

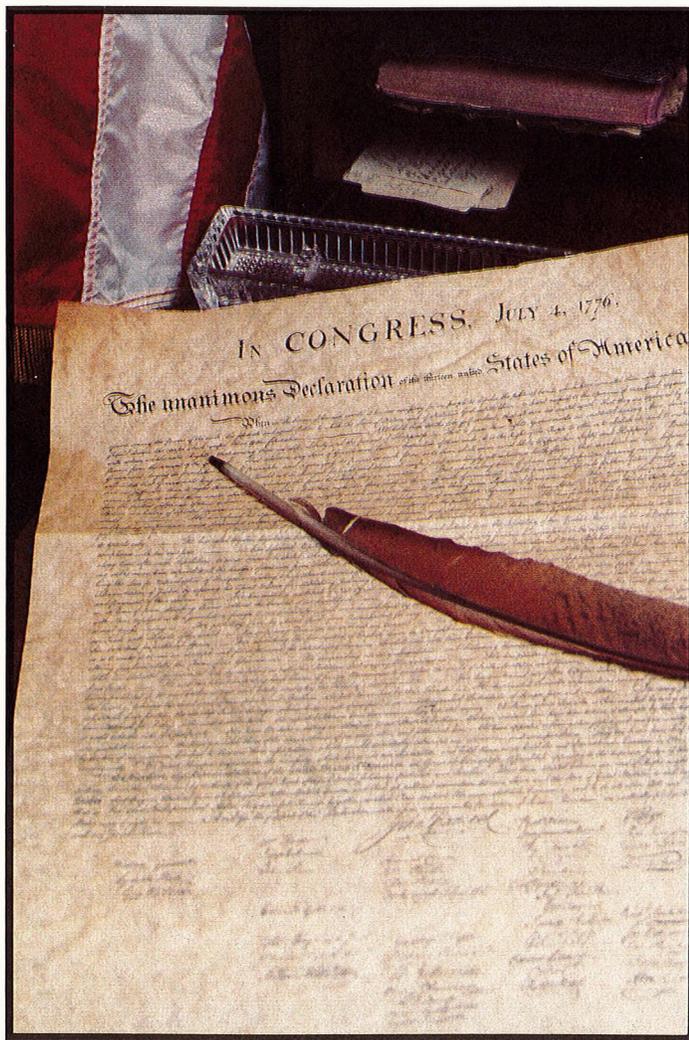
# LIGHT

Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

July-August 1982

## “Christian America”: Agenda of the New Religious Right

by Stan Haste



Despite all their disclaimers, leaders of the New Religious Right seek to make of the United States a Christian nation. Their desire to Christianize America is founded upon tragically flawed interpretations of both theology and U.S. history.

Theologically, leaders of the movement such as Moral Majority's Jerry Falwell and the Christian Broadcasting Network's Pat Robertson interpret the Bible—particularly the Old Testament—so as to place the U.S. in the mainstream of covenant theology.

Perhaps the most frequently misused and misapplied biblical text cited by these and other such leaders is 2 Chronicles 7:14: “. . . if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (RSV). That text, for example, was the theme of one of the largest rallies ever assembled in Washington, D.C., April 29, 1980. An estimated 250,000 persons at the “Washington for Jesus” rally heard speaker after speaker cite the text in calling the nation to return to God.

By applying the 2 Chronicles text to America rather than to the church, leaders of the New Religious Right have repeatedly equated the United States with the people of God, the “new Israel” which has inherited God's covenant with ancient Israel.

Historically, the movement's primary spokesmen have fallen prey to one of the most pervasive myths of American history, namely, that the nation's founders instituted a form of theocracy to govern the new nation.

With increasing frequency the founders' church-state views have come under attack, particularly Thomas

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# The New Religious Right

Politicized religion is not new. It is as old as Constantine, as ancient as the so-called Holy Roman Empire.

Today's New Religious Right is not new; but its new visibility, cultivated by an aggressive use of the electronic media, the printed page, and direct mail, has made it too prominent and pervasive to escape the current scrutiny it is now getting. Its actual influence, of course, may not be as great as its supporters have claimed or as its opponents have feared. It deserves our attention, however, because it now appears to pose some genuine problems both for religion and government.

Multitudes of good people, of course, are fed up and angry with those in government, in business, in academia, and in the communications media who undermine the family, despise patriotism, pander to pornography, defend the practice of homosexuality, condone adultery, support abortion as a means of birth control, wallow in permissiveness, and run roughshod over moral values. Society is sick. We are in desperate straits. We need solutions for our problems. Simple answers are often more attractive than complex ones even when they are wrong. When charismatic and persuasive personalities emerge in such situations with extravagant offers of quick deliverance, multitudes of good people are attracted to them and are persuaded to buy into their schemes of deliverance. Under such circumstances, the latter state of these good and morally concerned people can quickly become worse than the first. Caution is called for.

