

The Public Eye

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The Culture Wars Are Not Over

The Institutionalization of the Christian Right

Editor's Note

During the 2000 presidential campaign, the Christian Right's leadership kept a markedly low profile, leading many observers to conclude that the movement was weak and that George W. Bush had successfully placed it under the discipline of the Republican Party. The Christian Right seemed united in its support for Bush's campaign, yet seemed to demand no public promise that he would support its policies in return. When Bush was declared the winner of the election and the vote was analyzed, researchers could see that the Christian Right vote had been crucial in electing Bush. When Bush appointed Christian rightist John Ashcroft and Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson, the "father" of welfare reform, to his Cabinet and established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the quid pro quo was obvious. At that point, it looked to observers as if the Christian Right were strong and flourishing within the Bush Administration.

Weak and shaky or clever and victorious—which view was the accurate one? Frederick Clarkson walks us through the paradoxes that now characterize the Christian Right, demonstrating that there is truth in each view. Although before the election the movement faced problems and challenges that made it vulnerable to serious decline should Al Gore win, in a George W. Bush administration it enjoys the support it needs to rebuild and reassert its authority as the moral rudder and strategic ballast of the GOP. For the Christian Right, its public silence and private voter mobilization in the 2000 election was a strategic investment that

will pay off with double-digit returns for years to come.

by Frederick Clarkson

Introduction

Ralph Reed could not have predicted that the seat at the table of American politics he sought for so many years as Executive Director of the Christian Coalition would become an endowed chair. In the early 1990's the Christian Right, epitomized by the Christian Coalition, was ambitious but not quite fully legitimate. In this sense the nomination and confirmation of former Senator John Ashcroft as Attorney General, and the Bush administration's creation of a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is a measure of their success.

Several main trends are evident in the current fortunes of the Christian Right. First, the major institutions of the Christian Right, once bastions of fire and brimstone rhetoric and a transcendent vision of the once and future Christian Nation, have become practitioners of political compromise and coalition building. This is especially true in the case of national electoral politics. Second, the Christian Right has been largely incorporated into the Republican Party apparatus. Finally, and perhaps most important, the Christian Right is now largely institutionalized throughout society. The movement has come a long way in a short time. This is not to say that one of the most dynamic social/political movements of the latter part of the 20th century

has necessarily lost its energy and edginess. Nor is it without fractures and schisms. In many respects it is still growing and finding new and distinctive forms and expressions. But the quiet institutionalization of the Christian Right is a far more dramatic, if less visible trend than any single clash in the culture war.

Persistent Success

Conservative evangelicalism spent much of the 20th century on the political sidelines and at the margins of religious respectability. Now the movement and its political expression, the Christian Right, is contending for power within the mainstream of American culture and political life, and a generation has come of age that has no memory of what life was like before there was a Christian Right. Over the past 25 years, the Christian Right has matured, built durable institutions, and demonstrated both staying power and capacity for growth. It has also generated a large class of Christian Right professionals who serve as managers, public policy strategists, lobbyists, and campaign managers, among other movement jobs. The Christian Right has nurtured

IN THIS ISSUE

Commentary	2
Book Review	20
Eyes Right	22
Eye Lashes	22

From the President


The fiasco of the recent Florida vote count, including the disturbing role played by the Supreme Court, inspired resistance from liberals and progressives and breathed new life into organizing efforts. But, as the new Bush Administration moves into office and hits its stride, its actions illustrate the enormous powers of the President, especially when his party dominates Congress. We are beginning to see, in concrete actions, just how right-wing Bush's agenda is. The appointment of John Ashcroft as Attorney General was just the first shot of this Administration's goal to complete the "Reagan revolution."

All who oppose the Right face a daunting challenge. Blocking a strike at Northwest Airlines, repealing the Clinton Administration's ergonomic workplace safety regulations, reversing course on carbon dioxide emissions, threatening the American Bar Association's long-standing role in judicial appointments, appointing numerous right-wing activists to executive branch offices—these are direction-setting actions that reveal the hypocrisy of Bush's campaign slogans of "unity" and "diversity."

At PRA we have been analyzing the election results not only to determine who voted for whom, but what this Republican victory means for the future of the U.S. Right wing. Fred Clarkson's article "The Culture Wars Are Not Over" speaks directly to the question of the future of the Right, especially the Christian Right. The Bush "victory" has improved the prospects of the Christian Right immeasurably. Clarkson helps us understand the Christian Right's weaknesses, as well as its strengths, as it now serves as the unofficial organizing arm of the Bush GOP.

Here in the office, as we hunker down for four years of Republican political hegemony, we have a new asset in our toolkit. Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons' new book *Right Wing Populism in America* reviews the history and origins of right-wing populism and explains how two basic forms of populism—repressive populist movements and right-wing populist movements—feed the Right's authoritarian vision and drive its strategies.

We invite you to spread both this *Public Eye* and word of PRA's work throughout your political and social circles. Together we will build on the anger created by the political grab of the recent election and continue to expose and oppose the Right's softer face and growing power.



Jean Hardisty

Editorial Note: We apologize for omitting Jennifer Butler's name from the byline in the previous issue of *The Public Eye*. Butler is the author of "Faith and Family: Christian Right Advocacy at the United Nations," *The Public Eye*, vol. 9, no. 2/3, Summer/Fall 2000.

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Nikhil Aziz, Ph.D.

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ISSUE 36

politicians who have been elected to office at all levels of government, especially at the state level. These politicians in turn have groomed a stable of specialists in policy and administration.¹ Once largely taken for granted by GOP leaders, the Christian Right now controls the party apparatus in a number of states—including George Bush's home state of Texas—and routinely vies for control in others. Its leaders are rarely labeled as "extremist" anymore in mainstream discourse. The Christian Right is now able to expect and compel the appointment of key leaders to major governmental posts.

Further evidence of the Christian Right's success is the prominence in the Bush Administration's social policy of the theme of "compassionate conservatism," a slogan that embodies Bush's ostensible commitment to conservative Christianity. This notion, generally credited to Christian Right theorist Marvin Olasky, represents a shift in conservative doctrine. Secular rightists have supported defunding of social programs—a *laissez faire* approach to social problems in which the free market is seen as the key to meeting social needs. Reflecting the growing influence and clout of the Christian Right, the Bush Administration's "compassionate conservatism" directly acknowledges and supports the role of "faith-based" organizations in providing government services, directing government funds to these organizations.²

As Governor of Texas, Bush had an alliance, albeit a sometimes-uneasy one, with the Christian Right. For example, on the Texas State Board of Education in the late 1990s, Bush-allied Republicans coalesced with Democrats on most issues, while the Christian Right functioned as the *de facto* opposition party. Beginning in 1994, Christian Right candidates, largely bankrolled by business advocates of school privatization schemes, mounted primary challenges to more moderate Republicans in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to gain control of the state board.³ While Bush won his races for governor with the support of the Christian Right, he did not attend the

Christian Right-dominated 2000 Texas GOP convention. Bush did extend an olive branch, among other things, by backing state charters for religious schools and by establishing the first-ever state-sponsored Christian prison ministry in a Texas prison.

Paradoxes on the Christian Right

As recently as the fall of 2000, some commentators were still predicting or declaring the demise of the Christian Right—as usual with any and every dip and downturn in the fortunes of the movement

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or its constituent parts. But the pundits notwithstanding, the movement has consolidated, stabilized, and is prepared to wage fresh battles. "Not only are the culture wars not over, and not only have we not lost," declared Florida televangelist D. James Kennedy in 1998, "but the fact is we are winning!"⁴

Financial data provided by most of the major organizations of the Christian Right to the Evangelical Council on Financial Accountability (posted on its web site <http://www.ecfa.org/>) provide a snapshot of the scale and stability of the movement. In most cases organizational income rises steadily over the three years listed. A sampling of rounded income figures for 1999, the last year for which there is data posted, shows: Concerned Women for America, \$12 million; Family Research Council,

\$14 million; American Family Association, \$15 million; Promise Keepers, \$51 million; Regent University, \$52 million; Focus on the Family \$121 million; Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network, \$196 million; Campus Crusade for Christ, \$360 million. The combined income of D. James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries, and his television and radio operation totaled \$66 million. Interestingly, in 2000, AOL founder Steve and his wife Jean Case, donated \$8.35 million to Jean Case's alma mater, Westminster Academy, a parochial school adjunct of Coral Ridge Ministries.⁵ Of course, not all of these organizations spend all or even most of their resources on political action *per se*, but each is an integral component of a still larger conservative Christian culture from which the Christian Right political movement is sustained and refreshed.

Running counter to this trend, the Christian Coalition has been faced with a steady turnover in senior staff and a dramatic drop in its budget from a high of about \$25 million in the mid-1990's to about half that in 2000, among other signs of disarray. At the same time, it has sustained a significant and high profile niche in public consciousness. Similarly, Promise Keepers (PK), which at its peak filled dozens of football stadia in spectacular expressions of the new conservative Christian culture, has endured scandals, largely saturated its market, and declined in popularity and budget, but nevertheless sustains a \$50 million a year budget while staging smaller scale events. After distributing tens of millions of books, literature, videos, music CDs and other paraphernalia, PK remains a powerful vehicle of conservative Christian cultural influence.

Additional paradoxes confound simple conclusions about the state of the Christian Right. First, in 2000 the Christian Right substantially subsumed itself to the electoral fortunes of George W. Bush (his sketchy record on the litmus test issues of the Christian Right notwithstanding) as their best hope of ending the Clinton/Gore era. In the wake of this pragmatic decision,

some Christian rightists are becoming radicalized. Second, the founding generation of the Christian Right is aging, and the turnover at the top of the leading organizations of the movement suggests potential instability among leading Christian Right institutions. And finally, major changes in the ideology and composition of the leadership of the Catholic Church will undoubtedly lead to an important shift in the direction and impact of faith-based political activism. The rise of conservative Catholicism may profoundly, if slowly, alter the dynamics of the contemporary Christian Right, resulting in an era of increasing political aggressiveness in electoral politics on the part of church-backed rightist initiatives, particularly on the issue of abortion.

