosexuality—might be signs of the end; how the Soviet Union's

invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979 was the beginning of a fulfillment of Ezekiel 38; and

whether credit cards and computers were preparing the way for satanic control of the

world.[69] "If we could learn to read life rightly, almost everything is a sign," according to

pastor Ray Stedman.[70] For many fundamentalists and evangelicals, attuned as they were

to Cold War fears and cultural changes, these speculations had a great deal of plausibility,

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67. Lindvall and Quicke, *Celluloid Sermons*, 174-178.

68. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 191.

69. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 265, 234, 159, 285, 238. The Trilateral Commission was a discussion group, started in 1972 by David Rockefeller and Zbigniew Brzezinksi, seeking closer ties among leaders of the United States, Europe and Japan.

70. Ibid., 238.

even when writers who shared a basic dispensationalist chronology regarding the future differed on various details.

<div align="center">The Political Implications of Dispensationalist Belief</div>

Clearly, for many dispensationalists, the primary implications of their beliefs about the future were not particularly political. Historian Timothy P. Weber has suggested that "American premillennialism was and is primarily a *religious* movement. Although it has had some social and political consequences, premillennialism's paramount appeal is to personal and religious sentiments."[71] For many dispensationalists, one of those sentiments was comfort. Confident in their belief that they would spend eternity with Christ, they could look forward to his return for them in a pretribulational rapture. The troubles of this world not only were temporary, but were signs that the rapture was drawing ever nearer.

In the meantime, they were to live faithfully to God's revealed word, which included engaging in evangelization. This theme was obvious in the works mentioned above. Lindsey ended his book by encouraging his readers to personally place their faith in Jesus Christ, if they had not done so already; those who had were encouraged to place themselves fully in God's service, and rejoice in the "knowledge that Christ may return at any moment for us."[72] The Walvoords ended their book with a four-step outline explaining how to become a Christian. Another 1974 book, titled *The Coming Russian Invasion of Israel*, which detailed that expected event, had an additional purpose. It contained a call for Christians to live faithfully to Christ in the present and to evangelize,

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71. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 229.

72. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 175-176.

and it concluded with a familiar call for unbelievers to trust in Christ. Its last chapter,

however, was "a strategy for unbelievers," with instructions for what to do during the

tribulation if they found themselves left behind at the rapture. There would still be hope,

the authors wrote; those who became Christians during the tribulation would be

guaranteed eternity with Christ, but they might face severe hardship during these seven

years. Above all, they should not worship the Antichrist, and resist having the mark of the

beast stamped on them when the Antichrist had everyone "computerized."[73] But a

predominant theme of prophecy writing was that of being prepared, through faith in

Christ, for the rapture. Were they ready, or would they—like Patty in *A Thief in the

Night*—be "left behind" to face the terror of the tribulation?[74]

Nevertheless, there were, as Weber notes, "social and political consequences" of

dispensationalism, and some of them became more explicit in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Dispensationalism may not have been a *cause* of the Christian Right, but it did *shape*

evangelical political activism in important ways. This is not to suggest that

dispensationalist theology automatically pushed its adherents into political conservatism.

Senator Mark Hatfield, a moderate Republican who would never have been mistaken as a

member of the Christian Right, was a premillennialist, as were a number of the signers of

the 1973 Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern—a document that resonated

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73. Thomas S. McCall and Zola Levitt, *The Coming Russian Invasion of Israel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 80-96.

74. Churches and youth groups across the United States used the film for precisely that purpose, and Doughten estimated at one point that more than two million people had become Christians after watching his film. Lindvall and Quicke, *Celluloid Sermons*, 174-175.

more with political liberals than with conservatives.[75] But there were connections

between dispensationalism and the agenda of the Christian Right.

One of the most obvious of these was with regard to Israel. Many evangelicals

were advocates of "Christian Zionism," which Stephen Spector defines as a biblically

motivated support for the modern state of Israel as the Jewish homeland.[76] Christian

Zionism is a broad movement, and one that includes far more than just fundamentalists

and evangelicals; its adherents had a variety of reasons for their pro-Israel stance, ones

which may have had little to do with prophetic beliefs. American Christians in the 1970s

could support Israel because they believed America needed an ally in the Middle East, or

because Israel shared democratic principles with America, or because they believed the

Holocaust necessitated a Jewish homeland. The "foreign policy" of many Christians vis-

à-vis Israel needed no support beyond Genesis 12:3, in which God promises to bless

Abraham and to "bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse."

The *Scofield Reference Bible* of 1909, which propagated the dispensationalist system,

also made this connection; Scofield commented on this verse that it "has invariably fared

ill with the people who have persecuted the Jew—well with those who have protected

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75. I owe these observations to Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 226. The Chicago Declaration called upon evangelicals to defend the poor and oppressed, attacked racism and the "maldistribution of the nation's wealth and services," and warned that an idolatrous trust in the nation's military might promoted a "national pathology of war." The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern, accessed January 20, 2014, http://www.evangelicals forsocialaction.org/chicago-declaration-of-evangelical-social-concern. Weber accurately writes that "there has never been a typical or uniform premillennialist political response. Premillennialists have taken different political and social positions and, using the same eschatology, have managed to justify them." Weber, 234-235.

76. Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3. On the nineteenth-century British roots of Christian Zionism, see Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Lewis argues that Victorian-era evangelicalism was crucial for making possible the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which gave British support for a Jewish state in Palestine.

him." While the support for Israel by American evangelicals could be heartfelt and genuine, then, it also had a self-serving element: they stood with Israel in its wars and in its disputes with the Palestinians in part because they wanted God's blessing on *their* nation.

But the prophetic aspects of dispensationalism also contributed to evangelical Zionism. The belief that Jews would be in possession of the land of Israel when end-time events commenced meant that some dispensationalists saw their support for Israel as a way of placing themselves on the right side of history. What difference they believed their support would make is an open question, given their beliefs about God's control of the future: if Jewish possession of the land of Israel was divinely foreordained, then technically their support would make no difference one way or another. But for many dispensationalists this was not an important question; what mattered was that, in their view, God had promised the land to Israel and he was now fulfilling his promise. Nor was the Palestinian issue a particularly thorny one for many them: God had given the land to the Jews, and Palestinians who also lived in the land were often seen as little more than obstacles.

The Jerusalem Conference on Biblical Prophecy in 1971 was a sign of this growing relationship between dispensationalists and Israelis. The conference—whose organizer promoted it as a "ringside seat at the second coming"—was attended by some fourteen hundred people, and speakers stressed Israel's role in God's plan for the world. The Israeli government provided a venue free of charge, and former prime minister David Ben-Gurion spoke to the attendees about Israel as the land of the Bible.[77] The state of

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77. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 214.

Israel also began to actively cultivate relationships with dispensationalist evangelicals and fundamentalists, including Falwell, by bringing them to Israel at government expense. Many of these leaders began to bring tour groups to the "Holy Land" with a special focus on Israel's role in prophetic fulfillment.[78] Evangelicals may have been pro-Israel even if dispensationalism was not part of the thinking of many of them; for many, Genesis 12:3 was sufficient incentive. But belief about Israel's future prophetic role was a fillip to a pro-Israel stance.

Another political implication of dispensationalism was that it added a supernatural dimension to Cold War fears of the Soviet Union. Of course, the Cold War era was one in which Americans across the religious and political spectrum believed the worst about "the Commies"; the fact that the Soviet Union had an alien economic system and was a nuclear-armed totalitarian regime in global competition with the United States was enough to engender paranoia. Many evangelicals and fundamentalists, though, had another reason: as we have already seen, many dispensationalists believed that the Soviet Union would be the leader of a prophesied northern confederacy that would invade Israel.

The effect of this prophetic belief was not always explicit. In Falwell's 1980 political manifesto *Listen, America!*, for instance, his chapter titled "The Threat of Communism" contains no reference to this prophetic belief about Russia, although Falwell, too, believed that Russia was the "Gog" of Ezekiel 38.[79] Falwell instead discussed the Soviet Union's plan for "world domination," its repression of religion and

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78. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 218-219.

79. Jerry Falwell, "Where Is This World Going? The Twenty-First Century and the End of the World." Transcript of sermon, February 2, 1988. "Falwell Sermons: 1988" folder, Falwell Speeches and Sermons, FAL 4-2, Liberty University Archive.

its bloody record of purges;[80] perhaps this was because *Listen, America!* was intended for

a wider readership than just dispensationalists who shared his prophetic views. But this

belief about the Soviet Union's prophesied malevolent role made dispensationalists more

open to hawkish military rhetoric. Boyer suggests that "the connection between

grassroots prophecy belief and nuclear-weapons policy, while real, was subterranean and

indirect." It was not that prophecy believers sought to hasten Armageddon in some sort of

misguided attempt to ensure the fulfillment of prophecy. But their beliefs did lead them

toward at least "passive acquiescence in the nuclear-arms race and Cold War

confrontation."[81] Because they believed that war was inevitable—and with the advent of

nuclear weapons, many began to include them in their end-time scenarios—they saw

little point in seeking lasting peace with the Soviets. Some dispensationalists went

beyond "passive acquiescence" and were fervent cold warriors. In a book published in

1985, for example, Harold Lindsell (evangelical scholar and former editor of *Christianity*

Today) was critical of peace activists and wrote that the campaign for a nuclear freeze

was inspired by the KGB.[82] As we will see in chapter 6, Falwell linked a strong defense,

including nuclear build-up, with his program to restore "morality."

Just as they viewed the Cold War through prophecy-tinted glasses, so did some

dispensationalists see economic and political developments in the same way. For these

believers, a globalizing economy, internationalist and ecumenical movements, computer-

based technology and the growth of mass media all lent an ominous cast to the present. In

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80. Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 84.

81. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 146.

82. Ibid., 145.

this worldview, these developments were preparing the world for the global government

that would be introduced by the Antichrist.

The biblical roots of this belief were in the books of Daniel and Revelation. In

Daniel 7, Daniel is given a vision—and its interpretation—of a series of four beasts that

represent kingdoms. The first three are recognizable as a lion, bear and leopard. The

fourth beast, however, is "dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong," with iron teeth

and ten horns.[83] Three of the horns are then torn out by a "little horn" with eyes and a

mouth "uttering great boasts." This fourth beast, Daniel is told, represents a kingdom that

will "devour the whole earth"; the ten horns are kings, and the little horn will conquer

three of them, wage war "against the saints" and speak against God. Revelation 13 uses

similar imagery: a beast with ten horns and seven heads—one of which had had a fatal

wound that had been healed—comes out of the sea and rules the entire earth. This beast

also blasphemes against God and is worshipped by the world. The term "Antichrist" is

not used in either passage; that term is used in the Bible only in I and II John (Greek

antichristos), where the emphasis is not on a single individual but on a general spirit of

deception that opposes the worship of Jesus.[84] II Thessalonians 2:3-4, another passage

that prophecy writers saw as referring to the Antichrist, speaks of "the man of

lawlessness…the son of destruction" who will claim to be God, demand to be worshipped

and be seated in the temple.

Interpretation of these cryptic passages has been widely varied in Christianity's

history. Some interpreters have seen these descriptions as referring to individuals or

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83. Dan. 7:7-8.

84. I John 2:18, 24; 4:3; II John 1:7.

kingdoms that were persecuting the religious communities of the books' authors at the time of their creation. Others have seen them as generalized, symbolic descriptions of evil applicable during any period. Futurist interpreters like dispensationalists have held that these visions describe an individual yet to come—the Antichrist—who will set himself up in opposition to God and establish a worldwide rule.[85] For pretribulational dispensationalists, this will happen during the tribulation and after the rapture of the church. That bit of chronological detail, however, did not stop many of them from speculating about the Antichrist's identity, believing that perhaps his presence on earth could be discerned even before his final rise to power. Thus, the "Antichrist" label has been suggested for a remarkable number of candidates in Christian history. Among Protestants, the Roman Catholic papacy was for centuries the most probable candidate. The 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, for instance, made that identification, as did Martin Luther and John Calvin.[86] (For their part, Roman Catholics after the Reformation returned the favor, identifying those opposing Rome as Antichrist.[87]) Other possibilities in subsequent centuries included Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolph Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Israeli military leader Moshe Dayan, President John F. Kennedy, and Henry Kissinger, to name only a few.[88]

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85. D.A. Hubbard, "Antichrist," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology,* 2d ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

86. "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, accessed February 4, 2014, http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe =http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html.