The shakers and movers of the New Religious Right are a threat to both religion and government for several reasons.

By and large these leaders have

embraced too narrow an agenda focusing on a few important moral issues while ignoring numerous other moral issues of equal or of greater importance.

Some leaders of the New Religious Right have appeared to many actually to pervert the Gospel by supporting government actions that in effect withdraw any real compassion for the "fatherless and the widows in their affliction" while extending their unqualified blessing to the rich.

At least some of these leaders give evidence of having their feet shod with the bad news of making war while avoiding the good news related to the things that make for peace.

The New Religious Right leaders generally support the throwing of vast sums of money at military problems while pressing for a virtually cold turkey withdrawal of money to alleviate social problems such as feeding the hungry, aiding dependent children, and strengthening public schools where nearly all poor children and 89 percent of all American children get their education.

They uniformly insist on a dogma (traced in significant part to the historic Roman Catholic teaching that every person including infants must be baptized or go to hell) that would force a twelve-year-old girl child, made pregnant by a drunk father's incest, to bear the baby; and they would then apparently prefer to deny adequate public funds with which the baby could be supported.

There is evidence that the more doctrinaire brain trusts of the New Religious Right are ignoring the lessons of history that when any church runs with the hounds it has to bark with them and that their identification with hard-core political extremists alienates the dispossessed, stifles evangelism, cripples missions, and retards

public righteousness.

Some in the leadership roles of the New Religious Right have been caught up in the idolatry of civil religion, rendering unto Caesar that which is God's, and thereby debasing revealed religion while denigrating authentic patriotism.

By identifying Christianity with the hard-line political ideology and economic doctrines currently in vogue in some circles, some New Religious Right leaders have been flying in the face of the principles of freedom and pluralism and personal accountability which, since this nation's founding, have been cherished by Americans in general and by Baptists in particular.

Some forces in the New Religious Right have demeaned the church's high calling by prostituting themselves to partisan political principalities and economic powers that are everlastingly seeking to use anyone and everyone they can, including the churches, to further their own vested interests and to advance their own special agendas.

It is therefore with a substantial sense of stewardship that this issue of LIGHT gives special attention to the phenomenon of the New Religious Right and to its significance for individual Christians, the churches, and the nation.

Several nationally known and highly respected individuals share their special insights and their unique experiences in this issue. Approaching their subjects from a variety of political persuasions, social perspectives, and cultural stances, these contributors to this issue of LIGHT share a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and a deep conviction that the Gospel is relevant to all of life.

Joy Valentine



## . . . Agenda

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Jefferson's image of a "high and impregnable wall" between church and state. The views of both Jefferson and James Madison, father of the U.S. Constitution, are now labeled aberrations of what was otherwise a conscious decision to make of the new nation a kind of "holy commonwealth" governed not by the laws of men but those of God.

Citing phrases in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution regarding divine providence, the movement's leaders are attacking the traditional views that the founders deliberately sought to make a clear distinction between the fundamental roles of both church and state and to move the new nation away from the Old World idea of a state church to religious pluralism.<sup>1</sup>

Before turning to specific issues on the agenda of the New Religious Right, one point generally overlooked in the current debate over the movement ought to be noted: The New Religious Right is actually not "new" at all. It is rather the most recent manifestation of a strain in American history that dates at least to the mid-nineteenth century.

As the nation prospered and expanded westward, some churchmen and indeed historians came to speak to America as a nation of "manifest destiny," set apart by God as a special people with a special role in human history.

That theme has been reinforced over and over not only by fundamentalists but by politicians, even presidents.

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"What is new about the New Religious Right is a newly discovered set of techniques to reach masses of people and convert them into true believers."  
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The most recent example came at this year's National Prayer Breakfast, an event which in recent years has come dangerously close to embracing national idolatry. Appearing at this year's event, President Ronald Reagan declared his view that America has been "set apart in a very special way, a country created by men and women who came here not in search of gold, but in search of God." He continued: "Sometimes, it seems we've strayed from that noble beginning. . . ."

Such views, repeated often by politicians of both parties, have echoed the sentiments of numerous precursors to the New Religious Right. Within the past generation, for example, the same theological and historical interpretations have been offered by extremists such as Carl McIntire and Billy James Hargis.