Christian Right leaders, followers and even organizations have come and gone as the movement has evolved, but its religious and public policy agenda remains essentially unchanged. Pat Robertson, still the most visible and vocal Christian Right leader, declared during the 2000 election campaign "I want to see a future where a religious public servant occupies the White House and fills federal positions of power with men and women committed to godly principles."⁶ Such a government would at minimum seek to roll back liberal gains in such things as, reproductive rights and gay and lesbian civil rights, and lower, if not smash, the wall of separation between church and state. The debates among the factions of the Christian Right are more over means than ends.

The Christian Coalition

No discussion of the Christian Right is complete without the Christian Coalition, which has so dominated media coverage of the Christian Right—thanks in part to the relegenic qualities of its executive director from 1989 until 1997, Ralph Reed. The Coalition opened the 1990's as the archetypal Christian Right organization, becoming a convenient barometer when journalists and others needed a reading and a forecast on the condition of the movement.

However, coverage of the Christian Coalition to the exclusion of other major organizations has distorted the picture of the wider movement. Though significant, the Christian Coalition has never provided an accurate reading of the condition of the movement as a whole. Earlier, a narrow focus on the Moral Majority by interest groups and the media provided comparable

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distortions. The Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition were the leading, but far from the only, Christian Right political organizations of their eras. Popular and expert understandings (and sometimes misunderstandings) of these organizations have sometimes been too casually substituted for those of the Christian Right movement as a whole. For example, just prior to the 2000 elections, some prominent commentators pronounced the Religious Right dead as a "social movement," and blamed it on the decline of the Christian Coalition.⁷

When Reed resigned as the high-profile executive director in 1997, the Coalition's decline in membership, resources, and influence were well-established trends. His

legacy included several private lawsuits and federal investigations into the finances and tax status of the organization.⁸ Nevertheless, many journalists were quick to ascribe the Coalition's problems to Reed's departure rather than to his tenure. There is further mythology about Reed that distorts the history and therefore the present and future of the Christian Right. Reed is often credited with inventing stealth tactics and voter guides, but he invented neither.⁹ The mechanics of conservative movement electoral politics had been honed over several decades and had reached maturity at a time when another long-term trend had come to fruition—the raising of political consciousness and the articulation of a theological justification for the political engagement of evangelicals who had been largely on the political sidelines since the Scopes trial.

Still the Reed-led Christian Coalition developed a mastery of computer-generated, church-based voter lists to carry out effective voter ID campaigns.¹⁰ During the 1990s the now-famous half-page voter guides that were distributed through selected churches complemented this campaign. The strength of the voter guides lay in their uniformity of design and economies of scale for centralized production and distribution, as well as an effective use of the media to enhance their impact. But the real secret of the Christian Right's success has been the forging of a disciplined voting bloc that fields and backs candidates through the GOP primaries and the general elections, and capitalizes on the long-term decline in American voter participation by maximizing voter participation among Christian conservatives. Voter guides were an important factor contributing to this discipline.

However, recent attendance at the Coalition's annual Road to Victory conferences has dropped dramatically, and its budget has reportedly halved from a high of about \$25 million in the mid 1990s.¹¹ In 1992 and 1996, GOP Presidential candidates invariably attended the conference, but in 2000 it took pressure from Pat Robertson on his 700 Club before George W. Bush sent



COMPASSIONATE CONSERVATISM

Lynn Cheney, the wife of his vice presidential candidate, and a video of his personal greetings. Bush had already ducked a Republican candidate forum organized by the national Christian Coalition in New Hampshire in February 1999. Interestingly, the Coalition excluded Christian Right third party candidates Pat Buchanan and Howard Phillips from its 2000 Road to Victory conference.¹² Part of the strategy of the Bush campaign appeared to be to keep the Christian Right at arms length in public, even though the movement was fairly uniformly supporting the GOP ticket. Apparently Bush campaign strategists calculated that the appearance of a close relationship between Bush and the Christian Right would be a liability for Bush's candidacy. Such an assumption is a measure of the shaky standing of the Christian Right in U.S. public opinion.

Meanwhile, the effectiveness of the Christian Coalition's voter guides has diminished, in part because of a drop in activist participation. The effectiveness of the guides was also diminished by publicity about the unfair pro-GOP slant of the voter guides and efforts of Americans United for Separation of Church and State to warn churches that they may jeopardize their non-profit tax exempt status by engaging in partisan electoral activities.¹³ During the 2000 campaign, the Coalition was compelled to withdraw the distribution of the Nebraska guides, when it was revealed that they completely misrepresented the positions of leading Democrats on several key issues. Other Christian Right groups, aligned with the Republican Party but operating in the shadow of the Christian Coalition, routinely issue similarly constructed and slanted voter guides. These include the Traditional

Values Coalition, D. James Kennedy's Center for Reclaiming America, and the National Right to Life Committee. The latter received \$250,000 from the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee in October 1999.¹⁴

Additionally, many of the 35 state-level "family policy councils" affiliated with Focus on the Family also issue voter guides. In some states these organizations have been more politically significant than the Christian Coalition. The network of family policy councils has grown in size, resources and experience since 1989, when the network was first formed. Indeed, veteran GOP political operatives staff many family policy councils.¹⁵ Focus on the Family itself joined the National Day of Prayer Taskforce headed by Shirley (Mrs. James) Dobson in urging churches to make the Sunday before the Tuesday election in

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2000 a day of prayer about the elections, and to disseminate church bulletin inserts that stressed the obligation of Christians to vote. Other Christian Right groups that were particularly active in the 2000 elections include Gary Bauer's PAC called the Campaign for Working Families, Eagle Forum and the Pearland, Texas-based Vision America headed by Rev. Rick Scarborough.

To Bolt or Not to Bolt? A Perennial Question for Purists

As many of the major organizations of the Christian Right have solidified their position within the GOP, they have learned habits of compromise and political pragmatism. The more purist Christian Right factions have become increasingly marginalized. Though it was the most radical and purist leaders and organizations that were largely responsible for the growth of the Christian Right, often they are now spun off to the margins.

In the 1996 presidential primaries, the Christian Right in the GOP was divided between Pat Buchanan and Bob Dole. While the Christian Coalition backed Bob Dole, four top Christian right leaders co-chaired the Buchanan campaign: Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum, Don Wildmon of the American Family Association, Michael Farris of the Home School Legal Defense Association, and Larry Pratt of Gun Owners of America.

James Dobson of Focus on the Family, unhappy with Dole's prolife credentials, threatened to bolt the GOP and take his followers with him. He didn't, but said later that he personally voted for far-right candidate Howard Phillips. Dobson periodically threatens to bolt the GOP, and in this role follows in the footsteps of Robert

Grant and Gary Jarmin of Christian Voice, and an earlier Pat Robertson, before he became a go-with-the-winner GOP loyalist.¹⁶ In 1998, when Dobson addressed the annual meeting of the secretive Council for National Policy, he stated that if the GOP abandoned or watered down its anti-abortion position, he would leave the Party and take as many with him as possible.¹⁷

In the 2000 GOP primaries, the Christian Right vote was still deeply divided among Dan Quayle, Gary Bauer, Steve Forbes, Pat Buchanan, and Alan Keyes. Not one of these was able to match the vote-getting capacity of conventional politicians

ment conservatives to his cabinet. Blackwell said, "He is keeping that promise" and that "John Ashcroft is an example of that."¹⁸

The Christian Right's rally to Bush throws into sharp relief the divisions within the movement, not only among candidates but also among parties. Pat Buchanan, after failing to break out of the pack in the GOP primaries, bolted the party and seized the presidential nomination of the weak and disorganized Reform Party. Buchanan's strident "culture wars" style and views were opposed by an eclectic group aligned with party founder Ross Perot, who generally supported libertarian John Hagelin. Hagelin

was also the candidate of the Natural Law Party, dominated by devotees of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi the leader of Transcendental Meditation or TM. In the wake of these odd developments, some longtime Reform Party leaders endorsed Green Party candidate Ralph Nader whose anticorporate, clean elections, and good government messages resonated with many Perot voters.

Buchanan spent most of the Reform Party's \$12.5 million in federal matching campaign funds advertising on conservative Christian radio stations, in hopes of attracting voters who found the GOP ticker's public stands on abortion, civil unions, and immigration too mushy. But the vast majority of Christian

Right voters seemed more determined to end the Clinton/Gore era than to quibble about the conservative and prolife bonafides of George W. Bush. Buchanan and fellow Christian rightist Howard Phillips, the presidential candidate of the Constitution Party, (formerly the U.S Taxpayers Party) received only about one percent of the vote.