87. Hubbard, "Antichrist."

88. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 275-276.

Not all dispensationalists engaged in this kind of speculation about the Antichrist's identity, but even many who refrained from doing so were more than willing to identify present trends that were setting the stage for his rule. This included seeing nearly any expansion of government or cooperative efforts among nations—like the League of Nations and United Nations—as possible preparatory moves. As early as the 1930s, some fundamentalists saw in the New Deal sinister portents of the demonic rule to come. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's use of executive power, his charismatic personality, and his contribution to the modern liberal state were viewed with alarm by some fundamentalists, and not just because they disagreed with Keynesian economic theory.[89] Programs like Social Security were steps toward "socialism," in their view, and thus the United States was aligning itself with the Communist, godless rule that would soon sweep over the earth. Lewis Sperry Chafer, dispensationalist theologian and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote in the 1940s that "a vast world system" was coming that would dominate "all parts of human life and activity."[90] Other writers in later decades found the beginnings of this "world system" in a variety of technological and social developments. The growth of the television and media industry, the ability of computers to catalogue massive amounts of data, the personality cults of celebrities and liberal Protestant cooperation in the World Council of Churches were but a few of the signs these observers found of the coming world order.[91] This mindset also colored their view of international events. Lindsey was one of many prophecy writers to keep a close

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89. Matthew Avery Sutton, "Was FDR the Antichrist? The Birth of Fundamentalist Antiliberalism in a Global Age," *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 4 (March 2012): 1052-1074.

90. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 270.

91. Ibid., 264-278.

watch on the European Common Market, and its addition of Greece in 1981 as the tenth

nation caused great excitement; they believed that the ten beastly horns in Daniel 7 and

Revelation 13 indicated that the Antichrist's initial kingdom would consist of ten

nations.[92] All this was foreshadowing of the future culmination of world history. "The

increasing availability of nuclear weapons, the propaganda power of the world media,

and the blackmail power of international economic agreements now make it possible for

a world dictator to seize control of the world in a way that that would have been

impossible in any previous generation," wrote Walvoord in 1974. "In an amazing way,

the necessary ingredients for a world government are present for the first time in the

history of civilization."[93]

This apocalyptic thinking contributed to an anti-statist strand in the political

ideology of evangelicals and fundamentalists throughout the twentieth century, and it

helps explain why political conservatism resonated so deeply with them. There were a

number of other factors, too, as I have already suggested. But, as Matthew Avery Sutton

has recently observed, these beliefs shed light on why many conservative Protestants

"fought the expansion of the state into such seemingly religious-neutral areas as health

care, the economy, social welfare, and civil rights."[94]

Thus, by the end of the 1970s, a number of evangelical and fundamentalist writers

had contributed to a certain view of America's future and its past. In their view, their

nation had a righteous past and an ominous future. Founded on godly principles, the

nation had fallen away from its high calling, largely due to the corruption of secular

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92. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 277.

93. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*, 144.

94. Sutton, "Was FDR the Antichrist?," 1053.

humanism. And the storm clouds of Armageddon were gathering, giving their thinking a renewed urgency.

This thinking coalesced into an ideology in which political activism, not just evangelism, was seen as the way forward. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, several writers were suggesting that while the Great Tribulation was inevitable, perhaps America could escape—and even mitigate—the effects of the "pretribulation tribulation" that secular humanism was sure to create. The chronology of the end times, in their view, was certain, even if the date of the beginning of the end was unknown. But in the meantime, before the rapture, American Christians could act to restore the nation to its purported godly heritage, allowing it to once again be "a city on a hill."

CHAPTER 6

THE FORMATION OF THE EVANGELICAL RIGHT

Now I know this a nonpartisan gathering and so I know you can't endorse me, but…I want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing.

—Ronald Reagan, August 1980, to 15,000 Christian leaders in Dallas, Texas

In 1971, a group of researchers published their findings on the social and political views of California clergy. Such clergy, they found, were largely silent on political issues, and the researchers explained that silence by noting that the clergy believed their most important mission was to prepare souls for eternity rather than change this world. Without individual salvation, any such social change was pointless anyway.

The researchers—three academic sociologists and a political scientist—further suggested that these beliefs were inherent in conservative Christianity. "[T]he thrust of evangelical Protestantism," they wrote, "is toward a miraculous view of social reform: that if all men are brought to Christ, social evils will disappear through the miraculous regeneration of the individual by the Holy Spirit." Evangelicals, they noted, primarily concentrate on conversion, and "largely ignore social and political efforts for reform."[1]

Such a confident generalization was soon to be proven false; it was clear by the late 1970s that many evangelicals believed that their theology was perfectly compatible with political activism. It was also somewhat historically shortsighted. The researchers' generalization did, for the most part, describe the political attitudes of evangelicals and fundamentalists during the middle decades of the twentieth century. But these groups

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1. Rodney Stark, Bruce D. Foster, Charles Y. Glock, and Harold Quinley, *Wayward Shepherds: Prejudice and the Protestant Clergy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 102.

were, as we have seen, heirs of a long tradition of political engagement, rooted in the belief that America had a special relationship with God. That relationship was now in jeopardy, some of their leaders began to argue. By the end of the 1970s, a political theology had come into being that equated theological conservatism with political conservatism. In 1980, for the first time in the modern party system, a majority of evangelicals identified themselves as Republicans, a link that would become increasingly strong in the last two decades of the twentieth century. This was partly because the Republican Party had moved toward them. Both the 1976 and 1980 party platforms, for example, included support for a "constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children," speaking to an issue that was becoming increasingly important to evangelicals and fundamentalists.[2] But the evangelical-Republican alliance was not just a matter of Republican courtship. Conservative Protestants themselves moved to the political right, increasingly antagonistic toward a federal government they believed was under the influence of "secular humanism." Since the threat was coming from government, they believed they would have to engage politically to combat it.

Signs of Strength

1976 was the "year of the evangelical," according to a *Newsweek* magazine cover story in the fall of that year. There were two primary reasons for this designation. First, in August, a Gallup poll revealed that 35 percent of all Americans—perhaps as many as fifty million—said that they had been "born again," a typical evangelical description of the moment when one repented of one's sin and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation. This

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2. The platforms are available at "Political Party Platforms of Parties Receiving Electoral Votes: 1840-2012," The American Presidency Project, accessed February 28, 2014, http://www.presidency.ucsb. edu/platforms.php.

poll seems to have caught even evangelical leaders by surprise; it also alerted the

mainstream press to their presence. Not just *Newsweek* but *Time*, *U.S. News and World

Report* and the *Saturday Evening Post* featured evangelicals.[3] The second reason was the

presidential candidacy and election of Jimmy Carter. Carter, a Democratic governor of

Georgia before becoming president, was open about being a born-again Christian during

the 1976 campaign. A Southern Baptist, he was a regular church attender, taught a

Sunday school class, and read his Bible daily. His faith gave notice that some

evangelicals, at least, were willing to seek political power, and their sheer numbers made

them a force to be reckoned with.[4]

Other candidates in the 1976 presidential race—Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and

George Wallace—also professed faith in Jesus Christ, although Carter's usage of the

"born-again" term received the most attention.[5] His faith was proof that evangelicals had

"arrived;" their belief system was shared by a man competing for the highest office in the

land. Many theologically conservative Protestants flocked to his campaign,

enthusiastically supportive of a candidate they viewed as one of their own. The United

States needed a "born-again man in the White House," said a prominent speaker at the

Southern Baptist Convention in June, 1976. "And his initials are the same as our

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3. Robert Wuthnow, "The Political Rebirth of American Evangelicals," in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*, ed. Robert Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1983), 177.

4. Kenneth L. Woodward, "Born Again!" *Newsweek*, October 25, 1976, 69. The "year of the evangelical" designation is a quote from George Gallup, Jr. "'Born-Agains' Wield Political, Economic Influence," April 13, 2004. Gallup. accessed February 28, 2014, http://www.gallup.com/poll/11269/bornagains-wield-political-economic-influence.aspx.

5. John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), chapter 6, Kindle.

Lord's!"[6] Carter appealed to Americans of a variety of religious affiliations, of course; in

the aftermath of the Watergate presidential scandal, it was clear to many Americans that

"morality" was not only a private matter, and they believed Carter to be a man of decency

and integrity.[7] But Carter's candidacy and election were particularly meaningful to many

evangelicals, and their support of him showed that they were increasingly willing to

engage politically. While that support would dwindle during his presidency, his election

proved that being born-again did not preclude political involvement.

Evangelicals in the 1970s were a growing cultural force. Their churches grew

during this decade, as they had in the 1960s, while mainline denominations—"liberal"

churches, in evangelical parlance—shrank. The Southern Baptist Convention grew 15

percent during the 1970s, and other conservative churches grew by as much as 50

percent. The Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational denominations, by

contrast, each lost about 15 percent of their members between 1970 and 1985.[8] Some

individual evangelical churches grew prodigiously to become "megachurches," defined in

one study as churches with 2,000 or more members; by 1980 there were some fifty such

churches in the nation, a figure that continued to climb in subsequent decades.[9] Religious

content on television and radio—the "electric church"—was dominated by conservative

programming like Rex Humbard's *Cathedral of Tomorrow*, Pat Robertson's *700 Club*,

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6. Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 125.

7. Wuthnow, "The Political Rebirth of American Evangelicals," 176.

8. Paul Boyer, "The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 33; Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 149-150.

9. Boyer, "The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism," 43.

Jim Bakker's *PTL Club* and Jerry Falwell's *Old-Time Gospel Hour*. Accurate estimates

of the size of the audiences for these programs were difficult to come by, but by 1979

there were at least sixty syndicated religious television programs and five such

networks.[10] Mainstream media outlets carried the stories of the conversions of public

figures like Charles Colson, who converted to evangelical Christianity after his arrest for

his role in the Watergate scandal, and Eldridge Cleaver, former Black Panther.

Celebrities like football quarterback Roger Staubach spoke of their evangelical faith.

Colson told his own story in the first of his many books, *Born Again*. Other books from

evangelical authors were best-sellers, including Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet

Earth* (discussed in chapter 5) and Marabel Morgan's *The Total Woman*, which

celebrated and encouraged marital sex.[11] Evangelicals also in the 1970s made gains in

wealth and education, narrowing the gap with mainline Protestants that had existed for

most of the twentieth century.[12]

The enthusiasm that some conservative Protestants had for Carter was not the

only sign that they were moving toward political engagement, for their attitudes toward

politics also changed over the course of the decade. Surveys done in the early 1970s

among evangelicals and fundamentalists consistently revealed a tendency toward political

disengagement. For example, a 1972 study in North Carolina found that those who

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10. In 1979, the executive director of the National Religious Broadcasters estimated a Sunday audience of 130 million, although his figures were disputed. Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 172-173.

11. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ*, chapter 6; Charles Colson, *Born Again* (Old Tappan: Chosen Books, 1976); Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman: How to Make Your Marriage Come Alive!* (New York: Pocket Books, 1975). Cleaver's conversion to evangelical Christianity was apparently only temporary, one of several waypoints on his religious journey.

12. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 6.

affirmed belief in an afterlife, in God, and in the truth of the Bible were less likely to have voted and to have been involved in political discussions than were nonbelievers. A national study, also in 1972, found that fundamentalists were less likely than members of mainline congregations to be involved in political groups, to have paid much attention to the 1972 election and to value political participation. Attitudes among the clergy mirrored those of the laity. Within less than a decade, however, theologically conservative Christians were marching to a different drummer. A November, 1978, Gallup study, for example, revealed that 31 percent of evangelicals, compared to 17 percent of non-evangelicals, said that it was very important "for religious organizations to make public statements about what they feel to be the will of God in political-economic matters." A September 1980 study found that 74 percent of evangelicals, compared with 53 percent of nonevangelicals, agreed that "it is fitting and proper for religious groups to support candidates and to be active politically to restore morality to public life."[13] Other indicators also pointed to a rise in political awareness and activism among conservative Protestants. *Christianity Today* and other periodicals read by evangelicals began to give more attention to political issues in the late 1970s; they also encouraged political involvement, whereas before they had often discouraged it.[14]

The Evangelical Right Gets Organized

One of the clearest signs of the changing attitudes of conservative Protestants was the formation of a number of political action groups in the latter years of the 1970s. One

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13. Wuthnow, "The Political Rebirth of American Evangelicals," 168-171.