What is new about the New Religious Right is a newly discovered set of techniques to reach masses of people and convert them into true believers. Television and direct mail are the most potent methods.

Despite recent revelations that Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and others have vastly exaggerated their television audiences,<sup>2</sup> all observers are agreed that in terms of their ability to communicate with their supporters and evoke from them virtually instantaneous responses directed to public officials, the leaders of the New Religious Right are technologically far ahead of their opposition.

Another word of caution is in order. Despite the belated "coming out" of the Falwells and Robertsons with their sometimes questionable money-raising techniques, they are not to be condemned—but rather applauded—for entering the political arena. At the same time, the claim, particularly by Falwell, that he has been so condemned has been itself somewhat exaggerated.

## Moral Issues: Pro-Life, Pro-Family, Pro-Morality, Pro-America

The overarching moral agenda of the New Religious Right is perhaps best captured in a challenge issued constantly by Jerry Falwell: "Help me return this nation to moral sanity!"

In a *Newsweek* column ("My Turn," Sept. 21, 1981) Falwell wrote that Moral Majority Inc. was founded in June 1979 to "address four basic issues." Under those four headings is to be found the "moral" agenda of the New Religious Right. They are:

(1) "Pro-life" ("We believe all human life is valuable and deserving of legal protection. . . .")

(2) "Pro-traditional-family" ("While homosexuals should be free to live together if they wish, we oppose any law that would grant to homosexual couples the status of 'family' or qualify them as a legitimate minority.")

(3) "Pro-morality" (" . . . we oppose the illegal drug traffic and the spread of pornography.")

(4) "Pro-American" (" . . . we stand for a strong national defense, believing that freedom is the ultimate moral issue. We also support the nation of Israel and Jewish people everywhere.")

If other Christians and Christian groups are effectively to counter the Moral Majority and the other primary New Religious Right organizations, The Roundtable and Christian Voice, the selection of issues may be their most vulnerable point. Falwell seldom mentions social ills outside the parameters set forth in the *Newsweek* article. They appear month by month, individually or in clusters, in his monthly direct mail appeal for funds (a

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## . . . Agenda

(continued from page 3)

system entrusted, incidentally, to Richard Viguerie, the master fund raiser for most New Right organizations, secular and religious). To this writer's knowledge, Falwell has never consistently appealed for funds to combat other extremely important moral problems of the day such as unemployment, poverty, racism, world hunger, and the danger of nuclear annihilation. His is, in a word, a truncated moral agenda.

Falwell in particular is likewise vulnerable in his assumption that biblical morality demands one clear-cut solution for each social evil in today's world. Even though he claims that he does not believe "that individuals or organizations which disagree with Moral Majority, Inc. belong to an immoral minority," the very designation of his organization belies such a claim. Indeed it illustrates one of Falwell's most consistent traits—to engage in what George Orwell in his chilling *1984* calls "doublespeak." Falwell routinely denies statements previously made and positions previously taken. What is amazing is that until now he has largely gotten away with it.

The facile disposition of complex social ills with a simplistic right vs. wrong approach is another trait of the New Religious Right. To start at the top of Falwell's list, abortion is often a difficult, even traumatic, decision for women, their husbands, and other family members. Families which have grappled with it will attest to the need for the availability of abortion, at the

very least under conditions such as rape, incest, and instances where the mother-to-be faces severe, long-term health hazards if pregnancy is carried to term.

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". . . they apparently forget that the same God who judges individuals also judges nations as Lord of history."  
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Yet a human life amendment to the federal Constitution would deny abortion even under such difficult circumstances, limiting its availability to women whose own lives are in imminent danger.

Homosexuality is another moral issue easily disposed of in the rhetoric of the New Religious Right. It presents another instance of Falwellian doublespeak as well. While he has often claimed to respect the civil rights of homosexuals, once in the hearing of this writer going so far as to say he has no objection to their being public schoolteachers, he appeals in fundraising letters to the most blatant kind of homophobia.<sup>3</sup>

On the so-called "pro-morality" issues of drugs and pornography, the simplistic answers focus too narrowly on having police crack down on drug pushers and banning obscene materials from newsstands. Yet important constitutional principles, rights guaranteed all Americans in the Bill of Rights itself, necessarily complicate the way police may go about making drug-related arrests or closing down pornographic bookstores and theaters.