The Constitution Party, which was on the ballot in 41 states in 2000, draws a

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like George W. Bush (who had Ralph Reed as a campaign consultant) and Senator John McCain, and Bush ultimately won the votes of conservative Christians who opted for someone who seemed both acceptable and able to win the election. Interestingly, after the election, Morton Blackwell told *U.S. News and World Report* that in the fall of 1999, a group of conservative leaders met with then-candidate Bush seeking a promise that if elected, he would appoint move-

fiercely loyal but tiny constituency of Christian Patriots, Christian Reconstructionists, home schoolers, and militant anti-abortion activists.¹⁹ Over three presidential election cycles, it has been unable to attract candidates of national standing. The party unsuccessfully wooed Pat Buchanan in 1992 and 1996. In 2000, U.S. Sen. Bob Smith (R-NH) briefly bolted the GOP and sought the party's nomination before returning to the GOP fold. Party founder Howard Phillips ran as the party-building standard bearer in each race, speaking mostly to small groups and home-schooling conventions and drawing little media attention. After the 2000 vote, party chairman James Clymer of Pennsylvania wrote that he believed that "for every vote that Howard Phillips received in this election there are many times that number of people who support our efforts, yet could not bring themselves to vote for our candidate due to fear of Al Gore."²⁰

In 2000 others in the Christian Right also were unwilling to sublimate purity of principle to pragmatism. During the campaign, Judy Brown of the American Life League declared "George W. Bush is NOT pro-life!" and denounced the Christian Coalition, National Right to Life Committee, and the

Republicans for Life PAC for supporting Bush.²¹ Syndicated conservative columnist Kathleen Parker argued simply "abortion is here to stay—even if the Republicans take the White House." She predicted that

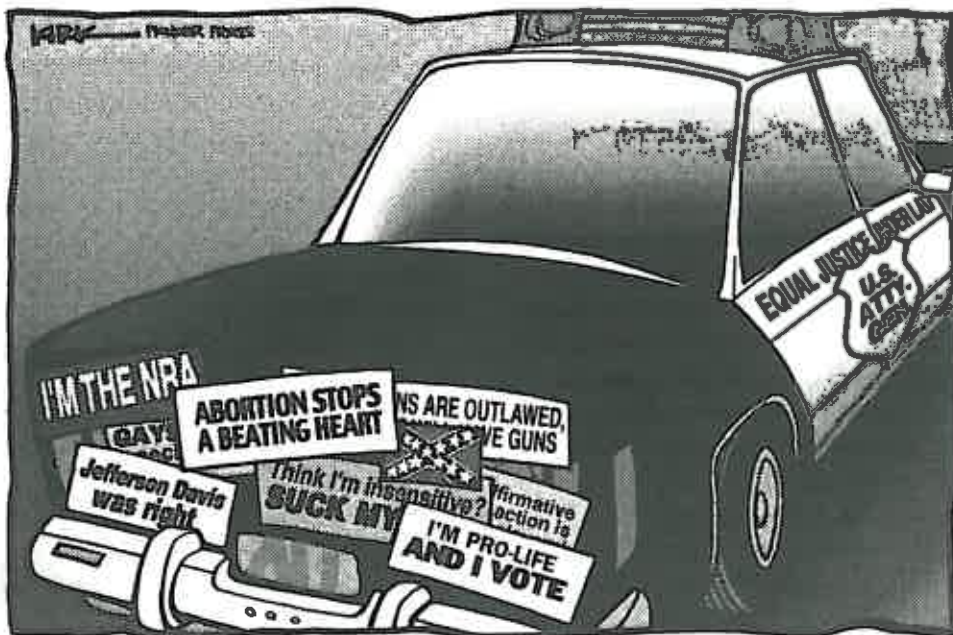
saying he would not make abortion a litmus test for Supreme Court candidates. The "debate" about abortion, Parker concluded, "is over."²² While the "debate" shows no signs of such a conclusion, Brown and

Blackwell told *U.S. News and World Report* that in the fall of 1999, a group of conservative leaders met with then-candidate Bush seeking a promise that if elected, he would appoint movement conservatives to his cabinet. Blackwell said, "He is keeping that promise" and that "John Ashcroft is an example of that."

RU-486, the "abortion pill," would make abortion more widely accessible and more palatable politically, and also would reduce the gruesome photo-driven politics of anti-abortion militancy. She noted that Bush de-emphasized the issue in the campaign,

Parker may be correct that, given Bush's mixed record on abortion, it is conceivable that he might appoint moderate justices in the mold of Justice David Souter, despite his declared admiration of the reactionary Justice Clarence Thomas. Early in the Bush administration, there are contradictory messages about abortion; just as the GOP itself remains a house divided on the issue. For example, while Attorney General John Ashcroft is fiercely anti-abortion, he claimed in his confirmation hearings that he would make no effort to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and would enforce the Federal Entrance to Clinics Act (FACE).

Factional squabbling surfaced early in the life of the Bush administration. The Republican National Coalition for Life denounced Bush's first ten major appointments, declaring that "with just one exception" Bush senior advisors and cabinet nominations were "either publicly supportive of a mother's right to kill her unborn baby or [that] we have found no evidence that they are in any way pro life."²³ Although this was before the nomination of John Ashcroft for Attorney General and Tommy Thompson



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for Health & Human Services, it underscores the nature of the GOP as a necessarily uneasy coalition. Similarly, Pat Robertson and other Christian right leaders expressed outrage and opposition to federal funding of some religious groups of which they did not approve, such as the Church of Scientology, the Hare Krishna's, and the Nation of Islam, and concern that enforcement of federal civil right laws would be tied to receipt of federal funds.²⁴

Divergent positions on abortion within the Christian Right demonstrate that, even as the centripetal force of the center in current U.S. politics pulls the vast majority of the Christian Right toward compromise, it also causes others to spin off into radicalized formations.

The militant wing of the antiabortion movement is retrenching and threatening more profound assaults on access to abortion through the ongoing harassment of abortion providers, from picketing and obstruction to lawsuits, death threats and strategic assassination. Increasingly, advocates of violence are publicly presenting themselves as the underground "Army of God," self-described members of which have committed numerous violent crimes against abortion providers.²⁵ While some of this public posturing is psychological warfare, it operates in tandem with the reality of the 20-year war of attrition waged by the violent antiabortion underground. Indeed, in the first two weeks of 2001, shots were fired through the windows of a Planned Parenthood clinic in Kansas, and an attempted arson occurred at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Michigan. During the 1990s, even as federal law enforcement increased their protection of abortion providers from harassment and physical violence, the war of attrition kept pace.

James Kopp and Eric Rudolph, two men who have been indicted for antiabortion related murders, were on the FBI's Most Wanted list. Kopp was arrested on March 29th in Paris for the alleged killing of Dr.

Barnett Slepian, an abortion provider, near Buffalo, NY on October 23, 1998. A day prior to the arrest "the federal court of appeals in San Francisco ruled that a Web site and 'wanted' posters calling abortion doctors 'baby butchers'... are protected by the First Amendment guaranteeing free speech. The Web site, the Nuremburg Files, which targeted Dr. Barnett Slepian, did not constitute a specific threat, the justices said.... The doctor's name was crossed out

Reaction to the growing and multifaceted acceptance of homosexuality in US society continues to be an animating feature of Christian Right activism. Like abortion, homosexuality is a permanent, defining issue for the movement.

on the Nuremburg Files Web site shortly after the murder."²⁶ The decade old cross-fertilization between militant antiabortion activism, the militia movement and Christian Patriotism in the 1990s²⁷ continues into the new century. For example, longtime Operation Rescue militants Joe Foreman and Bruce Murch have founded a community near Roanoke, Virginia that engages in paramilitary training.²⁸ In Idaho, a militia group has emerged, that makes abortion a high priority and featuring a fairly sophisticated website.²⁹ This group, the Freedom Fighter Militia, is typical of a new style and network of militia groups that seem to hybridize the contemporary Christian Right and the old style Christian Patriots. The Roanoke-based Virginia Citizens Militia encapsulated this confluence when it

declared: "We believe in conservative Judeo-Christian values and constitutional rights!! We know that abortion and homosexuality are the greatest moral evils of our day! All men should be like 'Promise Keepers' because a strong Christian family equals a strong Virginia." They also claim to be open to anyone regardless of race, gender, or religious orientation.³⁰

Battling It Out in the States

For three decades the Christian conservative movement has seen its work at the local level as its greatest strength. Wedge issues such as abortion and gay rights animate political conflict at the state and local level more powerfully than they do at the federal level, in part because such issues also resonate locally because it is easier to mobilize militant activism on issues that are closer to home than on more abstract and remote federal policies. Also, the pockets of strength of the Christian Right tend to be regional and local. Further, issues are increasingly resolved state by state in the ongoing devolution of federal policy to the states—the result of the "Reagan revolution" and Republican appointments to the Supreme Court. This local focus has played out over many years as the movement has recruited members, built institutions, and gained political experience.³¹ In one notable local victory in the 2000 elections, Judge Roy Moore, best known for hand carving a wood plaque of the Ten Commandments and defiantly hanging it in his Etowah County, Alabama courtroom, was elected Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court.³²

Even as a divisive, "culture war" political style characterizes much of the Christian Right's local-level organizing, one important feature of the maturation of the Christian Right is the effort to put a friendlier face on some of the most retrograde of conservative positions on such matters as race, gender, the environment, and the condition of the poor. The movement has shifted in order to counter the image of con-

servatives as lacking moral credibility, common decency and common sense on a range of issues. George W. Bush's presidential campaign grouped these issues under the rubric of "compassionate conservatism" and, during the campaign, heavily promoted the message of moderation implied by that title. In addition to abortion, four other issues have been fundamental for the Christian Right at the state level in the past several years. In each case, the Christian Right has moderated its rhetoric and adopted a friendlier face in promoting its agenda.

Homosexuality

Reaction to the growing and multifaceted acceptance of homosexuality in U.S. society continues to be an animating feature of Christian Right activism. Like abortion, homosexuality is a permanent, defining issue for the movement. In the 2000 elections, several antigay referenda were put to the voters. In Vermont, punishing legislators who had voted to pass a bill allowing civil unions for gay men and lesbians was pivotal in many races for the state legislature. This antigay campaign went by the coded, nativist-style slogan "Take back Vermont." Also in Vermont, out of state Christian Right interests supported an antiunion backlash, and succeeded in defeating several prounion incumbent Republicans in the Republican primaries. In the general election, several prounion Democrats lost to antiunion Republicans. The result was that Republicans—the majority of whom are antiunion—took control of the Vermont House of Representatives from the Democrats.