14. Ibid., 172; Mark A. Noll, "Evangelicals Past and Present," in *Religion, Politics and the American Experience*, ed. Edith L. Blumhofer (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 110.

of these groups was Christian Voice, formed in 1979 by California ministers Robert

Grant and Richard Zone through the merger of several groups opposing homosexuality

and pornography; Hal Lindsey, among others, served on its policy board, as did actor and

singer Pat Boone. Within a year, Christian Voice claimed a mailing list of over 180,000

members from a variety of Protestant denominations, as well as Roman Catholics and

Mormons. The group's publicity efforts were aided by Pat Robertson, who featured it on

his *700 Club* television show,[15] and one of its early activities was to issue "moral report

cards" to assist voters in making decisions by classifying issues and candidates as

"Christian" and "un-Christian."[16]

Two more organizations with roots in California were those founded by Tim and

Beverly LaHaye. By the late 1970s, the LaHayes were no strangers to starting new faith-

based ventures. Tim LaHaye was a graduate of Bob Jones University and had pastored

churches in South Carolina and Minneapolis. But it was in San Diego that his ministry

would gain national prominence; there, his Baptist church eventually grew to encompass

three congregations, he would found a Christian college and various Christian schools,

and help create the Institute for Creation Research to encourage the teaching of "creation

science." He was involved in the conservative movement in southern California, was a

supporter of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and a frequent speaker at meetings of the John

Birch Society.[17] He also authored a number of books, some with his wife. During the

1960s and 1970s, despite his own conservative politics, the LaHayes' books focused on

15. James L. Guth, "The New Christian Right," in *The New Christian Right*, 31-32.

16. Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011), 384.

17. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 73, 163.

non-political topics like family relationships, marriage, and living a Holy Spirit-

controlled life, with titles like *Transforming Your Temperament* (1971), *How to Study the*

Bible for Yourself (1976), and *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* (1976).

Together, the LaHayes led Family Life seminars to teach principles of Christian

marriage.

Their efforts to rally conservative Californians in support of two ballot initiatives

were exceptions to their focus on personal and marital issues. The first of these initiatives

was Proposition 16, a 1966 measure that would have made it easier for local communities

to define and regulate obscenity. Tim LaHaye served on the advisory board of the

California League for Enlisting Action Now (CLEAN), a pro-initiative group.[18] The

second was Proposition 6, more than a decade later. This referendum, often known as the

Briggs Initiative, would have allowed California school districts to prohibit gays and

lesbians from teaching.[19] Neither of these initiatives gained enough support to become

law, but they indicated the LaHayes' political interest. In 1978, in the midst of the

Proposition 6 battle, Tim LaHaye published *The Unhappy Gays*, in which he argued that

homosexuality was a harmful societal influence and that gay and lesbian teachers would

prepare students for recruitment into the "homosexual community."[20] He would also

launch a political action group in 1979, called Californians for Biblical Morality, in the

wake of the referendum fight. In petitions and rallies, members of the group posed the

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18. Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

19. Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 258.

20. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 152.

question for Christians: "How can we be more vocal in urging elected officials to make laws and decisions based on traditional biblical morality?"[21]

Beverly LaHaye's group, created for women, was also founded because of these perceived threats to "traditional morality." In the 1970s, she became increasingly concerned about what she saw as the negative effects of the feminist movement on American society. The National Women's Conference in 1977 would help propel her to action. This Houston conference, part of the International Women's Year, had federal funding, was chaired by Bella Abzug, and featured well-known speakers including Rosalynn Carter, Betty Ford, and Betty Friedan. Many of its resolutions, such as those calling for extending Social Security to housewives and expanding educational opportunities for minority women, were widely supported by participants across the political spectrum. But proposed resolutions favoring the adoption of the ERA and the protection of lesbian and abortion rights were opposed by conservatives and provoked a counter-rally across town. In Beverly LaHaye's words, "The lesbians flooded into that conference and attached themselves to the feminist movement, and never again were the feminists able to shake the lesbians from their agenda."[22] She soon organized Concerned Women for America, incorporated in January 1979, as a counter to the National Organization for Women and dedicated initially to stopping the ERA.

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21. Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 384.

22. William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 164-165.

The Evangelical Right and the "New Right"

Other groups were formed through the efforts of Republican political activists who saw an opportunity to bring conservative Protestants into a coalition that, together with economic conservatives, could engender Republican success. These activists, members of the so-called "New Right," sought to remake the Republican Party so that it could create, in historian Donald Critchlow's words, an America in which "people upheld traditional values, mothers placed primary value on their homes and their children, and parents protected their children from social evils that came from a secular culture in disarray." The vision of these New Right allies included "a strong social fabric; a culture that looked to past tradition as necessary to the preservation of its future; and a country protected by a powerful military willing to exert its strength when necessary."[23]

Among this group were Paul Weyrich, Howard Phillips and Richard Viguerie. Weyrich was a former aide to a Republican senator from Colorado, and in the early 1970s had, with financial assistance from beer mogul Joseph Coors, founded both the Heritage Foundation and the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC). Heritage was a policy analysis group; one of its first activities was to assist those protesting the school books in the Kanawha County, West Virginia controversy, noted in chapter 3. CSFC sought to elect conservatives to Congress, and claimed as early victories the election of Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyoming) to the Senate.[24] Phillips had created the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) in 1960, along with William F. Buckley, Jr., and others. YAF was made up primarily of college students and was one of

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23. Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 131.

24. Ibid., 129; Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 170-171.

the groups giving early support to the presidential candidacy of Goldwater in 1964.

Phillips continued to be active in Republican politics in the 1960s and 1970s and held a

position in the Nixon administration; in 1974 he founded the Conservative Caucus with

the aim of recruiting conservative politicians.[25] Viguerie also had been involved with

YAF and had worked with the Christian anti-Communist crusader Billy James Hargis,

but his primary contribution to the conservative cause was his direct-mail expertise.

Viguerie was a pioneer in the use of computers to create direct mail for political

campaigns and by the mid-1970s, he had created a leading fundraising operation and was

credited with a number of political victories. He also helped George Wallace in the mid-

1970s raise enough money to retire a large campaign debt.[26] In 1978, Viguerie organized

a "Truth Squad" to "expose the lies" that had led to Carter's withdrawal from the Panama

Canal.[27]

Together, these long-time activists served as matchmakers between evangelical

leaders and the Republican Party. In doing so, they both capitalized on the rising political

awareness of evangelicals in the mid-1970s and did much to encourage it. One of the

groups born out of this marriage was the Religious Roundtable, later known simply as

"Roundtable." The Conservative Caucus was instrumental in its formation; Ed McAteer

was a leader in the Caucus and a Southern Baptist, and saw an opportunity to reach out to

theologically conservative clergy. Roundtable set up political forums, workshops and

discussion groups intended to show ministers how to mobilize their congregations for

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25. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy*, 59-60; 129-130.

26. Ibid., 130-131.

27. Sean P. Cunningham, *Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and the Rise of the Modern Right* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 191-192.

conservative causes. The best-known of Roundtable's events was the 1980 National

Affairs Briefing in Dallas, Texas, in which thousands of pastors gathered to hear

speeches from a number of political activists, prominent televangelists and presidential

candidate Ronald Reagan. (Carter was also invited, but declined.) Reagan drew loud

applause when he said: "I know you can't endorse me, but I want you to know that I

endorse you and what you are doing."[28]

The second organization that these New Right activists helped bring into

existence was the Moral Majority. Not only was it the largest, but it would become the

best-known, with its name nearly synonymous with the Christian Right as a whole. By

the late 1970s, Falwell had long left behind his 1965 disavowal of politics, when he had

declared that pastors needed to preach the "gospel" and stay away from activism. He also

had become a nationally known figure—in evangelical and fundamentalist circles, at

least—through his television program, *Old-Time Gospel Hour*. By the early 1980s, the

program was carried by 373 television stations and had a mailing list of about two and a

half million.[29] Thomas Road Baptist Church, Falwell's church in Lynchburg, Virginia,

had grown into one of the megachurches of the 1970s. By 1970, it had around three

thousand members, and was the ninth-largest church in the nation. The church operated a

youth camp, a residential program for alcoholics, and a "family center" that provided

help for needy families. In the 1980s the church started a crisis pregnancy center that

housed young women so they could carry their babies to term; the center also arranged

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28. Robert C. Liebman, "Mobilizing the Moral Majority," in *The New Christian Right*, 54. Critchlow, 176.

29. Ibid., 58.

adoptions for those women who chose not to raise their children.[30] Falwell's religious

empire also included Liberty Christian Academy, an elementary school that would grow

to include a secondary school, started in 1967; and Liberty Baptist College—eventually

Liberty University—in 1971.

He also broadened his audience beyond his congregation through his "I Love

America" rallies, which he began in 1975. These rallies, held on the steps of state

capitols, were a blend of preaching and patriotism. A choir of clean-cut Liberty students,

attired in red, white and blue, would sing religious and patriotic songs, and Falwell would

speak about his love for country and its need for national repentance, frequently quoting

II Chronicles 7:14.[31] Falwell's public opposition to homosexuality also indicated his

growing political interest. As noted in chapter three, he supported Anita Bryant's efforts

in Dade County, Florida, to overturn a city ordinance that prohibited all schools,

including private ones, from discriminating against gays and lesbians in hiring. He

travelled to California to support Proposition 6, writing in a letter to California pastors:

"It is time that today's Christian generation stand up and speak out against the sin that is

eating away at the very foundations of our nation."[32]

Thus, by 1979, Falwell was open to starting an explicitly political organization. In

May of that year, Weyrich, Phillips, McAteer and Robert Billings—a leader in the

Christian school movement—traveled to Lynchburg to meet with Falwell, who

apparently needed little persuading. Weyrich later reported that he had contributed the

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30. Michael Sean Winters, *God's Right Hand: How Jerry Falwell Made God a Republican and Baptized the American Right* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 77, 211.

31. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 203.

32. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 152.

name of the organization by suggesting that there was a "moral majority" in America

who would agree with the Ten Commandments but who had been separated by

geographical and denominational differences. They only needed to be unified to make a

real difference. The name had obvious resonances both with Nixon's "silent majority"

and with Bryant's terminology; she had claimed after the Miami ordinance was defeated

that the "normal majority" had been victorious. Nowhere near a majority of Americans

would ever join the Moral Majority, and a 1982 national poll indicated that barely a

majority—51 percent—of evangelicals had even heard of the organization.[33] But the

name did indicate the organizers' belief that they were standing up for widely shared

values. These values included being "pro-life" (that is, against abortion), "pro-traditional

family," "pro-moral," and "pro-American;" sometimes "pro-Israel" was added to the

list.[34] By June, Moral Majority had an office in Washington, D.C., with Robert Billings

as its director. Joining Falwell on the board were pastors Charles Stanley, D. James

Kennedy, Greg Dixon and LaHaye.[35]

Christian Voice, Concerned Women for America, Religious Roundtable and

Moral Majority were not the only groups seeking to link theological conservatism with

political conservatism. Other organizations, often more narrowly focused, were also

formed during this period. These included the Coalition for the First Amendment, which

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33. Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 205. The poll also indicated that negative or indifferent attitudes among evangelicals toward the Moral Majority outweighed positive feelings by a three to two margin. Only one in seven evangelicals had actually considered joining it.

34. "Here is Where Moral Majority Stands on the Vital Issues Affecting America Today," Moral Majority, Inc., Falwell Speeches and Sermons, FAL 4-3, series 1, folder 2, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA; "The Moral Americans, 1980," *Directions*, aired January 11, 1981, American Broadcasting Companies, Inc., transcript, FAL 4-3, series 1, folder 2, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

35. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 200.

sought to reinstate school prayer, and the American Family Association, which primarily sought to reduce the "excessive, gratuitous sex, violence, profanity [and] the negative stereotyping of Christians" on television. Other groups focused on school prayer and abortion.[36]

Why the Late 1970s?