The fourth prong of Falwell's "moral

agenda for America," the strengthening of the national defense, illustrates most clearly the danger of exalting the nation to the place rightly claimed only by God himself. In calling for large increases in Pentagon spending, especially at a time when social service cutbacks pose a real threat to the survival and well-being of millions of poor Americans, leaders of the New Religious Right give away their view that the United States occupies a unique role in God's plan for the nations of the world. While they talk a lot about the judgment of God against individuals, they apparently forget that the same God who judges individuals also judges nations as Lord of history.

### Establishment of Religion Issues: Prayer in Schools, Tuition Tax Credits<sup>4</sup>

Since the Supreme Court first ruled in 1962 that state legislatures and local school boards may not require children in public schools to engage in devotional exercises, the issue of restoring prayer to the schools has been the rallying cry most often sounded by right-wing leaders. It has remained for two decades the most persistent and nettlesome issue for advocates of church-state separation.

The New Religious Right broadly subscribes to the view that the nation's "moral decline" was initiated by those 1962 and 1963 decisions.<sup>4</sup> Although church-state separationists view the cry for prayer in schools as yet another example of offering a simplistic answer to a complicated problem, that cry has unquestionably touched a sensitive nerve with many Americans. Recent polls show that fully two-thirds of the people favor "prayer in public schools," even if required by the states.

To their credit, Baptists gathered in their annual meetings at both national

and state levels have historically refused to follow public opinion on the issue, passing resolutions again and again which in effect support the Supreme Court decisions. Baptists by and large have recognized that turning the issue over to state and local officials will inevitably bring one result—the local prevailing religious majority will triumph in determining the kinds of prayers and religious readings permitted in public schools. Further, some of the strongest support of the Supreme Court's views on the subject comes from Baptists in parts of the country where they are numerically weak; they do not want their children exposed to religious teachings which contradict and undermine what they are being taught at home and church.

Ironically, leaders of the New Religious Right, while claiming they wish to improve the quality of public education by "returning prayer to the classroom," are at the same time leaders in the private Christian school movement.

An even larger irony is the demand of such spokesmen that the federal government subsidize their schools with tuition tax credits. In this drive, as in that for prayer in public schools, leaders of the New Religious Right point the finger of blame at the federal courts and a series of decisions declaring unconstitutional a variety of schemes to finance, either directly or indirectly, private sectarian schools.

Unlike their popular appeals for school prayer, however, they are having a much harder time convincing the public that the government should allow parents of children attending sectarian schools to subtract from their income taxes up to \$500 for each such child. And again, to their credit, Baptists have officially stood with the federal courts in insisting that public funds be spent only for public schools.

## Conclusion

A final word is in order to help place the New Religious Right in the larger context of the American body politic at this juncture in national history. The newest edition of the movement

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". . .Viguerie conceded that sometime in 1979 the handful of New Right leaders decided to tap a heretofore untapped pool of religious figures to its brand of politics."  
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known as the New Religious Right did not arrive on the political scene strictly of its own volition. It has arisen instead to its current place as part of a cynical design by veteran leaders of the extreme right wing of the American political spectrum.

Long-time leaders of the movement such as Richard Viguerie, editor of *Conservative Digest*; Paul Weyrich, president of the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress; Conservative Caucus director Howard Phillips; and Edward McAteer, executive director of The Roundtable in fact set out some three years ago to recruit prominent religious figures to their cause.

In a stunning admission made at the National Press Club less than two weeks before the 1980 elections, Viguerie conceded that sometime in 1979 this handful of New Right leaders decided to tap a heretofore untapped pool of religious figures to its brand of politics. Viguerie said that McAteer, a Southern Baptist layman who belongs to Bellevue Church, Memphis, was chosen to become the "point man" of what was termed the "preachers-into-politics" movement.

McAteer then set out to recruit prominent television preachers and pastors in more generally conservative denominations to the politics of the New Right. Among his early successes were Falwell, Robertson, and Southern Baptists James Robison, the Texas-based evangelist, and pastors Adrian Rogers of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, and Charles Stanley of First Baptist Church, Atlanta. Each of these has remained prominent in New Right circles, appearing as featured speakers at a variety of events sponsored by the movement.

Despite all the media attention garnered by these and others active in the New Religious Right, a final word

of caution must be offered. Recent developments, including some post-election analyses, a growing backlash against single-issue groups, criticism from such staunch evangelical leaders as Billy Graham and Carl F. H. Henry, and several polls argue that the New Religious Right may have already peaked.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the soundest and most concise advice yet offered on how to respond to the perceived threat posed by leaders of the movement has been offered by Martin Marty: "Don't underestimate them. But don't overestimate them either."<sup>6</sup>

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>For a thorough discussion of the issue, see Franklin H. Littell, *From State Church to Pluralism* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1962).