In Oregon, an antigay initiative that would have prohibited positive discussion of homosexuality in public schools was narrowly defeated, while initiatives in Nevada and Nebraska banning gay marriage and civil unions passed. An initiative in Maine that would have banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment, housing and public accommodations, narrowly failed.

One notable aspect in these campaigns is a shift away from the sharp, homopho-

bic rhetoric so characteristic of Christian Right leaders in the past. Perhaps weary of being described as hate mongers and as responsible for creating a cultural climate that fosters violence and hate crimes or simply acting strategically in response to the public's increasing tolerance, even some radical Christian Right leaders, notably John Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute,³³ have backed away from strident antigay rhetoric. There is, however, no evidence

**The Christian Right
has campaigned
for home schooling,
religious charter schools
and vouchers for
religious schools for the
past two decades.
The Christian Right
advanced this agenda
at state, local and
national levels in the
2000 elections.**

of any significant change in their underlying views. Similarly, the emergence of "ex-gay" ministries such as Exodus International have sought to put a friendlier face on religious opposition to homosexuality and gay civil rights. These groups promote supposedly curative therapies, which actually involve little more than efforts to convert people to evangelical Christianity.³⁴

Recently, this approach has further evolved in the form of a broader "love the sinner" antigay politics, expounded by Rev.

John Rankin, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, and professional debater, who heads the one-man Theological Education Institute in Hartford, Connecticut. In the Fall of 2000, Rankin keynoted an area conference on "A Biblical View of Sexuality" in Northampton, Massachusetts. The event was organized, according to Rankin, in response to "a growing number of evangelical women [who] claimed that lesbianism is affirmed by God." Northampton, he explained, "is the location of Smith College, the nation's premier women's college where lesbianism is as strong as anywhere...."³⁵ Rankin emphasized that homosexuals should not be hated, but pitied and shown the gospel. He claimed that homosexuals tend to be victims of child sexual abuse.³⁶

The seemingly obscure Rankin has debated approximately 50 leading liberals, usually before liberal audiences on college campuses. "I do my forums in the presence of the country's best skeptics," he declared, "and my goal, much of it, is to defang the opposition, so people can hear the gospel."³⁷ Among those he debated in 2000 through the vehicle of his so-called Mars Hill Forums, were Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women, Debra Hafner, former executive director of Sexuality, Education and Information Council of the United States (SEICUS) Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for Free Choice, and Rev. John Buehrens, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Education

The Christian Right has campaigned for home schooling, religious charter schools and vouchers for religious schools for the past two decades. The Christian Right advanced this agenda at state, local and national levels in the 2000 elections. On the Kansas State Board of Education, a seesaw contest for control has pitted Christian rightists against moderates. When under the control of Christian rightists, the Board caused a national controversy when it removed evolution from standardized tests in 1999. The rightists lost their majority to

Democrats and GOP moderates in 2000. The new majority has revised the standards to reincorporate evolution.³⁸ That this battle had to be fought at all demonstrates the continuing strength of the Christian Right. A few years ago, the focus of the curriculum culture wars was over control of individual, local school boards. Now many education struggles are waged at the state level as well—Texas and Kansas are the most famous examples.

Despite Christian Right strength at the state level, two major referenda in California and Michigan that would have provided state-funded public school vouchers for any private school, including religious schools, were both defeated by margins of more than 2–1. The Roman Catholic Church and the Christian Right backed both referenda, and organizers promise to try again. Also in 2000, the Florida legislature passed, and Gov. Jeb Bush signed, a bill that would have provided state-funded vouchers for private schools, including religious schools. The bill has been ruled unconstitutional by a state judge.

Race

Within conservative evangelicalism, the cutting edge approach to race today is the theme of “racial reconciliation.” Ralph Reed seized on this approach when he was executive director of the Christian Coalition, which also later became a hallmark of the Promise Keepers (PK), which says it seeks to eliminate race as a “barrier” to Christian brotherhood. Racial reconciliation has been criticized as a superficial analysis of racism, rooted in both religious and gender supremacy and used to deflect historic and contemporary injustices to African Americans and Native Americans, among others.³⁹ Dr. Loretta Williams, Lecturer, the Boston University School of Social Work, told a conference at Hampshire College in 1997 that the Promise Keepers are treating men of color as “trophy friends”. “People of color are there [at PK rallies] to be hugged” she said, “to be there for the white male who is afraid of being labeled racist.

The black male is there to serve, once again.” While people are talking about race, she observed, “They are not talking about racial justice.”⁴⁰

One aspect of racial reconciliation involves public ceremonies featuring people of different races mutually asking for forgiveness for past and present transgressions. These requests for forgiveness, which can be personal or on behalf of institutions, or

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even on behalf of one’s race, can be moving and often are authentic in spirit. Such ceremonies have marked PK events, notably at the 1997 Stand in the Gap rally in Washington DC. The notion of racial reconciliation was the brainchild of the late Rev. John Perkins, an African American whose work was substantially bankrolled by Christian Reconstructionist philanthropist, Howard Ahmanson.⁴¹ This is significant in part because a central argument in Christian Reconstructionist theory is that change comes through evangelization and conversion, and that the government of the converted would be a biblical theocracy, for which the blueprint has already been drafted.⁴² Reconstructionists, like many on the Christian Right, oppose governmental intervention in significant part because the

government is not yet theocratic, and therefore is illegitimate.

In one of the strangest alliances in recent American politics, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and Unification Church head Sun Myung Moon joined as the principal sponsors of the Million Family March on Washington, DC in October 2000.⁴³ The two aging demagogues adapted the rubric of racial reconciliation in staging the event.

Like the overwhelmingly White Christian Right, the Black Nationalist Nation of Islam and the Moon organization have sought to soften their notorious reputations. Both have seized on images of racial and religious inclusion in an effort to inoculate themselves against charges of racial and religious bigotry that have defined each for decades. Echoing PK, Rev. Chang Shik Yang, co-chairman of the march and a top official of Moon’s World Family Federation for Peace and Unification, (formerly known as the Unification Church), called for “all the walls” of race and religion to be torn down. “Color is meaningless,” he said. “All human beings are brothers and sisters in front of God.”⁴⁴ At the rally, Farrakhan denounced abortion and implied that it was a White plot. Despite these efforts by Moon and Farrakhan to divide the African American and other people of color electorates with the “family values” rhetoric of the Christian Right, in the 2000 elections even most socially conservative African Americans and Hispanics stuck with the Democratic Party, where their perceived economic and civil rights interests lay.

Environment

The friendly religious face of anti-environmentalism is the Washington, DC-based Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship (ICES). The Council was founded in 1999 at the initiative of Fr. Robert Sirico, CSP, a Catholic priest, former gay activist, and head of the Grand Rapids, Michigan-based Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty.⁴⁵ Fr. Sirico was instrumental in forging the 1999 anti-

environmentalist Cornwall Declaration that sought to counter established faith-based environmental initiatives by Catholic, Jewish, evangelical, and especially mainline Protestant bodies. This manifesto essentially repackages conservative ideology under the rubric of environmental stewardship in the style of Marvin Olasky's "compassionate conservatism" approach to poverty and social welfare. Olasky is a member of the ICES advisory board.

According to journalist Bill Berkowitz, the Christian Right hopes to do for environmental issues what "free-market think tanks have done for the debate on social and political issues." To do this they seek to "harness scripture in the service of free-market environmentalism."⁴⁶ ICES describes itself as "building a network of religious, academic and community leaders who can offer sound theological, scientific and economic perspectives on these issues. Soon they will provide a credible alternative to liberal environmental advocacy for people in congregations, schools, government, and the religious and secular media."⁴⁷

The Cornwall signatories epitomize the current trend in political coalition building

on the Christian Right, as conservative evangelicals join rightist Catholics like Fr. Frank Pavone, and John Neuhaus, and a few conservative Jews such as Rabbi Daniel Lapin. Notable signatories include James Dobson, Don Wildmon, Christian Reconstructionist author George Grant, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, David Noebel of Summit Ministries, Charles Colson of Prison Fellowship, and Diane Knippers of the Washington, DC-based Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD). Knippers' organization was established in the early 1980s to counter the social justice orientation of mainline Protestantism.⁴⁸ IRD has projects aimed at undermining the historic social justice traditions of the mainline Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopal churches.

The Growth of the Christian Counter-Culture

As the Christian Right has become significant in mainstream politics and government, it both stimulates and benefits from a growing conservative Christian counter-culture. This counter-culture takes many forms and its growth contributes to

the institutionalization of the Christian Right. Christian schools and colleges are experiencing unprecedented growth. Membership in conservative evangelical churches is growing, partly at the expense of mainline Protestant churches, and Christian publishing, epitomized by the best selling apocalyptic novels of Tim LaHaye, is experiencing explosive growth.

The rise of the Christian counter-culture may be seen most dramatically in the separatist Christian home schooling movement. The "right" to home school children, part of the Republican Party platform since the 1980's, provides support for Christian Right legislative efforts to allow home schooling at the state level. Estimates of the number of home schooling families vary wildly, but may be a million. Many states have little oversight, let alone scrutiny of home schools or home school materials. The absence of state oversight has shielded some of the extreme antiabortion militants who home school their children, notably convicted murderer Paul Hill and militia proponent Matt Trehwella. Thousands of children are being raised to be Christian theocratic revolutionaries. While there is no

guarantee that these children will turn out as their parents may hope, there is no question about the intentions of their parents.