From a long historical perspective, as the earlier chapters describe, the mobilization in the late 1970s was a resurrection of beliefs about the relationship between religion and government that had deep roots in evangelical history. As we have seen, evangelicalism as a movement arose in a culture that more or less took for granted the idea that the state should be the moral guardian of the culture. Many American evangelicals had the additional belief that theirs was a nation with a special relationship with God and that it was obligated to express that relationship through its laws and in the public sphere. Many of them since the cultural losses of the 1920s had distanced themselves from these beliefs regarding political action, but now were ready for their re-application. As George Marsden has suggested, even though evangelicals were largely premillennial by the twentieth century, there remained a sort of "residual postmillennialism" that encouraged political action, rooted in their Puritan-influenced heritage.[37] By the 1970s they believed that they had the numerical strength and communication networks to make an impact.

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36. See Jerome L. Himmelstein, "The New Right," in *The New Christian Right* for a long list of organizations that New Right activists sought to bring under the same umbrella groups. On the American Family Association—originally the National Federation for Decency—see Don Winbush, "Interview with Don Wildmon: Bringing Satan to Heel," *Time*, June 19, 1989, accessed March 6, 2014, http://content.time. com/time /magazine/article/0,9171,957949,00.html.

Noting these roots, however, does little to explain why these groups formed at this particular historical moment in the late 1970s. One of the attempts to explain this has relied on the concept of "status politics." This theory—sometimes referred to as "status discontent theory"—suggested that social groups politically mobilize not just to protect their economic interests, but also to defend their status and social respectability. In this model, "moral crusades attract recruits who are dissatisfied with the valuation accorded them by society. The resentment stems from the perception by members of a group that social changes have undermined the prestige commanded by their lifestyle and elevated to supremacy contrasting models with divergent values and codes of behavior."[38] Applied to the development of the Christian Right, status politics theory—in the words of two of its proponents—suggested that "[r]eligious identity is…bound up with cultural tradition as part of a total way of life. When the security and status of that way of life appear threatened, its religious and moral content typically become rallying points of defense."[39] Thus, the argument was that the moral agenda of these Christian Right groups represented an attempt by evangelicals to protect their privileged position.[40]

How useful status politics theory is for explaining the mobilization of the Christian Right depends in large part on how we understand the status of evangelicals and

37. George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 112.

38. Kenneth D. Wald, Dennis E. Owen, and Samuel S. Hill, Jr., "Evangelical Politics and Status Issues," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28, no. 1 (March 1989), 2.

39. Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, "The Election and the Evangelicals," *Commentary*, March 1981, 26.

40. For additional description and critique of the status politics model, see John H. Simpson, "Moral Issues and Status Politics," in *The New Christian Right,* 196-197; Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 5th ed. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 224-225; and Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 69-70, 83-84.

fundamentalists in the late 1970s. Some observers have critiqued the model, pointing out that during the decades of the mid-twentieth century, these faith groups did not have much status to lose. Their own subculture—schools, publishing industry, churches and parachurch organizations—may have been thriving, but it was, after all, a *sub*culture, and they were not mainstream cultural insiders and shapers. Thus, their marginality meant that their status was not essentially threatened by the cultural changes they protested.[41] Yet as we have seen, evangelicals and fundamentalists were, by some measures, gaining social status throughout the 1970s. Their churches and institutions were thriving, some of their preachers were highly visible, and mainstream awareness of their numbers and beliefs was increasing. Their subculture was becoming increasingly integrated into mainstream culture, and it could be argued that their mobilization was at least in part an effort to protect their new gains.

I would suggest, however, that the status politics model fails to account for much of the shift in political attitudes among conservative Protestants primarily because it does not adequately consider the theological-political ideology that I have been describing in these chapters. The status politics model assumes that political mobilization is primarily defensive and self-interested. Yet the anxiety expressed by leaders of the Christian Right was not so much anxiety about their own status as it was for the existence of the nation as a whole.[42] This is not to assert that political active evangelicals were entirely altruistic;

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41. Simpson, "Moral Issues and Status Politics," 196.

42. As sociologist Christian Smith has written, based on surveys and interviews with evangelicals in the 1990s: "The issue of evangelical social status was noticeably absent from their language and logic…Instead, their concerns about America's turn from God focused almost exclusively on the deleterious social and spiritual consequences they believed that *other* individuals and *the nation* as a whole would suffer as a result." Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 84. The same concern could be found among evangelical activists in the 1970s.

their rhetoric reflected their sense that they and the values they held dear were under attack. But—if we take their writings and speeches seriously—they also believed that the entire nation was threatened by creeping "secular humanism." This mixture of concern for both themselves and the nation was neatly summarized in a brochure from early in the life of the Moral Majority: "America is entering a Decade of Destiny in the 1980's, a period in which we may lose our freedoms. As she faces the 1980's, the very survival of the nation and everything we hold dear is at stake."[43]

By the late 1970s, the key elements of this political theology were in place. In its most basic form, it held that America had been founded as a "Christian nation" and that evangelicals played a special role in guarding this heritage. It held that that heritage was being corrupted by humanism, which showed itself in a variety of symptoms, including changes in gender roles, changes in sexual mores, abortion, welfare spending, and a decline in patriotism. It included the belief that the eschatological clock was ticking, and that the time was short; a strand of this political theology maintained that these changes were not merely political changes, but were ominous signs of malevolent spiritual forces. And it held that the consequences of failing to "turn back to God" would be severe, but if only people of faith engaged in politics, those consequences could at least be forestalled.

<div align="center">Trigger Issues</div>

Many of the changes decried by the evangelical right had been around for years without prompting large-scale evangelical political mobilization. Evangelicals, for instance, had long been critical of any sexual practice other than heterosexual, marital

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43. Jerry Falwell, "Why the Moral Majority?" in Moral Majority Capitol Report (Washington, D.C.: Moral Majority, Inc., August, 1979), The General Materials of the Moral Majority, MOR 1-2, series 2, folder 2, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

sex. Deviations from that norm were fodder for calls to revival and renewal, but as long as the federal and state governments were neutral or supportive of evangelical mores, no further action was necessary. What happened in the 1970s was the increasing sense among some evangelicals that the halls of power *themselves* had been corrupted, and that those governments were under a nefarious influence. Several events helped trigger that belief.

One of these was the disappointment many evangelicals felt during the Carter presidency. He may have shown them that a born-again Christian could participate in politics, but on a number of issues he failed to meet their expectations. Carter supported the Equal Rights Amendment and women's rights and was moderately supportive of gay rights, positions that were anathema to many conservative Protestants. He spoke against, for example, Proposition 6 in California. While personally against abortion, Carter nevertheless opposed seeking a constitutional amendment to overturn the *Roe* decision, which did little to endear him to increasingly anti-abortion evangelicals.[44] They also disagreed with him on economic and foreign policy issues. His signing of a treaty to turn control of the Panama Canal over to the Panamanian government rankled many evangelicals, who, like other conservatives, saw the "giveaway" as an affront to American patriotism. He seemed unable to control the stagflation that crippled the national economy.[45] To make matters worse, his interview with *Playboy* magazine during the 1976 campaign continued to tarnish his Christian credentials among evangelicals. In that interview, Carter had sought to assuage any fears non-believers might have had that

44. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy*, 150.

45. Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 374.

he was a judgmental moralizer. Referring to the Sermon on the Mount, he had told the interviewer that Jesus equated the act of adultery with lust in one's heart, and said that he had "committed adultery in my heart many times…God forgives me for it." A few decades later, in a more open and confessional age, his admission might have passed with little comment, but in the mid-1970s it was jarring to conservative Protestants—as was his use of the word "screw" to refer to promiscuous sex.[46] And some expressed chagrin that he had even spoken with a magazine they viewed as pornographic in the first place.[47]

An attempt by Carter in 1980 to mend fences with evangelicals may have done him more harm than good. In late of that year, the president hosted a southern-style breakfast—complete with grits—at the White House for a small group of evangelical and fundamentalist leaders, including Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts, Rex Humbard, Jim Bakker, D. James Kennedy, Charles Stanley and Tim LaHaye. The breakfast, like Carter's address to the National Religious Broadcasters gathering the evening before, was an attempt by the White House to shore up waning support among conservative Protestants for the 1980 election. Some of those at the breakfast had become increasingly vocal about their dissatisfaction with the president's policies, which they viewed as dangerously liberal.

The breakfast may have reminded some of the attendees of the faith connection they had with the president. Afterward, Bakker noted that while he had been critical of the president, "it is easier to take potshots at the image on the screen than when you're in the same room with a warm, decent man confessing his faith in Jesus Christ."

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46. Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 174.

47. Williams, *God's Own Party*, 126.

Nevertheless, Carter's remarks at the breakfast, in response to questions about abortion, school prayer, homosexuality and the lack of evangelicals in his administration did nothing to allay the growing suspicion of many in the group that he was failing to stem the tide of "secular humanism" that they believed was sweeping the nation. LaHaye remembered later that as he left the breakfast, he was moved to pray: "God, we have got to get this man out of the White House and get someone in here who will be aggressive about bringing back traditional moral values." There were others in the group, he believed, who had the same desire. "We all had made a commitment to God that day that, for the first time in our lives, we were going to get involved in the political process and do everything we could to wake up the Christians to be participating citizens instead of sitting back and letting other people decide who will be our government leaders."[48] By 1980, the candidate that many evangelicals believed would bring back "traditional moral values" was Ronald Reagan.

Another precipitating cause of the formation of the Christian Right was the growing gay rights movement. The 1970s were years in which homosexuality was increasingly visible. The Briggs Initiative in California and the Miami fight over homosexual school teachers were two cases in which gays and lesbians and their allies pushed for greater legal protection; they won the battle in California and lost in Florida. A number of states by the mid-1970s had eliminated sodomy laws, effectively decriminalizing gay and lesbian sex.[49] As noted in chapter 3, the U.S. civil service commission in 1975 had removed its ban on hiring homosexuals. A member of Carter's

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48. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 189; George Vecsey, "Carter Sways Some Evangelicals In 2-Day Blitz to Regain Support," *New York Times*, January 28, 1980.

49. Tina Fetner, "Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-Gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claims," *Social Problems* 48, no. 3 (August 2001), 411.

administration met with gays and lesbians in the White House, raising the ire of some

conservatives, including Bryant.[50] Harvey Milk became the first openly gay person to win

public office in California, when he was elected in 1977 to the San Francisco Board of

Supervisors. Gay rights parades, gay and lesbian newspapers, magazines, and community

organizations raised the public profile of homosexuality and celebrated the slogan "Gay

is Good." The television show *Soap* debuted in 1977 and featured television's first openly

gay character, played by Billy Crystal.[51] While gays and lesbians still faced plenty of

prejudice, they also enjoyed a growing—if grudging—societal acceptance.

For many conservative Protestants, this apparent acceptance was one of the

reasons that political action was necessary: governments at various levels seemed to be

siding with homosexuality. Evangelicals and fundamentalists, by and large, did not see

homosexuality as a "sexual orientation" that one was born with, but as a sinful choice that

they believed was clearly forbidden in Scripture. Biblical passages like I Corinthians 6:9-

10, which condemned homosexuality—along with acts like fornication, adultery,

coveting and theft—formed the basis of their belief. In addition to the biblical

proscription, many conservative Protestants, as well as other Americans, simply found

homosexual practice abnormal and a perversion of natural sexual activity. Furthermore,

many of them increasingly saw it not just as a sin, but as a threat to families. Matthew

Lassiter has noted that in the 1970s the "crisis of the American family" was a

"mainstream feature of the decade"; evangelicals and fundamentalists were not the only

ones who were fearful in the wake of the sexual revolution, rising divorce rates, and

50. Robert Freedman, "The Religious Right and the Carter Administration," *The Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (March 2005), 237.

51. Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 264.

increased cohabitation.[52] Conservative Protestants believed that two-parent, heterosexual families were a key building block of society, and that arrangements outside that norm were not only sinful, but dangerous for the entire culture. "[H]ow can I be silent about the sins that are destroying the moral fiber of this nation?" wrote Falwell in August 1979 in a fund-raising letter for the new Moral Majority. "How can I be silent about abortion, homosexuality, pornography, and laws that seek to destroy the Christian family?"[53]

A third "trigger issue" for the formation of Christian Right groups in the late 1970s was the Internal Revenue Service's attention to the tax-exempt status of private Christian schools. Following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 and the federal government's subsequent stepped-up efforts to desegregate public schools, private religious schools had exploded in number, especially in the South. Nationally, enrollment in such schools tripled between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s; in Mississippi, for example, the number of non-Catholic private schools rose from seventeen in 1964 to 155 by 1970.[54] Some of these schools clearly had been formed as "segregation academies," born out of the desire of white parents to have their children educated apart from African-American children. Yet there was a mixture of other motives, as well. Many Christian parents also wanted religious instruction, including the sorts of prayers and Bible reading banned by the Supreme Court in public schools, to be part of their children's education; to have "traditional" gender roles respected; to have their children taught a "biblical

52. Matthew D. Lassiter, "Inventing Family Values," in *Rightward Bound*, 14.

53. Falwell, Moral Majority mailing, August 22, 1979, The General Materials of the Moral Majority, MOR 1-2, series 3, folder 3, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

54. Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 272; Joseph Crespino, "Civil Rights and the Religious Right," in *Rightward Bound*, 93.

worldview," which did not include evolution; and to have their schools inculcate a respect for authority and a patriotism some of them believed public schools were lacking.

Thus, these schools existed at the crossroads of race and religion, and the IRS had the unenviable task of attempting to sort out these motives. Private Christian schools were classified as charitable organizations, and donations to them—often enabling their existence—were tax-exempt. The question for the IRS was how to determine whether they were actually "church schools," existing for religious reasons, or whether they were "white-flight schools" and thus undeserving of tax-exempt status. A lawsuit in 1969 by a group of African-American parents in Mississippi against the IRS (*Green v. Kennedy*) was part of the reason the federal agency began to act.[55] There was also growing political pressure. While President Richard Nixon was not eager to alienate potential white Republican voters through aggressive efforts on the issue, he also wanted to appear as a racial moderate, and in 1970 instructed the IRS to deny tax exemptions to schools that were racially discriminatory. A 1971 district court decision in the *Green* case mandated the same thing, and the agency began to draw up policies based on the court's prescriptions. It also revoked the tax-exempt status of Bob Jones University in 1975, which had denied admission to African-American students until 1971, and still banned interracial dating and marriage. In 1978 the IRS announced new benchmarks that schools had to meet to retain their tax status. If Christian schools had been formed at the same time that public schools in the community had been desegregated, those schools needed

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55. Later known as *Green v. Connally* when John B. Connally, Jr., became Secretary of the Treasury.

to prove that they had "significant" numbers of minority enrollment and were actively

seeking minority students.[56]

These regulations created a firestorm among supporters of Christian schools—

hundreds of thousands of letters were sent to the IRS and to members of Congress.

Falwell joined the disapproving chorus. "The Infernal [*sic*] Revenue Service has been

questioning the taxability, the exempt status of Christian schools," he said in a sermon in

February, 1979. "Why? To put the Christian schools out of business. Why? Because

they're motivated by the devil in this effort, that's why."[57] For many conservative

Protestants, the IRS action became yet another reason to dislike Carter, even though the

regulations had been in the works since the Nixon presidency.

Weyrich and other Republican activists saw a chance to bring evangelicals and

fundamentalists to the party, linking their religious concerns to the conservative theme of

a meddling federal government. Senator Bob Dornan (R-California) called for the

resignation of the IRS commissioner, asserting that the IRS had assumed Christian

schools were "guilty until proven innocent…People all over this land are sick and tired of

unelected bureaucrats engaging in social engineering at the expense of our cherished

liberties."[58] Congress held hearings on the issue, and Senator Jesse Helms (R-North

Carolina) helped pass legislation that blocked enforcement of the IRS guidelines.[59] In

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56. Crespino, "Civil Rights and the Religious Right," 91-100; Peter Skerry, "Christian Schools Versus the I.R.S." *National Affairs* 61 (Fall 1980), 18-19. "Significant" was defined as 20 percent of the percentage of the minority population in the surrounding community.

57. Falwell, *Old-Time Gospel Hour*, February 4, 1979, Falwell Publications, FAL 2-3, series 1, folder 1c, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

58. Freedman, "The Religious Right and the Carter Administration," 240.

59. Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 273.

1982, the Reagan administration reinstated Bob Jones University's tax-exempt status,

creating a wave of protest that the White House was supporting racial discrimination; the

university would eventually lose a Supreme Court decision that upheld the original

position of the IRS.[60]

Both Viguerie and Weyrich would later claim that it was the IRS controversy,

more than any other issue—including abortion—that created the Christian Right. The

agency's action "kicked the sleeping dog," Viguerie claimed. "It galvanized the religious

right. It was the spark that ignited the religious right's involvement in real politics."[61]

Weyrich asserted something similar. "[The IRS action] enraged the Christian community

and they looked upon it as interference from government," he said in an interview years

later. "[I]t suddenly dawned on them that they were not going to be able to be left alone

to teach their children as they pleased. It was at that moment that conservatives made the

linkage between their opposition to government interference and the interests of the

evangelical movement."[62]

The timing of the creation of the prominent Christian Right organizations

indicates that the IRS controversy was certainly a factor in their creation. The *Roe v.*

Wade decision in 1973 alone had not been enough to mobilize conservative Protestants to

political action, nor had the passage of the ERA or such things as rising divorce rates and

the increased availability of pornography. The IRS move did indeed "kick the sleeping

dog." But suggesting that it was essentially the only factor, as some have done, probably

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60. Crespino, "Civil Rights and the Religious Right," 104-105.

61. Ibid., 91.

62. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 173.

goes too far.[63] Abortion was of increasing concern to many evangelicals by the late

1970s, largely because of Schaeffer's efforts, and for many evangelicals and

fundamentalists who were not in leadership roles or associated with Christian schools, the

IRS's moves probably had little political salience.

Even for the leaders of the Christian Right groups, the IRS controversy was only

one reason for their growing suspicion of the government. In the early 1970s, Falwell's

ministry had issued bonds that allowed it to raise over $6 million. In 1973, the U.S.

Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) charged the ministry with "fraud and

deceit." At the least, the bond issue had been amateurish and poorly documented, and the

investigation revealed that the finances of Falwell's church were in trouble. But the

SEC's charges were dropped after an investigation, and there was no indication that

Falwell and his associates had engaged in intentional wrongdoing; Falwell continued his

fund-raising efforts that put the ministry on a sounder financial footing. For Falwell,

however, the entire incident was an example of "government interference in the work of

the church."[64] LaHaye's church, in the mid-1970s, attempted to get a zoning variance

passed by the city council, and was rejected. This experience convinced him that "men

and women largely hostile to the church controlled our city."[65] These two men, at least,

believed that they had additional reasons beyond the schools issue for their belief that

government was too intrusive. James Robison, a Texas-based television preacher with a

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63. Randall Balmer, for instance, usefully describes the IRS controversy, and includes reports from an interview he did with Weyrich. He also, however, labels the belief that abortion prompted the Christian Right as "the abortion myth" and a "convenient fiction." Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 11-17.

64. Winters, *God's Right Hand*, 88-89. Falwell, *Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 313-333.

65. Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1980), 191.

national following, dating his politicization to a different type of episode. Robison's

program was pulled from a Dallas television station in February 1979 after he asserted

that homosexuality was a sin and charged that gays sometimes recruit children for sexual

acts. In response, Robison organized a rally at the Dallas Convention Center on the theme

of "freedom of speech, the right to preach." The rally was attended by ten thousand

people, including Falwell, and the station put Robison back on air. The rally also linked

him with New Right activists like Phillips and Weyrich; Robison would soon be the

primary spokesman for the Religious Roundtable, formed later that year.[66] Thus, the IRS

controversy was not the only event that prompted the formation of the Christian Right

organizations.

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66. Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 198-199; Robison's communications director, who helped organize the rally, was Mike Huckabee. Huckabee would go on to become governor of Arkansas, a 2008 Republican presidential candidate and Fox News political commentator. Huckabee years later pointed to the rally as the key event not just for Robison's politicization, but as the event that started the "Moral Majority movement." Ariel Levy, "Prodigal Son: Is the Wayward Republican Mike Huckabee Now His Party's Best Hope?" *New Yorker*, June 28, 2010, accessed March 14, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/06/28/100628fa_fact_levy? currentPage=all.

CHAPTER 7

EVANGELICAL POLITICAL THEOLOGY IN
THE AGE OF REAGAN

Let us unite our hearts and lives together for the cause of a new America…a moral America in which righteousness will exalt this nation. Only as we do this can we exempt ourselves from one day having to look our children in the eyes and answer this searching question: "Mom and Dad, where were you the day freedom died in America?"

—Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!,* 1980

In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected president of the United States with the help of theologically conservative white Protestants. When he took the oath of office on January 20, 1981, his left hand rested on a King James Bible opened to II Chronicles 7:14, a verse long favored by politically engaged evangelicals as a sign that God promised to bless a nation that relied on him: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."[1]

Reagan's election was a turning point in the political history of evangelicals. About 65 percent of them voted for him in the election, not as high a percentage as had voted for Nixon in 1972 (84 percent), but considerably more than had voted for the Republican candidate Gerald Ford in 1976. And—in a shift that would hold true for years to come—the 1980s were the first years that more evangelicals identified as Republicans than as Democrats. Evangelicals would also become an increasingly important part of the Republican coalition. Their percentage of the Republican Party presidential vote would

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1. The same family Bible, open to the same passage, would also be used at Reagan's 1985 inauguration. "Bibles Used in Inaugural Ceremonies," Joint Congressional Committeee on Inaugural Ceremonies, accessed April 1, 2014, http://www.inaugural.senate.gov/swearing-in/bibles.

continue to rise throughout the remaining twentieth-century elections; in 2004, white

evangelical Protestants accounted for about 40 percent of George W. Bush's support.[2]

How much credit for Reagan's election was due to evangelicals and

fundamentalists and to new Christian Right organizations was a matter of some debate.[3]

What *was* certain was the affection that many of them—especially the leaders of those

political groups—felt for the new president. They celebrated the "beginning of a new era

of conservatism in America," in the words of one of the leaders of the Christian Voice.[4]

Jerry Falwell spoke publically of "our beloved president," especially praising Reagan's

anti-abortion stance. Reagan "has taken his stand for this country, and some things that

he's said lately have just made me feel that God was really talking to him. I hope you're

praying for your president. We want God to bless America."[5]

The affinity between evangelicals and Reagan might at first glance have seemed

odd. Reagan was divorced, hardly a faithful church attender, and a movie actor during the

mid-twentieth century when most fundamentalists excoriated anything coming out of

Hollywood. As California governor, he had signed a law expanding abortion rights, and

later had opposed the Briggs Initiative in his state. Yet many evangelicals and

fundamentalists loved his strong anti-Communist rhetoric, his support for prayer in

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2. Lyman Kellstedt, John Green, Corwin Smidt and James Guth, "Faith Transformed: Religion and Politics From FDR to George W. Bush," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 272-273, 281, 285.

3. Jerome L. Himmelstein, "The New Right," in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*, ed. Robert (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1983), 27-28.

4. Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 192.