The home schooling movement, (like the rise of private White Christian academies as a backlash to the integration of public schools) is quietly led and informed by the Christian Reconstructionist movement. For example, one large purveyor of home schooling materials and services is the Christian Reconstructionist-oriented Christian Liberty Academy, headed by Rev. Paul Lindstrom in Arlington, Illinois. Reconstructionism is a politically-oriented theological movement that provides the ideological catalyst for the Christian Right. Reconstructionism has played a central role in politicizing conservative evangelicals.



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MARVIN OLASKY

"Marvin Olasky is a professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, a senior fellow at the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, and the editor of *World*, a national weekly news magazine from a biblical perspective. He has written 13 books of history and cultural analysis, including *Compassionate Conservatism*, *The American Leadership Tradition*, *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, [and its sequel *Renewing American Compassion*], *Fighting for Liberty and Virtue*, and *Abortion Rites*. He has co-authored seven more and was general editor of the Turning Point Christian Worldview series. Dr. Olasky received an A.B. from Yale University in 1971 and a Ph.D. in American Culture from the University of Michigan in 1976. He is an elder of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Austin and serves as a trustee of Covenant College."

Source: <http://www.olasky.com/>

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Bush's Christian Guru aims to reshape America

Doug Saunders
Toronto Globe and Mail
Saturday, January 13, 2001

... The phrase "compassionate conservatism" tripped off Mr. Bush's lips hundreds of times during the [2000 U.S. presidential] campaign. It sounded, to most observers, like something aimed at appeasing moderate voters. But to fundamentalist Christian conservatives, it signified the beginning of a radical public-policy experiment, one that is neither glib nor moderate. The phrase was coined by Mr. Olasky, a slight, tweedy man who teaches journalism at the University of Texas and has become one of Mr. Bush's most influential intellectual advisers....

... [President] Bush is preparing to make the professor's ideas a central part of his government. In short, compassionate conservatism is a taxpayer-funded mission to allow religious groups to provide most government social programs, allowing them to operate homeless shelters, drug-treatment

programs, pregnancy-counselling services, prisons and unemployment offices – even if their mission is to convert their clients to religious faith. To opponents who charge that this will set social programs back a century, Mr. Olasky pleads guilty. This, he says, is exactly the point.

"Historically, what we've found is the most useful kind of poverty-fighting is spiritual," he said in an interview yesterday at his home in the hilly suburbs of Austin. "If I've been any use in this process, it's [been by] bringing up some history and showing how in this country we knew how to fight poverty, through compassion that's challenging and personal and spiritual. And we forgot that in the 20th century..."

... Mr. Olasky's book, *Compassionate Conservatism*, published last year, contains a laudatory introduction by the President and a reprint of a campaign speech in which Mr. Bush promised to bring religious groups into the government fold. "In every instance where my administration sees a responsibility to help people, we will look first to faith-based organiza-

tions, charities and community groups that have shown their ability to save and change lives," Mr. Bush said, adding that the greatest hope for the poor is not found in "reform" but in "redemption." In other words, religious belief.

In recent days, Mr. Bush has created an Office of Faith-Based Programs... [And] has promised to expand the scope of a 1996 law that allows people to redirect tax dollars to private charities and religious groups... Mr. Olasky and his followers believe that poverty is not caused by a lack of money, but by a lack of moral values on behalf of the poor. As such, they see welfare as a poor alternative to religion...

... Many Republicans and religious conservatives believe that the Office of Faith-Based Programs should be just the beginning. Jesse Helms, the Republican chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, said this week that foreign aid should be placed under the care of religious organizations....

... "This is on its face a kind of constitutional crisis. The merger of church and state in the White House represents a terrible reversal of the country's principles," said Barry Lynn, head of the Washington advocacy group Americans United for Separation of Church and State. The U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, he notes, contains the phrase "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," and the Supreme Court has interpreted this to mean that governments cannot direct funds to religious groups.

But Mr. Olasky and his followers believe separation of church and state is based on a misinterpretation of the Constitution. In his books, he offers a rereading of U.S. history in which such luminaries as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison are replaced by more spiritually minded early Americans.

"The government was meant to be secular in the sense of not preferring any religion. That's what the First Amendment was all about," Mr. Olasky said yesterday. "The founders would have seen what we've done to the public square not as neutrality, but as nakedness."

Excerpted with the kind permission of Doug Saunders

Before the 1980s, conservative evangelicalism generally steered clear of politics because it was dominated by the pre-millennial view that the world cannot be significantly changed or "saved" until the Second Coming of Jesus. This view has been transformed by an extraordinary theological shift, catalyzed by the profoundly theocratic political vision of the Christian Reconstructionist movement, and its variants, which we may broadly call "dominion theology." Dominion theology shook the evangelical church off the political sidelines in part by arguing that the apolitical views of most of evangelicalism in the 20th century was a betrayal of what has been called the cultural mandate, or the dominion mandate found in the book of Genesis. The compromise ultimately struck during the 1980s among conservative evangelical factions was that Christians are obligated to build the kingdom of God in so far as that is possible. This compromise has allowed evangelicals to agree to disagree about the timing and political significance of the Second Coming, while uniting over a general political mandate to "Christianize" government and public life along conservative lines.

The doctrine of "compassionate conservatism" popularized by Marvin Olasky epitomizes the percolating influence of this theocratic strain, even as it seeks to take the edge off traditional, uncompassionate business conservatism. Joe Conn, editor of *Church & State* magazine demonstrated that leading Reconstructionist writers and thinkers have influenced Olasky's thinking about compassionate conservatism.⁴⁹ Olasky is an elder in the Presbyterian Church in America, (PCA) a conservative splinter denomination and home to a number of Reconstructionist leaders. While some scholars continue to dismiss Reconstructionism as a "fringe" element within conservative evangelicalism, in fact, the

movement has been consistently, albeit quietly, integral to the genesis, ideological formation and maturation of the Christian Right.⁵⁰

The home schooling movement made a significant advance in the Fall of 2000, when Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Virginia opened as a four-year college with the explicit purpose of training home-schooled children in politics and government. There are plans for a law school, and possibly undergraduate programs in journalism, computer science and business. Located just outside Washington, DC, the school emphasizes hands-on experience as

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interns in government and advocacy organizations so students can jump-start their careers in the Christian Right.⁵¹ The college is a "ministry" of the Home School Legal Defense Association headed by Michael Farris. Farris follows in the footsteps of fellow Virginians Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell who established and still lead their own and much larger institutions of higher learning, Regent University and Liberty University.

The growth of home schooling reflects the increased popularity of separatism among conservative evangelicals. In 1999, Paul Weyrich, President of the rightist Free Congress Foundation, argued that conservative Christians have essentially lost the culture war and issued a provocative call for Christians to separate from secular insti-

tutions.⁵² The separatist nature of the home-schooling movement is consistent with, and predates his view. Weyrich called for "building our own schools, media, entertainment, universities, every institution that people need in order to lead good lives."⁵³ Weyrich was attacked for what he later gently called his supposed intention to "give up the fight." Writing in the Olasky-edited *World* magazine in response, Weyrich explained, "Instead of relying on politics to retake the culturally and morally decadent institutions of contemporary America, I said that we should separate from those institutions and build our own."⁵⁴ In many respects,

Weyrich was actually issuing a call for support for a well-established trend—the institutionalization of the Christian Right in all of its manifestations, with politics as a secondary aspect of the movement.⁵⁵

Ageing Empires

Even as key Christian Right institutions are stabilizing and growing, some of these same institutions are also enter-

ing a transitional period as the founding generation of leaders prepares to pass the torch. Leaders who in the 1970s were in their 40s and 50s are now in their 70s and 80s. Some are in poor health. Bill Bright, 79, plans to turn the presidency of Campus Crusade for Christ over to executive vice president Stephen Douglass, while he continues to chair the Board of Directors. Similarly, Beverly LaHaye, founder of Concerned Women for America named Carmen Pate as her successor, while staying on as Board chair. Pate's quick departure and the lack of a replacement, suggests an era of instability at CWA. Don Wildmon, 62, has had several heart attacks, and has turned over many responsibilities to his son, Tim. R.J. Rushdoony, the founder

and seminal thinker of the Christian Reconstructionist movement died recently. He had handed the reigns of his Chalcedon Foundation to Rev. Andrew Sandlin. Other aging leaders of major Christian Right organizations include Pat Robertson, 70; D. James Kennedy, 70; Phyllis Schlafly, 76; Robert L. Simonds, 75; Jerry Falwell, 67, Lou Sheldon, 66; and James Dobson, 62. Tim LaHaye, former Christian Right political leader and now best selling novelist, is 72.

Institutionalization notwithstanding, some of these organizations may decline just as they have risen—on the personality and vision of the founder. In the case of Pat Robertson's empire, his sons may take over. However Tim Robertson's stint as host of the 700 Club in the late 1980's when his father ran for president showed a fall-off in

The erosion of the mainline Protestant churches has created openings for both the Christian Right and the Catholic Church to contend for dominance as the "moral center" of American political life.

viewers and was financially disastrous. There is no heir apparent for the pugnacious Rev. Jerry Falwell, whose television ministry and Liberty University have suffered major financial difficulties for many years.⁵⁶



TAMPER-RESISTANT CAP

Driving Wedges in Mainline Protestantism

One of the emerging areas of influence of the Christian Right is in the mainline Protestant denominations affiliated with the National Council of Churches (NCC). Strong conservative evangelical currents and organizing by Christian Right organizations inside and outside the churches have eroded, if not displaced the historic role of these denominations as bastions of religiously-inspired movements for social justice at the center of American religious life. *A Moment to Decide: The Crisis in Mainstream Presbyterianism*, published in 2000 by the Institute for Democracy Studies, raises the possibility that the Presbyterian Church (USA) may become a conservative evangelical denomination.⁵⁷ The gridlock created by this battle is typical of what is happening in mainstream Protestantism. Conservative factions in the Presbyterian Church (USA) for decades have systematically undermined the social justice orientation of the denomination. Unable so far to prevail outright over Presbyterian moderates and progressives, Presbyterian rightists are campaigning to take over the denomination, even as some openly threaten to leave the church altogether, much as some GOP's conservatives threaten to bolt the party. In fact, a number of conservative

churches have left over the years to join the rightist schism, Presbyterian Church in America. (PCA).

For much of the twentieth century, the liberal Protestant churches served as the moral center of the culture, for example, playing a leading role in the civil rights movement, while conservative evangelicals were generally either silent or on the other side. Conservatives have waged an ever-widening guerrilla war on the mainline churches, creating gridlock within the ecumenical National Council of Churches and its member denominations while simultaneously seeking institutional influence and control. These struggles echo the conservative takeover of the formerly moderate Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and its subsequent alignment with the Christian Right. SBC has, among other things, purged its seminaries of liberals, reversed its historic advocacy of separation of church and state, banned the ordination of women as pastors, and declared that women should be in submission to men.

A major issue of engagement between the mainline denominations and the Christian Right is the status of homosexuality. In the summer of 2000, the United Methodist Church took stands against gay ordination and same-sex commitment ceremonies; the Presbyterian Church (USA) passed an

amendment to its church constitution banning "holy unions" that must now be ratified by its regional bodies, Presbyteries. The Episcopal Church approved a resolution that recognizes both married couples and couples living "in other life-long committed relationships" characterized by fidelity and monogamy. In each case, the struggle is far from over, and schisms and threats of schism abound. The erosion of the mainline Protestant churches has created openings for both the Christian Right and the Catholic Church to contend for dominance as the "moral center" of American political life.

An Emerging New Catholic Right

At the same time both the evangelical and Catholic Right are developing and promoting a long-term, fundamental approach to the practice of faith that links political involvement with faith itself. In this case, the Catholic Church is building on its own history and also benefiting from the Christian Right's recent efforts to create wider space for public expressions of religiosity in civil discourse. The success of these efforts was evident in the election year debates over expressions of religiosity by candidates for public office, sparked by the religious statements of Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), Al Gore's running mate. This could hardly have happened even a few years ago, but a shift in the political culture suggests that personal and unedited expressions of religious belief for political purposes are no longer considered unseemly. Indeed, the suggestion is that they are beyond reproach.

Historically, the Catholic Church in the U.S. has played a role in public life, but has been circumspect about that role for two reasons. First, the Catholic Church sought to avoid arousing nativist anti-Catholic bigotry and second, it has sought to avoid the appearance of serving as a monolithic and authoritarian voting bloc in a pluralist society. John F. Kennedy, while a candidate for

president, emphasized that he did not take orders from the Vatican, and thus reassured voters that his loyalties would not be divided between church and state.

Catholic politicians no longer feel obliged to distance themselves from church teachings in this way and would not dare to do so for fear of a harsh church response. Indeed, some bishops now denounce Kennedy-style Catholic politicians as "accommodationists" who fail to advance the directives of the church. "Four decades after John Kennedy," declared Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver in October

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2000, "too many American Catholics—maybe most—no longer connect their political choices with their religious faith in any consistent, authentic way."⁵⁸

Conservative appointees of Pope John Paul II now dominate the American Catholic leadership. Their influence is reflected in the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' pronouncement in 1998 urging Catholics to give primary consideration to a politician's stances on abortion and euthanasia when voting, over the many other, sometimes progressive public policy views of the church.⁵⁹ Another dimension of the conservative trend in Catholicism is, according to *The New York Times*, that the social activist priests of the 1960's and 70's are retiring, and are being replaced by younger priests who far more conservative.⁶⁰

These trends are accompanied by the

growth of powerful right-wing interest groups in the church, such as the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights; Opus Dei, a rightist prelature of the pope, which functions as an international order of priests and lay people; and Legionnaires of Christ, a Mexico-based rightist order that owns and publishes the conservative weekly newspaper, *National Catholic Register*, which has increased its visibility and ability to reach a far wider audience through convenience store newsstands like Dairy Mart and Seven Eleven. An Opus Dei priest was installed as auxiliary bishop of Denver in March 2001.⁶¹

The escalation of political intervention in the 2000 election reflects the new assertiveness of the Catholic Church hierarchy. For example, a pastoral letter from Archbishop Edward M. Egan urging the faithful to vote for antiabortion candidates for office at all levels was read from the pulpit in all 400 Catholic parishes in New York City on the Sunday before the 2000 election.⁶² Similarly, the Bishops of Massachusetts jointly declared, "Support and promotion of abortion by any candidate is always wrong and can never be justified."⁶³ The impact of such

statements is hard to measure, and exit polls indicated that Catholics favored Gore over Bush by 50-47 percent. Archbishop Elden Curtiss of Omaha, Nebraska complained, "the majority of Catholic people still do not make abortion a priority."⁶⁴

Meanwhile, Priests for Life, an action arm of the Pontifical Council on the Family, has emerged as a force in the antiabortion movement advocating a broad political agenda with abortion as its wedge, according to a study by the Institute for Democracy Studies.⁶⁵ PFL and its leader Fr. Frank Pavone waged a media campaign during the summer of 2000 calling on Catholics to mobilize politically,⁶⁶ but ultimately acknowledging the role of pragmatism in politics. Pavone told the conservative newsweekly *Human Events*: "Because voting is not a canonization, we may morally

vote for a less perfect candidate who is actually electable at the present moment, rather than a better candidate who does not have the base of support to actually get into office... If both candidates support some abortion, it is not wrong to vote for the one who is less supportive of abortion."⁶⁷ Pavone met with candidate George W. Bush and declared him to be "pro-life," while attacking candidate Al Gore as "an apostle for abortion."⁶⁸

These trends suggest that the church hierarchy will increasingly direct resources into political activism that will further the Catholic wing of the Christian Right. However, even as Catholic leaders escalate their engagement in public life their efforts may be undermined by trends in conservative Catholic theology. Theological tensions between Protestant fundamentalist factions and conservative Catholics inevitably surface when the alliance moves beyond a fairly narrow band of issues, notably abortion, homosexuality, and ending public education as we know it.

In 2000, the Vatican highlighted this tension when it issued a proclamation called *Dominus Jesus* that seemingly overturned four decades of ecumenical dialog and Catholic acknowledgement of the possible validity of other spiritual paths. It declared that Jesus and the Catholic Church were the only possible means of spiritual salvation, and that other Christian churches "are not 'churches' in the proper sense."⁶⁹ The decree denounces the "philosophy of religious pluralism," and emphasizes conversion over ecumenical dialog. The Vatican declared it a "definitive and irrevocable" doctrine of the church.⁷⁰ The reaction ranged from disappointment to outrage among Protestants—including evangelicals.⁷¹ The Vatican soon thereafter invoked *Dominus Jesus* to denounce a book supportive of religious pluralism authored by a Jesuit theologian.⁷² Such official religious supremacism is also reflected in Fr. Frank Pavone's teaching that "it is not just the church that must obey God. So does the state. So does the government. Separation of church and state doesn't mean separation of God and

state.... God and his law are the very foundation...of the state."⁷³

Pavone's attack on church-state separation is consistent with the Christian nationalism that is integral to the theology of most if not all of the leaders of the Christian Right, from Bill Bright and Pat Robertson, to the Promise Keepers and the theologians

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of Christian Reconstructionism. All see religious pluralism and constitutional guarantees of separation of church and state, as a bulwark that must be breached if any of the sectors of the Christian Right are to accomplish their aims. While the Catholic and Protestant wings of the Christian Right are united in many areas of public policy, it remains to be seen whether competing versions of the true religion will eventually undermine their collaboration. Indeed, the public debacle in which Christian Right leaders and White House officials

denounced one another over the role of the White House Office of Faith Based Initiatives is an excellent example of how religious supremacism interferes in any effort for equitable treatment for federal grant recipients and federal contractors.⁷⁴

Similar political ecumenism among fundamentalist factions working in coalition against women's rights generally, and reproductive rights in particular, in the UN system also has similar points of potential fracture. As was detailed in the Summer/Fall issue of *The Public Eye*, this growing international alliance is comprised of Mormon institutions, the U.S. Christian Right, the Vatican, and certain elements within theocratic Islam.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The Bush Administration will provide numerous opportunities for advancing the religious and political agenda of the Christian Right. The free market schemes that were pioneered in the past two decades—such as "outsourcing" government services to private businesses, deregulation, and privatization—are being replicated in the form of redirecting government social welfare resources to "faith based charities," proposals to finance religious charter schools, and vouchers for private religious education and even home schooling. These redistributive Republican policies are also part of the GOP's political pay-off to the Christian Right. The assignment of Cabinet and sub-Cabinet posts to Christian Rightists is but the tip of the iceberg of the political patronage a major Republican constituency may reasonably expect. As a major power within the Bush Administration, the Christian Right will enjoy exactly the benefits it needs to assure its further institutionalization at all levels.

Frederick Clarkson is the author of Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy, (1997) and of the forthcoming Profiles In Terrorism: Twenty Years of Anti-Abortion Violence, both from Common Courage Press.

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A RIVER OF HATE RUNS THROUGH US

Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons

Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort

(Guilford Press, 2000), 499 pp., including endnotes, bibliography, and index.