5. *Old-Time Gospel Hour*, March 21, 1982, Falwell Publications, FAL 2-3, series 1, folder 1c, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

schools and his "endorsement" during the 1980 campaign of their efforts to apply what they viewed as biblical morality to politics. By the 1980 campaign, Reagan was firmly against abortion; his party's platform included anti-abortion language, as it had in 1976. The platform also pledged to "halt the unconstitutional regulatory vendetta launched by Mr. Carter's IRS Commissioner against independent schools."[6] Finally, many conservative Protestants deeply resonated with his affirmation of the supposed divine origins of America and his optimistic blend of patriotism and religious faith. As early as 1952, Reagan—still a Democrat—told a graduating college class: "I, in my own mind, have thought of America as a place in the divine scheme of things that was set aside as a promised land."[7] He would retain this type of religious patriotism throughout his career, even as his other political beliefs evolved; perhaps the best-known of these references was his use of the biblical phrase "city on a hill" to describe America, hearkening back both to John Winthrop and to the Sermon on the Mount.[8]

The Evangelical Right and America's Past

In the late 1970s and 1980s, a number of writers made contributions to an ideology that made political activism not only plausible, but necessary. The sampling that follows in this chapter illustrates an ideology that helped cement the growing alliance

6. "Republican Party Platform of 1980," The American Presidency Project, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25844.

7. Michael Sean Winters, *God's Right Hand: How Jerry Falwell Made God a Republican and Baptized the American Right* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 140.

8. Reagan used the reference at least twice, in his speech accepting the Republican presidential nomination in 1984 and in his farewell address to the nation. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas, August 23, 1984," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/ archives/ speeches/1984/82384f.htm; "Final Radio Address to the Nation," January 14, 1989, http://www. reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011489a.htm.

between theologically conservative Protestants and the Republican Party. These writings

helped overcome any residual reluctance many of them had regarding political activism;

for many evangelicals and fundamentalists in the remainder of the twentieth century and

on into the twenty-first, political activism would be simply taken for granted as an

expected part of their faith. Increasingly, that activism would be conservative.

One of the key elements of this ideology was the familiar belief that America had

been founded with a special relationship with God. Various writers expressed this belief

in different ways. For Francis Schaeffer, the key element was that the nation had been

founded on a "Christian consensus," broadly defined, rather than on a "humanistic base."

This meant for Schaeffer that the American founders believed that God rather than

humans was the "final reality"; that is, that God existed as creator and governor of the

universe and had bestowed value and rights on his human creation. Thus, the American

legal system did not *create* rights for Americans; it merely recognized what God had

already granted. "Think of this great flaming phrase: 'certain inalienable rights,'"

Schaeffer wrote. "Who gives the rights? The state? Then they are not inalienable because

the state can change them and take them away." Those rights, he argued, come from God,

and the founders worked from "the concept that goes back into the Judeo-Christian

thinking that there is Someone there who gave the inalienable rights."[9] Tim LaHaye, who

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9. Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, rev. ed. (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1982), 32. Schaeffer's belief about the biblical influence on the American founders put him at odds with some evangelical historians. This was especially true with regard to his assertion that Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), a Scottish thinker, and his book *Lex Rex* had significantly shaped John Witherspoon and other key American figures in the early national period. Among others, Mark Noll and George Marsden criticized Schaeffer for assuming too much Christian influence on the American founders and engaged in an extended correspondence with him. Schaeffer remained intransigent in his views. For an extended discussion of this debate, see Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 209-227.

was heavily influenced by Schaeffer, echoed this idea, although he was a bit more specific. America was founded not on *Christian* principles as such, but on "biblical principles, all of which are found in the Old Testament and therefore should not exclude any but the most anti-God, antimoral humanist thinkers of our day."[10] The basis for America's laws and Constitution, LaHaye asserted, was the "last six commandments of the Decalogue, dealing with man's treatment of his fellowman, and the civil laws of the Old Testament."[11]

By pointing to the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments as the source of the American legal system, LaHaye was attempting to make alliances not just with all Christians, but also with Jews. Other writers, however, asserted that the New Testament, too, was influential in America's creation. The nation's founders "almost to a man, believed in God," wrote Pat Robertson in the mid-1980s. "They were students of the Old and New Testaments and were deeply influenced by the life and teachings of Jesus. They founded the nation on principles basic to our Judeo-Christian heritage."[12] America's "godly" past was a constant theme in Falwell's speeches, sermons and writings. "Any diligent student of American history finds that our great nation was founded by godly men upon godly principles to be a Christian nation," Falwell wrote in *Listen, America!*, published in 1980 shortly after his Moral Majority organization was formed. "Our Founding Fathers were not all Christians, but they were guided by biblical principles. They developed a nation predicated on Holy Writ. The religious foundations of America

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10. Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1980), 37-38.

11. Ibid., 39.

12. Pat Robertson, *America's Dates with Destiny* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 20.

find their roots in the Bible."[13] For these activists, these beliefs about America's past were not simply historical assertions, but were justification for political action. Their political activism, they could argue, was merely a defense of the nation's historical worldview that they themselves still shared.[14]

At times, however, these assertions about America's "Christian" past were detrimental to their agenda, for they sought to build as large a coalition as possible, and claiming that America was uniquely Christian could be off-putting to some potential allies. The leaders of the Moral Majority were particularly explicit regarding what they believed was their non-sectarian agenda, claiming support from Catholics, Jews, Protestants, and Mormons—anyone longing for a "return to moral sanity."[15] Falwell attempted at times, partly depending on his audience, to modulate his "Christian nation" rhetoric. "I don't think America has ever been or can be a Christian republic," he said in a television interview just a year after he had claimed the opposite in *Listen, America!*. "I believe that America…is a nation under God, built upon the Judeo-Christian ethic."[16] Whether America had been a "Christian" nation or merely a "religious" one was a distinction that for political purposes Falwell often did not care to make.

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13. Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 29.

14. For a discussion of various Christian Right leaders' views on the American past and how their historical understanding affected their political activism, see Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 139-194.

15. "Here is Where Moral Majority Stands on the Vital Issues Affecting America Today," Moral Majority, Inc., Falwell Speeches and Sermons, FAL 4-3, series 1, folder 2, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

16. "The Moral Americans, 1980," *Directions*, aired January 11, 1981, American Broadcasting Companies, Inc., transcript, Falwell Speeches and Sermons, FAL 4-3, series 1, folder 2, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

Another belief about America's past that figured large in the ideology of the evangelical right was a certain understanding of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. John Whitehead was one of proponents of the idea that the amendment did not mandate a "separation of church and state." Whitehead had a law degree from the University of Arkansas and was converted to an evangelical faith after reading Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which he had started reading because he thought it was science fiction. While living in California, Whitehead began attending a church pastored by the Christian Reconstructionist Rousas John Rushdoony, and through Rushdoony became fascinated by the relationship between the American founding and Christianity. In 1980, Whitehead defended in court a San Francisco church that had been sued by its former organist after the church dismissed him because of his homosexuality. Whitehead won the case, and came to the attention of Christian Right activists, including Francis and Franky Schaeffer. Soon, he was collaborating with them on two books: his own, which would be called *The Second American Revolution* (1982) and contributing research for one of Francis Schaeffer's final books, *A Christian Manifesto* (1981).[17]

Much of Whitehead's book would have been familiar to anyone who had read Schaeffer's previous writings. Whitehead argued that America had been founded with a "biblical base": the American founders believed in a God who governs his creation and who gives laws that are absolute.[18] Thus, law is not something that can be invented, and Whitehead castigated what he referred to as "sociological law," the idea that law evolves and is whatever those in authority say it is. This concept of sociological law, Whitehead

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17. Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 193-194.

18. John W. Whitehead, *The Second American Revolution* (Elgin: David C. Cook, 1982), 32.

believed, was shaping American jurisprudence.[19] Whitehead's additional complaint was that the First Amendment, with its guarantee that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," was being used in a way it was never intended: to prevent "Christians from exercising their beliefs and influencing the society in which they live." The First Amendment, he argued, was intended to prevent the establishment of a national church and to protect—rather than end—the state-established churches in existence at the time the Constitution was ratified. The amendment was not intended, Whitehead asserted, to prevent individual Christians and churches from bringing their faith into the public sphere. Whitehead particularly criticized the Supreme Court's decisions regarding school prayer and Bible reading, and suggested that Christians had the right to post the Ten Commandments in public spaces.[20] In essence, Whitehead argued that the First Amendment was designed to protect churches from governmental interference and not the other way around, an argument that evangelical conservatives would assert again and again in subsequent decades.[21]

"Humanizing America"

America may have had a divinely blessed beginning, according to these writers, but it was now being corrupted by immorality and the influence of secular humanism.

19. Whitehead, *The Second American Revolution*, 49-50.

20. Ibid., 93-100.

21. See, for example, John Eidsmoe, *God and Caesar: Christian Faith and Political Action* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1984), 19-24. Perhaps the best-known proponent of this view today is David Barton and his organization, Wallbuilders. Barton, named one of Time magazine's twenty-five "most influential evangelicals" in 2005, is an author, lecturer and Republican Party activist whose constant theme is the purported Christian roots of America. *Time*, February 7, 2005, accessed March 20, 2014, http://content.time.com/time/ specials/packages/article/0,28804,1993235_1993243_1993261,00.html. For Barton's beliefs about the First Amendment, see in particular his book *Original Intent: The Courts, the Constitution, and Religion* (Aledo: Wallbuilders Press, 1996).

Like Puritan preachers of the colonial period issuing jeremiads, these activists were, in

Michael Lienesch's phrase, "troubled patriots," and lamented what they saw as the evils

of modern American society.[22] They found the culprit in an "anti-God worldview" that

Schaeffer had been describing for nearly two decades. Secular humanism, Falwell said in

1982, "is fast becoming the dominant religion of our society in America," and the nation

was forsaking the "Judeo-Christian values" of its founding. "As far as God's dealing with

society is concerned, I personally feel that America is in trouble. I think in serious

trouble."[23]

For these leaders, the secret to understanding a society was not by examining its

institutions, culture or demographics. Rather, they followed Schaeffer in asserting that the

key was in understanding its presuppositions—the basic beliefs that undergirded

everything else. One of the best illustrations of how Schaeffer's concept could be put into

political service was LaHaye's *The Battle for the Mind*, published in 1980.[24] There were

only two possibilities for human thought, LaHaye wrote: one either began with "man" or

with God. Humanism, he wrote, is "a man-centered philosophy that attempts to solve the

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22. Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 155.

23. Jerry Falwell, "Speech to the Christian Life Commission," Falwell Speeches and Sermons, FAL 4-1, series 1, folder 1, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA. This idea that secular humanism was a religion was rooted in part in a 1961 Supreme Court decision, *Torcaso v. Watkins*. The case dealt with whether a Maryland atheist could have his appointment as a notary public revoked because of his beliefs. The court noted in a footnote that "[a]mong religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism and others." "Torcaso v. Watkins—367 U.S. 488," Justia.com, accessed March 19, 2014, http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/ us/367/488/case.html.

24. LaHaye's San Diego church distributed the book to 85,000 pastors across the country. Many of them conducted seminars to spread the book's message of how "humanism" had insinuated itself into American society. Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002), 223-224.

problems of man and the world independently of God."[25] Freely admitting his debt to

Schaeffer, LaHaye elaborated how humanism was infecting modern America, and

asserted that "unless the 60 million people who George Gallup's poll indicates are

Christians wake up to who the enemy really is, the humanists will accomplish their goal

of a complete world takeover by the year 2,000." The members of the American

Humanist Association and the few hundred signers of "Humanist Manifesto I" (1933) and

"Humanist Manifesto II" (1973) were but the tip of the iceberg. The godless philosophy

was widespread, LaHaye alleged, and its adherents were quickly "humanizing

America."[26]

The five basic tenets of humanism, LaHaye wrote, were atheism, evolution,

amorality, autonomous man and a "socialist one-world view." Humanists reject the idea

of God and thus "must explain man's existence independent of God." For LaHaye, belief

in the theory of evolution was rooted not in empirical observation but in this rejection of

a divine creator. As noted in chapter 6, LaHaye was one of the founders of the Institute

for Creation Research, a group dedicated to discrediting evolutionary theory and

defending a creationist view. He asserted that there was no evidence for the kind of

species-change demanded by evolution. Humanists continued to cling to the theory, he

wrote, because if their theory was discredited, "their entire humanistic philosophy will

collapse." Evolution was related to "amorality," the third tenet of humanism: "If you

believe that man is an animal, you will naturally expect him to live like one." The spread

of sexual permissiveness, homosexuality, pornography, "easy divorce," trial marriages,

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25. LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind*, 27.