Two things are a hard sell these days: history and analysis. History because it's "old news" in an era when the information industry is so over-hyped that last week's news is old news. Analysis is hard to sell because, although it may explain something that is happening, it doesn't tell you what to do. Even schoolteachers despair of holding their students' attention and interest when they talk about the past or teach habits of abstract and analytical thought. As a result, we too seldom look to the past for lessons and models and we invest enormous importance in detailed observations without recognizing that the detail is only useful if we know what to make of it.

In *Right-Wing Populism in America*, the history and analysis are so thoughtful and so powerful that they may change the way you think about the Right's grip on U.S. politics. The authors argue that much of what we experience as "extremist" in right-wing rhetoric is not a startling deviation from mainstream thinking, but instead is imbedded in U.S. culture. Reviewing the history of repression by right-wing factions throughout U.S. history, we see that the powers that be were intimately tied to that repression and often have used the Right for their own purposes.

A common thread that runs through this process is the "producerist narrative"—a cultural myth that promotes the notion that America's strength is built on its productive citizens. These industrious producers struggle to prevail in the face of their antithesis, the lazy and immoral parasites who drag the country down with their corruption and dependence. On this basis, the Right has demonized and scapegoated minority groups and elite factions alike. Jewish bankers, Latino immigrants, welfare mothers, and drug addicts all become "natural" targets for the average American.

After reading this long and comprehensive book, it is no longer possible to think simplistically about the Right or to deny its generic roots in U.S. culture. First, the authors demonstrate that drawing distinct separations between the sectors of the Right can obscure the ideological affinities that exist across sectors. Strict attention to the names that journalists and scholars have given to various sectors of the Right, such as the "Christian Right" or "neoconservatives" can cause us to focus on each sector's center rather than its marginal actors, minimizing its links to other sectors and sometimes making it look more benign than it is.

Second, we can no longer see the Right as distinct from a "moderate mainstream." Right-wing populism draws on a culture of prejudice and bigotry that runs through American history. When the expression of bigotry is low-key, we are lulled into the wishful thinking that America has become more pluralist. But the hatred of "parasites" is in fact as present as ever and available to be mobilized, not from the extremes but from the center.

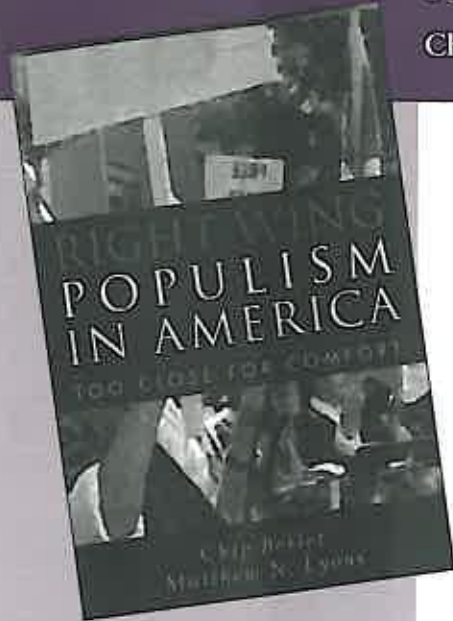
In telling the story of the Right's role and origins in U.S. politics, Berlet and Lyons give us an enormous amount of information, but also a new pair of eyeglasses through which to make sense of it all. You will be richly rewarded for making your way through this important book.

Jean Hardisty

"THIS LONG-AWAITED HISTORY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS HAS ARRIVED RIGHT ON TIME"

Right-Wing Populism in America TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

Chip Berlet of Political Research Associates and Matthew N. Lyons



"This long-awaited history and critical analysis has arrived right on time. The increased presence of the Right in this country has confused many people with its varied shapes and forms. This book gives the context needed for students and monitors of the Right to understand why these anti-democratic forces continue to thrive in our society."

—Suzanne Pharr, author of *In the Time of the Right*

Right-wing militias and other anti-government organizations have received heightened public attention since the Oklahoma City bombing. While such groups are often portrayed as marginal extremists, the values they espouse have influenced mainstream politics and culture far more than most Americans realize. This important volume offers an in-depth look at the historical roots and current landscape of right-wing populism in the United States. Leading political analysts Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons illuminate the potent blend of anti-elitist rhetoric, conspiracy theories, and ethnic scapegoating that has fueled many political movements from the colonial period to the present day. The book provides compelling insights into where right-wing populism comes from, how it has been fostered by the American social order, and how proponents of equality and social justice might work to diminish its influence.

"This book shines brilliant light on right-wing populist movements that have undermined democracy throughout United States history—and are still influencing politics and policies today."

—Holly Sklar, author of *Chaos or Community?*

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POLITICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Book Review

Martin Durham

The Christian Right, the far right and the boundaries of American Conservatism

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). Distributed in the U.S. by St. Martin's Press, pbk, 204 pp., with bibliography and index.

The installation of a born-again Christian as President of the United States after the 2000 election necessarily refocuses our attention on the Christian Right. One might ask why this particular President's religious faith is a matter U.S. citizens should be concerned with or about. After all President Carter was also a born-again Christian. Moreover, for all the secular trappings of the U.S. political system Presidents routinely and publicly display their particular confessional beliefs, from attending church to swearing their oaths of office on the Christian bible. It is significant now because of the role this President accords to religion in public, not just his personal life. And it is important because of the shared assumptions and interests between him and the Christian Right. This does not mean that George W. Bush and the Christian Right agree on all issues. Frederick Clarkson, in this issue of *The Public Eye*, points out that the relationship between Bush and the Christian Right is best described as an uneasy alliance. Nor does the Christian Right speak with one voice on all issues or often even on any one issue. This is one of the central tenets of Martin Durham's well-researched and comprehensive analysis of the Christian Right and the Far Right. Whereas Clarkson's current piece provides an insightful analysis of the current state of the Christian Right, Durham's book is a comprehensive

and perceptive study of the emergence and trajectory of the Christian Right and other right-wing groups from the 1950s onwards.

Durham begins by locating the emergence of modern conservatism in the United States with the debut of William F. Buckley's *National Review*. This event is significant because it was through the pages of this conservative journal that the effort



was made to weave together distinct strands of conservative thinking: the free market ideology underpinning libertarianism and economic conservatism, and the traditionalist, primarily Christian religious belief, ingrained in social conservatism. This fusionism was plagued by problems from the very start. Durham emphasizes throughout his work that those of us concerned with the U.S. Right and especially the Christian Right cannot make the mistake of reifying it and treating it as mono-

lithic. Since the beginning, he argues, the Right has been a contested terrain with different wings seeking to assert their voice and ideology. This has often meant that much as the Right seeks to include or exclude groups outside its ideological framework, it has also sought to bring in and keep out groups well within the boundaries of a right-wing ideology. The long-standing conflict between paleoconservatives and neoconservatives is a case in point. Thus Durham sees the Right as a dynamic rather than static social movement or coalition of movements that have broadly shared interests and agendas.

It is important not to frame the Right in terms of a single issue. Durham concedes that race and gender, for instance, are central issues it is concerned with. Yet, to frame a discussion of the Right's ideological foundations and policy agendas in just one or the other issue is to miss the larger picture. Like other social movements the Right, and even the Christian Right within it, are multi-issue movements. Therefore, he argues, it is not meaningful to simplistically assert that the growth of the Right is largely attributable to the "angry white male." While race continues to be a key issue it is evident that significant sections of the Right are alert to the problems and pitfalls of engaging in racial politics. Within important sectors of the Christian Right there is a conscious move towards what has been termed racial reconciliation. This is evident especially, but not only, in the Promise Keepers movement that deliberately showcases members of minority communities within its programs, events and publications. Yet, while the "do good," "feel good" approach that underlies this trend might on the surface appear to be a welcome change from previous behavior, it does not address the structural and insti-

tutional racism deeply embedded in U.S. society.

In terms of gender as well, while the Right as a whole is opposed to feminism and its critique of patriarchy, it is clearly evident that the movement is not made up of men alone. Durham asserts that women are a stronger source of support for the Christian Right than men. Women also play a role in the Patriot movement and other Far Right groups. And if one further deconstructs the gender gap between Democrats and Republicans, Durham tells us, a larger percentage of unmarried women as opposed to married women vote Democrat, with sizeable numbers of the latter group voting Republican.

Having set the ground rules for analyzing the Right, Durham then looks in depth at various issues that have claimed the substantial portion of its attention: gay rights, gun rights and abortion. Here too, Durham cautions against tarring the entire spectrum of the Right with one anti gay brush. Some of the previously hateful rhetoric has been toned down. And so now, instead of hating the sinners some Christian Right leaders call on their flocks to hate the sin, and pray for the sinner and attempt to save their souls with Christian doses of guilt, prayer, and discipline to cure the "disease" of homosexuality. This approach is more insidious. The Right can continue to be destructive even as it appears to the broader public to be compassionate. Still others frame gay rights as special rights. On the one hand they argue that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people do not need any legislated rights to ensure that they are not discriminated against. On the other, they use this as a wedge issue with ethnic or racial minorities by propagating the idea that gay rights somehow dilute the civil rights of racial minorities. Explicit bigots within the Christian Right, for instance, some Reconstructionists and Christian Identity groups, demand capital punishment for homosexuality.

The same careful distinctions are also drawn in Durham's analysis of the anti-abortion movement. As he points out, "The Christian Right is to be distinguished from other strands within conservatism because it foregrounds an evangelical sexual politics. . . . But the Christian Right is also different from the pro-life movement." This is because although the antiabortion movement and the Christian Right are on the same side of the fence on abortion, the Christian Right agenda is much broader than that of the antiabortion movement. The Christian Right itself, Durham contends, rose "partly as a defence of a threatened subculture, but also as an attempt to displace the hegemony of a rival belief-system." There are many theological strands within it that are fundamentally different and thus it does not help to lump them all together. Premillennialists and postmillennialists have different theological understandings and consequently often different political agendas. Durham also looks in detail at the influence of conspiracist theories on elements of the Christian Right, within particular individuals and subsequently movements led by them, such as Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition. This conspiracism highlights yet another tension—between a pro-Israel stand and antisemitism.