26. Ibid., 10, 25.

"inflammatory sex education forcibly taught our school children from kindergarten through high school" and drug abuse were only some of the evidence of the moral fallout resulting from belief in evolution, according to LaHaye. The belief that "man" was autonomous—that is, independent from God—had additional dire consequences. It led to a pursuit of "self-actualization" to the exclusion of compassion, to an emphasis on pleasure rather than responsibility, and to selfishness and general social disharmony. Finally, LaHaye asserted that humanists "have a running romance with big government. They universally assume that government is good and that big government is better than little government…Anyone familiar with humanist writers is struck by their consistent hostility toward Americanism, capitalism, and free enterprise."[27]

LaHaye's argument here was essentially that because humanists had forsaken belief in God, they replaced it with a belief in government. Thus, LaHaye found sinister humanistic motives behind any expansion of government or international organization. The United Nations came in for special attack: "The humanists discovered early," he wrote, "that the UN offered them a tremendous springboard to a humanist one-world government with a socialistic economic system." LaHaye alleged that humanists were especially influential in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), that they saw abortion as a means of population control, that they sought to subvert national sovereignty, and that the result might be Soviet or Chinese troops on U.S. soil. Humanists were not influential only at the U.N. He wrote that "over 50 percent of our legislators are either committed humanists or are severely influenced in their thinking by the false theories of humanism"; according to LaHaye, the

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27. LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind*, 62-64, 57-72.

humanists were "why we were not permitted to win in Korea and Vietnam and why they voted to give away the Panama Canal." In language reminiscent of earlier communist-conspiracy theories propagated by the John Birch Society, LaHaye charged that the U.S. government—especially the State Department—was filled with humanists. This, he wrote, was why "America has faded from its position as the most powerful nation on earth to our present status of military inferiority to Russia."[28]

Humanism seemed to be behind every political position LaHaye disliked. Abortion, the push for homosexual rights, government deficit spending, the elimination of capital punishment, "national disarmament" (apparently a reference to nuclear arms limitations talks with the Soviet Union), higher taxes, the Equal Rights Amendment and "unnecessary busing" (referring to efforts to create racially mixed schools) were all evidence of this humanist conspiracy. All these, LaHaye asserted without elaboration, were opposed by a majority of the American people, yet "we are being controlled by a small but very influential cadre of committed humanists, who are determined to turn traditionally moral-minded Americans into an amoral, humanist country."[29]

The concept of "secular humanism" at least partially explains the sweeping nature of LaHaye's list of alleged social ills. On some of these issues—such as abortion, homosexuality, and the ERA—he and other evangelicals believed that they had biblical grounds for their opposition. Scripture, they believed, taught that God created life in the womb, that homosexual activity was a perversion of his creation, and that the ERA subverted the divinely ordained order of "husband leadership" in marriage and the home.

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28. LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind*, 73-77, 93.

29. Ibid., 142.

But why did LaHaye—and other politically conservative evangelicals—assert that such things as tax increases, relinquishing control of the Panama Canal, nuclear arms reduction and busing were signs of an "atheistic, amoral" agenda?

Perhaps his opposition to busing, at least, was rooted in nothing more than his insensitivity as a white man—to put it mildly—to the racial disparity in America. He argued that the "church of Jesus Christ is the last obstacle for the humanists to conquer. The 1960s saw the battle for racial rights. In the 1970s, it was sexual rights. But the 1980s have been designated for the battle against religious rights." He also suggested that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was one of the "special interest groups" used by humanists to advance their agenda.[30] These were no more than passing references, but LaHaye clearly branded the entire the civil rights movement as a humanist-inspired effort. At the least, LaHaye seemed unaware of how offensive this suggestion would have been to those marchers for civil rights whose activities were inspired by deep Christian faith. At the worst, he was revealing his own crude racism and appealing to that of his readers.

Whatever his own deeper motives with regard to race, the focus of his book was on uncovering the agenda and power of the secular humanist worldview. Understanding LaHaye's use of this concept helps explain how he could see such disparate issues as "moral" ones. His thinking was strongly dualistic; according to *The Battle for the Mind*, all concepts—including political positions—were rooted either in a belief in God or in atheism. There was no middle ground, and it led him to categorize as "humanist" beliefs that might to others have seemed morally neutral. One of the beliefs rooted in atheism, he

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30. LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind*, 10, 163.

alleged, was the humanist goal of a "one-world, socialistic government." The humanist, he wrote, "yearns for an international oneness of all people and seems willing to sacrifice national benefits to international unity." Goals such as ending world poverty or bringing about world peace were indeed desirable, LaHaye wrote. But attempting to engineer them through government action was both detrimental to society and dangerous. Trying to guarantee a minimum income through a welfare system, he asserted, "is the worst human demotivator ever conceived by government." And seeking world peace through disarmament denied the innate sinfulness of human beings; human evil needed to be restrained through the threat of force. "If [humanists] would learn a lesson from history, they would find that such a utopian life-style has never existed and never will. Mankind must experience a change in nature before people can live together as brothers in a world of peace."[31]

Thus, LaHaye branded as "humanistic" any governmental action that seemed like an attempt to create equality (like busing, or higher taxes to pay for welfare spending) or seemed to limit American sovereignty and power (like the Panama Canal issue or arms reduction). These were attempts, in his thinking, by humanists to engineer an egalitarian world and would end in disaster. Whether his *own* attempts to implement a conservative political agenda were also an attempt to engineer a "utopia" of his own creation— regardless of whether people had a "change in nature"—was a question that he never addressed.

LaHaye was not the only evangelical leader in this period to allege the pernicious influence of humanism. Several of them wrote glowing back-cover blurbs for his book.

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31. LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind*, 90-93.

These included D. James Kennedy, pastor of the large Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church,
in Fort Lauderdale, Florida; Falwell; and Adrian Rogers, president of the Southern
Baptist Convention. In 1982, Kennedy told the delegates at a joint gathering of the
National Religious Broadcasters and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) that
"secular humanists have declared war on Christianity in this country and they are
progressing very rapidly."[32] The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) issued a
resolution in 1981 that warned against secular humanism and its consequences of
"unrestricted abortion, free love and homosexual practices, permissiveness in divorce,
genetic engineering or cloning to help mankind evolve into brave new men."[33] The
NAE's resolution did not display the same sort of sweeping, conspiracy-minded paranoia
as did LaHaye. But it illustrates how, by the early 1980s, the concept of secular
humanism for many evangelicals explained much of the social change they feared.

The Case for Political Action

The question was: how should conservative Protestants respond? The answer was
clear to these leaders. They should mobilize politically, vote, put pressure on their
legislative representatives and perhaps run for office themselves. Noting that Romans
13:1-7 refers to rulers as God's "ministers," LaHaye wrote: "We are in a moral quagmire
today because ministers have failed to recruit 'ministers of God' from our congregations,

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32. Kenneth A. Briggs, "Evangelicals Debate Their Role in Battling Secularism," *New York Times*, January 27, 1981, accessed March 19, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/1981/01/27/us/evangelicals-debate-their-role-in-battling-secularism.html.

33. Richard Cizik, "A History of the Public Policy Resolutions of the National Association of Evangelicals," in *Toward An Evangelical Public Policy*, ed. Ronald J. Sider and Diane Knippers (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 51.

to run for public office."[34] Both LaHaye and Falwell asserted that it was a "sin" that there

were millions of non-voting American Christians; Falwell could usually get a laugh in

speeches by asserting that it was a minister's duty to get people "saved, baptized and

registered to vote."[35] Schaeffer, by the early 1980s much more politicized than he had

been just a decade earlier, echoed the importance of political action. *A Christian

Manifesto* was published in 1981; in it Schaeffer asserted that there was "open window"

for Christians to make a political difference, given the "conservative swing" of the 1980

election.[36] He also raised the possibility of protest and civil disobedience if the window

closed. By this, Schaeffer primarily meant nonviolent resistance and the withholding of

taxes. But he also suggested that force was appropriate when a government had

"abrogated its authority," noting the example of the American Revolution.[37]

There was no hint of such desperate measures in *Listen, America!*. But Falwell

was equally forceful in his belief that America needed to return to its "moral" roots

through political action. *Listen, America!* was a sort of manifesto for the Moral Majority,

as Falwell sought to popularize and explain his organization, and much of the book was a

discussion of the wide range of problems that Falwell believed were besetting America.

As was the case with LaHaye's *The Battle for the Mind*, the list was long, and

Falwell was willing to lump a variety of issues into his "moral" agenda. Large portions of

it could have passed for a Republican politician's stump speech. Falwell complained that

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34. LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind*, 190.

35. LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind*, 201; Falwell, *Listen, America!*, 257; William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 201.

36. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, 73.

37. Ibid., 103-118.

taxes were an "overwhelming burden," that "government spending is out of control," and that the nation's "whole welfare system is built on a basic premise that is detrimental to our society." While there were times welfare was necessary, he asserted, the present system was undermining the work ethic commanded in the Bible.[38] Regarding international policy, Falwell, along with many other Americans of his era, believed in the "missile gap"—that the United States was far behind the Soviet Union in numbers of nuclear weapons. *Listen, America!* included a chapter devoted to America's "faltering national defense." His complaints about rampant government spending apparently did not apply to defense spending, for he wanted it to be dramatically increased. Romans 13, he noted, included the idea that rulers bear "the sword" to administer justice; therefore, American politicians who sought to reduce the nation's nuclear stockpile were abdicating their responsibilities. Another international issue to which Falwell devoted a chapter was support for the nation of Israel. Here, he reflected fairly standard dispensationalist beliefs. Israel should be wholeheartedly supported, he argued, not only because of the historic suffering of the Jewish people, but because "God is not finished with the nation Israel." Those nations that did not support Israel would incur God's wrath, he wrote, citing Genesis 12:3.[39] The middle section of the book listed social issues closer to home that Falwell decried. These included abortion, homosexuality, the feminist movement, obscenity in the media, drug and alcohol abuse, and "Satan worship and the occult" in rock songs, and a humanist-controlled public-education system in which students were taught situational ethics, evolution, and sex.

38. Falwell, *Listen, America!*, 76-77.

39. Ibid., 96-106, 112-113.

The solution to all these issues, according to Falwell in the book's final section, was "revival." The revival that he called for was a curious blend of political action and spiritual renewal. The last chapters, for instance, included a standard evangelical presentation of the "plan of salvation," complete with Scripture references. Humans are sinners, Falwell wrote, and thus unable to earn their way to heaven (Romans 2:23). But salvation is through the grace of God; it is a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through faith in Jesus Christ, humans could receive "regeneration…the new birth." Falwell called on his readers to "receive Christ as your personal Savior…Acknowledge your sin, accept His forgiveness and the gift of life that He offers." In this same section, Falwell also discussed three areas of political action: registering to vote (and—presumably—voting); becoming informed about issues; and mobilizing, by which Falwell meant primarily contacting elected officials and lobbying them on the sorts of "moral" issues he had discussed.[40]

There were at least two tensions in this sort of rhetoric that Falwell never seemed to recognize, much less attempt to resolve. First, it was not clear how the sort of spiritual renewal he called for was to be brought about through politics. Even if his "moral majority" had been able to legislate its complete agenda, the question remained how that political victory was to bring about the spiritual humility, repentance and faith in Jesus Christ that Falwell's own theology held was necessary for salvation. As he wrote, "good deeds alone will not save a nation, nor an individual."[41] Yet by seeking to implement a "moral" agenda, while at the same time arguing that that agenda did not depend on

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40. Falwell, *Listen, America!*, 264, 257-263.

41. Ibid., 264.

"regeneration," Falwell seems to have been seeking the sort of good-works-without-faith that he disparaged. As biographer Michael Winters has written, Falwell reduced "religion to ethics, thereby casting religion in a utilitarian role, as a prop for Americanism." Thus divorced from its doctrinal core, morality became little more than "moralism, one ideology among many, something to be justified at the polls, not confirmed by the dictates of God."[42] Falwell, the evangelist, and Falwell, the political activist, thus seem to have been at cross-purposes with each other.

The second tension had to do with the two audiences to whom Falwell sought to appeal: evangelicals and fundamentalists like himself, and non-evangelicals who nevertheless believed America was on the wrong track. Falwell himself clearly rooted his political convictions in the Bible, and he saw—at least by the mid-1970s—conservative political involvement as a natural outgrowth of a Christian's faith in Jesus Christ. When people were "saved" and began to study the Bible, he assumed, they should share his beliefs, and his sermons and speeches to fellow evangelicals and fundamentalists were laced with Scripture proof texts. Yet at the same time, he wanted to build a broad coalition of "moral" Americans who did not necessarily share his evangelical convictions. Thus, Falwell wanted it both ways: an agenda that his fellow evangelicals would support for biblical reasons and one that non-evangelicals would support because it appealed to broadly held convictions. Support from the latter group was never widespread. There were a few non-evangelicals who joined the Moral Majority, but

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42. Winters, *God's Right Hand*, 9.

Falwell was never able to overcome the general perception that he was anything more than a spokesman for the type of conservative evangelical he pastored.[43]

Will God Judge America?

There was another reason why these leaders believed that political action was necessary to fight the nation's "corruption": to avoid the wrath of God. Falwell spoke frequently of the possibility that America would face God's judgment. "Many have exclaimed, 'If God does not judge America soon, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah,'" he wrote in *Listen, America!*. "In almost every aspect of our society, we have flaunted our sinful behavior in the very face of God Himself."[44] Falwell frequently linked the nation's increasing "immorality" with the possibility of a loss of "liberty."[45] His fear seems to have been two-fold. On the one hand, Falwell feared that if secularists gained governmental power, they could curtail the freedom of Christians to worship and live as they chose. But his deeper fear was linked to this idea of judgment: God might judge America by allowing it to slide into chaos—or even into Communist enslavement. Falwell was not alone in this speculation about a coming judgment of God. Lindsey and LaHaye, too, warned of the possibility of divine wrath.

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43. An examination in the early 1980s of the chairs of the Moral Majority state chapters revealed that all forty-five whose denominational affiliation was able to be determined were Baptist pastors. Many of them pastored independent Baptist church affiliated with the Bible Baptist Fellowship. Robert C. Liebman, "Mobilizing the Moral Majority," in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*, ed. Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1983), 61.

44. Falwell, *Listen, America!,* 248.

45. See, for example, his 1976 sermon "America Back to God," in which Falwell preached: "The United States tonight is under the wrath of God, not because of wicked and dishonest politicians, but because of a rebellious and disobedient and sleeping church within her borders. Our country tonight is in grave and eminent peril of losing its liberties." Falwell Speeches and Sermons, FAL 4-2, series 1, folder 1, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

In strict dispensationalist terms, such a judgment was impossible: the only judgment that the Bible spoke of, according to dispensationalist theology, was the tribulation. But that would follow the rapture, when Christians would be taken out of the world; since that event had not happened, God's wrath on the earth was yet forestalled. But, as anthropologist Susan Harding writes, in the 1980s these writers adjusted their eschatology to speculate about another possible judgment, one that was not found in the Bible. This, in turn, allowed them to call for "national revival" in an effort to avoid that judgment. Such a revival was one that few of their dispensationalist forebears had thought possible; the typical future scenario envisioned by premillennialists was one of ongoing moral decline until the establishment of Christ's earthly kingdom during the millennium. Thus, as Harding writes, these writers "fashioned bold new narrative frames that not only cast Christians onto history's center stage but momentarily reversed the course of human history, opening up a veritable 'postmillennial window' in the End Times."[46] They remained premillennialists. But they sounded like postmillennialists in their optimism about a national revival.

In *The Battle for the Mind*, for example, LaHaye wrote of a "pretribulation tribulation," which would happen "if liberal humanists are permitted to take total control of our government." Unlike the seven-year, global tribulation that he was absolutely certain would follow the rapture, this one was not inevitable. It could be postponed—or even avoided—if only Christians would politically mobilize and fight against the influence of humanism. Perhaps surprisingly for a book that described the humanist

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46. Susan Harding, "Imagining the Last Days: The Politics of Apocalyptic Language," in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 67.

threat to America in such dire terms, LaHaye ended his book on an optimistic note. There

was evidence, he believed, of spiritual reawakening in America, and he was hopeful that

American Christians would continue to be a force for global missions.[47] Falwell, too, held

out hope that "God has not finished with us as a nation," in part because "America is the

last logical base for world evangelization…If we lose our freedom and our liberty, no one

else can spread the Word of God to all peoples across the earth."[48]

Hal Lindsey's book *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* was perhaps the most

dramatic example of how conservative politics could be joined to dispensationalism.

After the publication of his blockbuster *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970, Lindsey

had been in high demand as a speaker, even addressing U.S. military personnel at the

American Air War College and the Pentagon on prophetic topics.[49] *The 1980s*, published

in 1981, was in one sense an updating of the prophetic picture in light of events in the

1970s. The Soviet Union had continued to expand its power, most notably into

Afghanistan in 1979; the Middle East continued to be a region of conflict, as the 1973

Arab-Israeli War demonstrated; and the European Common Market had added its tenth

member in 1979, which prepared it for a takeover by the Antichrist. This figure, Lindsey

believed, was alive and perhaps already a member of the European parliament. While

there were some surprises in the 1970s, Lindsey believed that his predictions in his earlier

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47. LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind*, 218-222.

48. Falwell, "Why the Moral Majority?" The General Materials of the Moral Majority, MOR 1, folder 1A, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

49. Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 220-221.

book were still on track.[50] What was new in *The 1980s* was his focus on America's political scene.

Lindsey had given little attention to domestic politics in *The Late Great Planet Earth*. While electing "honest, intelligent men to positions of leadership" was important, he had suggested in that book that politicians were unable to provide the answers to the "basic and visceral questions of man."[51] In Lindsey's view, biblical prophecy indicated that the United States would soon lose its status as a superpower and be replaced; it was being weakened by student rebellions, communist subversions, military cowardice, and loss of moral principle among its leaders. "The only chance of slowing up this decline in America is a widespread spiritual awakening," he wrote.[52]

Ten years later, Lindsey foresaw the possibility of a different future for America. He still believed American decline was, in the end, inevitable. Since there was no biblical prophecy that could be construed as referring to the United States, the nation must pass from the international scene before those prophesied end-time events began. Lindsey speculated that the nation might be taken over by Communists, or destroyed in a nuclear attack, or become subordinate to the European confederacy. But, he suggested, there was also a more hopeful possibility: "If some critical and difficult choices are made by the American people right *now*, it is possible to see the U.S. remain a world power."[53] In other words, it was possible that the United States could retain its world supremacy right

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50. Hal Lindsey, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 68, 54-57, 103-106.

51. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), viii.

52. Ibid., 173.

53. Lindsey, *The 1980s,* 132.

up until the rapture; what happened after that would not be the concern of true Christians, for they would have been "caught up" out of the world to be with Christ. These "critical and difficult choices," it was clear from *The 1980s*, meant the implementation of a right-wing political agenda. This included a dramatic increase in military spending to increase its nuclear arsenal; like Falwell, Lindsey believed that the U.S. was woefully behind the Soviet Union in military power.[54] For this, he largely blamed the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations. Furthermore, the "welfare state" that had begun with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal was threatening to "strangle the entire economy," and a "'free lunch' mentality has begun working its way into the American mind," which was leading to socialism. While the genuinely needy should receive assistance, he wrote, the Bible taught that no one should eat without working.[55] Lindsey made no real attempt to link these political convictions directly with his premillennialism. Rather, he seemed to have arrived at them from other sources, and then adjusted his eschatology to allow for the possibility of their implementation.[56]

Lindsey, LaHaye and Falwell showed that dispensationalists were not inherently apolitical. That eschatology could—and did—push some evangelicals and fundamentalists out of the political arena. But, as Baptist theologian Russell Moore notes, if politically engaged dispensationalists are "inconsistent," then the "late twentieth

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54. Throughout his book, Lindsey relied heavily on Barry Goldwater's biography, *With No Apologies*. His sources for the United States' supposed military deficiencies, judging from his charts in the book, were the conservative groups Committee on the Present Danger and the Coalition for Peace Through Strength, an arm of the American Security Council Foundation.

55. Lindsey, *The 1980s*, 68-80, 121-127, 141-142.

56. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 219.

century has seen several attempts at 'inconsistent dispensationalism.'"[57] Clearly, the

writers sampled here along their faithful readers and many other ordinary conservative

Protestants found that their beliefs about the future and their conservative political

convictions were perfectly compatible. If anything, as sociologist Sara Diamond has

suggested, their premillennialism gave an added urgency to their political efforts. The end

of the world was probably coming sooner rather than later, and if the United States was to

avoid an early "tribulation," they would have to act to set it back on a course of "moral

righteousness."[58]

At times, these activists could sound as if they believed in a sort of national

"prosperity gospel." This type of thinking had a long history within American

Christianity; its proponents taught that God would give financial and physical blessings

to the faithful—especially to those who donated to certain ministries. Mainstream

evangelicals usually ridiculed this theology as "health-and-wealth" when it was applied

to individuals. Yet Falwell, for instance, seems to have assumed that God would bless the

United States if it only became a more moral and politically conservative nation. "I think

an unredeemed person could get all the principles of the Scriptures of the Judeo-Christian

ethic and live by them and enjoy all the blessings from living by them," Falwell told an

Atlanta Baptist group in 1982. "Now he would go to hell a very disciplined person if he'd

never accepted Christ, but he could enjoy the benefits of obedience to biblical principles

on this earth if he lived by them because they're automatic. They're unalterable." There

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57. Russell D. Moore, "Till Every Foe is Vanquished: Emerging Sociopolitical Implications of Progressive Dispensational Eschatology," in *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 343.

58. Sara Diamond, *Not By Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), 199.

were seven such principles, he said: the "dignity of human life," as opposed to abortion and euthanasia; monogamous, heterosexual marriage; "common decency," as opposed to pornography; the work ethic; support for Jews and Israel; a God-centered education; and the institutions of the home, the state, and and the church. If only America would return to these principles, Falwell preached, God might not judge America but would continue to bless it with wealth, stability and international prominence.[59]

The Hope of National "Healing"

To what extent did these activists speak for America's evangelicals? Clearly, groups like Falwell's Moral Majority did make an impact on the political scene. By the early 1980s, his organization claimed to have registered over four million voters; other outside observers suggested that those numbers were inflated, and that the Moral Majority, Christian Voice and Roundtable had together registered about two million. Membership statistics generated the same sort of debate. Moral Majority claimed a membership of over four million by 1981; outsiders alleged that the group was including anyone on its mailing list, and that the actual membership was perhaps 400,000.[60]

How many of America's increasingly Republican evangelicals would have affirmed the entire ideology of these activists is not clear. Evangelicals may have voted for Reagan and joined the Republican Party for a variety of reasons, and not necessarily because they believed that secular humanism was corrupting America's "Christian" heritage, or that the nation would face God's wrath if it did not reform. In other words,

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59. Falwell, speech to the Christian Life Commission "Strengthening Families" seminar, Atlanta, GA, Falwell Speeches and Sermons, FAL 4-1, series 1, folder 1, Liberty University Archive, Lynchburg, VA.

60. Liebman, "Mobilizing the Moral Majority," 54-55.

some of these Republican evangelicals may have registered and voted primarily as economic conservatives, or as military hawks, or on the basis of some other primary identity rather than as evangelicals, per se.

But when activists like Falwell were doing their best to marry evangelical theology with conservative politics, such distinctions were not easy to make. He and the other leaders discussed in this chapter helped forge an ideology that made evangelical support for conservative politics a familiar part of the American political landscape. For many evangelicals, it became increasingly obvious that they needed to be politically engaged, and that that mobilization would be for conservative causes. The apolitical focus on saving souls in anticipation of the rapture—common in the mid-twentieth century—did not entirely disappear. But it would become increasingly relegated to the sidelines of the evangelical subculture in the latter decades of the century. In its place was an older understanding of the relationship that Christians should have with the gears of government. Rather than merely seeking revival, they were called to be reformers. In the midst of turbulent times and with the nation afflicted with what they viewed as a variety of social ills, they believed they were called to lead America back to God in the hope that he would—in the words of II Chronicles 7:14—"heal their land."

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