The author alerts the reader to the close yet complicated relationship between the Christian Right and the Republican Party. Although evangelicals seem to occupy a prominent place within the party, especially at state and local levels, the relationship is one fraught with tension on different planes, including, but not limited to, the differences between the Christian and secular Right. Differences and tensions are once again the theme in his assessment of Pat Buchanan as representative of the struggle to redefine conservatism arising from the old conflict between paleoconservatives and neoconservatives. While Buchanan's shrill campaigns have drawn various right-wing groups to him they have also set him

apart from others. This is markedly evident in the area of political economy where Buchanan has increasingly become an economic nationalist at cross-purposes with the Right's dominant free traders.

With all these differences, Durham sees three common strands that run through the entire Right. The struggle by Buchanan and the paleoconservatives to redefine the conservative movement is a struggle that other sectors of the Right are also engaged in. This of course means that certain groups can and will be included while others are excluded from this, what Benedict Anderson has termed "imagined community," based on shifting ideological and strategic fault lines. The second thread common across the Right is the idea that America must be taken back and related to it the third element that it—the Right—is dispossessed. Differences persist, however, in terms of how far it is to be taken back and from whom. For some it could be all the way back to the founding of the United States, whereas for others it is the period before the Civil War. For many in the Christian Right, it might actually be the 1950s. The aggressors vary too. Immigrant hordes, a godless secular elite, international bankers, feminists, lgbt people, the liberal media all appear as the demons in right-wing mythology. Differences within the Right, however, do not mask another significant commonality—that the Right's politics across sectors and ideologies portends a vision of society deeply disturbing and dangerous to those who struggle for a truly democratic, humane, and just political, economic and social order.

Durham's book provides a rich and interwoven account of the Right, particularly the Christian Right, the Patriot movement, and the Buchanan-led movement, that constantly alerts us to the similarities and differences, and the strengths and weaknesses of the Right. As he states, "openness to the mutual interaction between different currents on the right is a vital part of their com-

Continued on page 24

Eyes RIGHT

WELCOME TO THE RIGHT HOUSE

Grover Norquist, a conservative strategist and president of Americans for Tax Reform recently announced: "There isn't an us and them in this administration. They is us. We is them."

Source: Robin Toner, "Conservatives Savor Their Role as Insiders in the White House," The New York Times, 3/18/2001

"IT'S NOT GAY"

The American Family Association has produced a new video for the American family. The film rightly titled "It's Not Gay" attempts to "counter the overt pro-homosexual agenda moving into our public schools." According to the AFA, "Homosexual activists are pushing harder than ever to get society to view their behavior as normal." And this offensive is especially evident to AFA in the nation's public schools where school administrators and children are exposed to "influential pro-homosexual videos." To set the record straight, so to speak, AFA decided to produce a film "that highlighted the profoundly negative effects of homosexuality." And to "help school policy decision-makers realize that any decision to affirm homosexuality as normal or natural can have devastating effects on the lives of students who enter that lifestyle." Therefore, their film "provides an uncompromising yet compassionate look at the tragic consequences of the homosexual lifestyle, ... [including having] former "gays" and lesbians share their experiences in the homosexual lifestyle—experiences that produced emotional pain, brokenness and physical consequences including AIDS."

Source: American Family Association Alert 03/07/01

CONCERN FOR CHILDREN THE RIGHT WAY

Concerned Women for America is very concerned that "UNICEF strongly promotes the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and advocates freedom of thought, conscience, expression and privacy for children...." Because the CRC in effect "divorces children from their parents, giving them full autonomy over every aspect of their lives."

Source: Concerned Women for America Alert 03/01/01

TAXING TRADITIONAL FAMILIES

According to Ken Connor, President of the Family Research Council, "the current tax code is hostile to families, driving moms from the home to earn second incomes and penalizing marriage." Connor's solution lies in uncoupling all traditional married couples from this taxing penalty, "especially those who sacrifice a second income by having a stay-at-home parent."

Source: Family Research Council Press Release 03/01/01

SEGREGATION IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The Christian Broadcasting Network's Internet Media Development Director, Kevin Feldman, notes that the "gay agenda is to allow homosexuals to have equal access to the same places that heterosexuals have access to.... [That] would have homosexual men serving as scoutmasters, coaches, and in other positions that some may find as compromising, or situations that invite temptation and risk harmful and sometimes criminal

behavior. Because gay men are sexually attracted to other men and teenage boys in much the same way that straight men are attracted to women and teenage girls, doesn't it make sense to have the same restrictions in place separating gay from straight that we use to separate boys from girls?"

Source: Christian Broadcasting Network Daily Dispatch 02/20/01

Eye LASHES

“[I]t is not just the church that must obey God. So does the state. So does the government. Separation of church and state doesn't mean separation of God and state.... God and his law are the very foundation... of the state.”

— Father Frank Pavone of Priests for Life, from a 1996 Priests for Life audiotape.

Source: Priests for Life: A New Era of Anti-Abortion Activism, Institute for Democracy Studies, October 1999. See also, "Vote anti-abortion in Upcoming Election, Catholic Leaders Urge," Church & State, November 2000, <http://www.au.org/church/state/11006.htm>

"DANGERS OF SECOND-HAND SEX"

Gary Glenn, Director of the American Family Association's Michigan state unit reasons "[s]ociety imposes significant social and legal restrictions on—and spends millions of dollars urging Americans, particularly children, to avoid—life-threatening behavioral choices such as smoking, drug abuse, and drunk driving. This rational, logical, common sense commitment to protecting our children from life-threatening activity is irrationally discarded, however, concerning the deadly practice of homosexual behavior. With the ready compliance of negligently pandering, enabling politicians and bureaucrats—particularly in public schools—homosexual activists are dead set on teaching our children "it's O.K. to be gay."

Glenn points out that "The N.E. Journal of Medicine reports that men who smoke risk cutting 7.3 years off their lives... [while at the same time] the Oxford University's International Journal of Epidemiology reports: "Life expectancy at age 20 years for gay and bisexual men is 8 to 20 years less than for all men. If the same pattern of mortality continues, we estimate that nearly half of gay and bisexual men currently aged 20 will not

reach their 65th birthday." Judging by the number of years at risk, homosexual activity is up to three times deadlier than smoking. Society irrationally nonetheless condemns and restricts the lesser threat, while contemplating laws to protect and force acceptance of the greater.... As with smoking, homosexual behavior's "second hand" effects threaten public health."

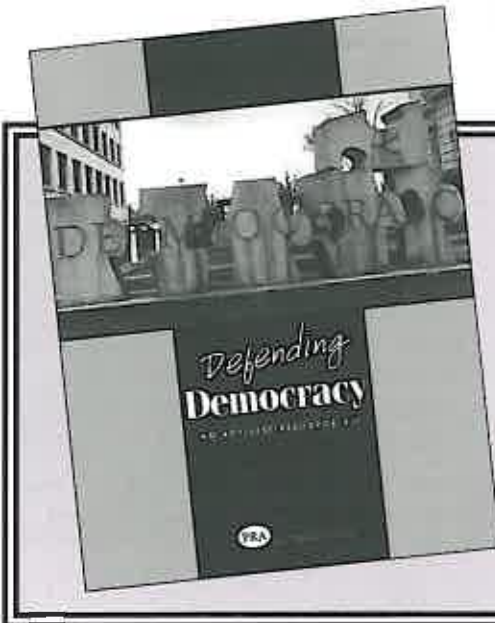
Source: American Family Association Michigan Affiliate.
<http://www.afa.net/affiliates/afamich121400.asp>

Compiled by Nikhil Aziz

LIMERICK

Old Bush had a son from big Texas;
 who catered to those who drove Lexus.
 Crying crocodile tears
 for the poor, and their fears;
 he gave his rich pals lower taxes.

Chip Berlet



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Book Review continued from page 21

prehension." But "[s]o too is an awareness of their fluidity." It advises against using terms such as "radical" or "extreme" lightly in describing the Right while emphasizing that they should be used where appropriate. And it alerts us to look beyond simplistic explanations such as the "angry white male" in situating the emergence and location of the Right in U.S. politics.

Nikhil Aziz

Devin Burghart ed.,

Soundtracks to the White Revolution: White Supremacist Assaults on Youth Music Subculture
(Chicago: Center for New Community, 1999) pbk, 106 pp., with index.

A project for "Turn it Down: A Campaign Against White Power Music," *Soundtracks to the White Revolution* traces the rise of White Power music both in the United States and internationally. It especially emphasizes the financial power that music

industry has gained, and its strength as a form of recruitment for youth. Running the gamut from skinhead music scenes in the US to the National Socialist Black Metal underground in Norway, *Soundtracks* provides both a history of the music itself and of the individual players involved. Additionally, the book draws on the history of White supremacist movements and current social and cultural trends to bring a comprehensive analysis to the strength and complexity of these music subcultures. The authors continually come back to the ways in which music has become a key youth outreach tool for White

supremacy, proving more relevant and accessible to young people than traditional politics. *Soundtracks* is at its best when discussing the complicated network of connections between various factions of White Power music, and when analyzing the ways in which these connections have worked to draw youth audiences that are not simply disoriented young people but "are gearing up for a real-life culture war." Quotes from White Power musicians, lyrics from skinhead bands, and glossaries of terms and images round out this very informative work.

Wendy Beauchamp



The Public Eye

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Political Research Associates
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