<sup>2</sup>See Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann, *Prime Time Preachers* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., Inc., 1981).

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., "We're Losing the War Against Homosexuality!" (Fund raising letter dated Aug. 14, 1980).

<sup>4</sup>See John W. Baker and Rosemary Brevard, *Religion in the Public School Classroom* (Washington: Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, 1982, rev. ed.).

<sup>5</sup>Jim Castelli, "Has the Christian Right Peaked?" *Church & State*, October 1981, 17-18.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Marty, "Twelve Points to Consider About the New Christian Right Wing," *Context*, July 15, 1980, 1-5.

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# The New Religious Right and American Government

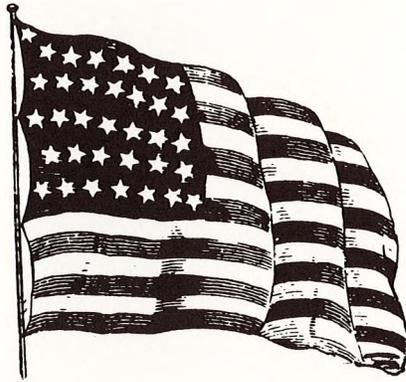
by Senator Mark O. Hatfield

In the 1980 election and since, new political forces have mixed religion and politics in a sometimes dangerous, and even heretical, way.

There has been much analysis about what caused this unusual but not altogether isolated incident in American political history. Certainly, it is not to be totally unexpected that people of moral concern would rise up in a time of wholesale assault on traditional value structures. Further, the movement was energized by a confused spirit coming from disconnected people without emotional and spiritual strength to withstand the demands of a fragmented and frightening culture. During the period preceding the 1980 election, Dr. Gallup discovered that Americans were far more concerned about diminishing "family life, health, and peace of mind" rather than material concerns. The New Religious Right's response to this appeared to be that "the country is going to hell. . . and the Christian responsibility is to save it by electing born-again people and legislating morality."

This modern emergence of ideological Christians is not dissimilar to the mobilization of Evangelical Christians in James A. Garfield's Presidential campaign in 1880. In Indiana alone, 25,000 Christians were mobilized by 400 preachers, and one-quarter of a million pieces of literature were distributed extolling Garfield's Christian virtues. Fortunately, Garfield took charge of his campaign and made most of the crucial policy and political decisions, and the result was a triumph of personal conciliation, both religiously and politically.

After the election, a close friend of his indicated the expectations of Christian friends that Garfield use his appointing powers to place evangelicals in the government. In



response, he said: "Our people must not use me as the promoter of the views of our brethren. While I cheerfully maintain my own relations to them, I want it understood that it is the broad general views and not the special particulars of our faith that I desire to promote. . . . Let us not flaunt ourselves in the face of the American people, as though we had made a special conquest, but, by modesty and moderation, bear our part worthily and take whatever resulting advantages may come."

## Characteristics of Democracy

Canadian college professor Robert Allan Cook points out that there are certain essential characteristics that a democratic society must have to keep it from degenerating as did the ill-fated Weimar Republic in post-World War I Germany.

First, there must be resistance to *atomization*, which reduces to a mass movement frightened and isolated people who no longer identify with traditional values. Fearful souls flocked to the Nazis, and even industrialists and bankers contributed great sums to Hitler because they saw him as a cohesive force in an otherwise impotent world. A

breakdown of pluralism and individual values in our present day, I believe, has led to mass movements which offer quick and simplistic solutions.

Secondly, if a society is to remain strong, it must resist the *apathy* that was the undoing of the German Weimar Republic, in which the far right and the far left were making countercharges about its legitimacy, while the vast middle class stood apathetic and apologetic. It is of great concern to me that a growing near-majority of Americans ignore elections. Further, only a small minority of Americans, not to mention committed church people, is involved in a constructive way in the political process. The counter-productive nature of extremism has been shown in the inability of the zealots involved in the pro-life debate to accomplish a reasonable legislative alternative. Instead, tremendous resentments and recriminations have resulted, even among those who agree, like I do, that abortion is a moral tragedy.

Thirdly, a strong democratic society must create an atmosphere in which people's *hunger for wholeness* is satisfied. Tormented souls are not finding peace in the biblical sense through astrology, the occult, Eastern religions, or the simplistic notions of certain New Right religionists who, in my view, are creating an anti-biblical theology of power politics. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, as recorded in Luke 19, because the people had a mistaken notion about peace being established through political intrigue. Jesus knew then, as we know now, that peace comes by restored relationships and sacrifice for one another. For our democracy to remain strong, we must participate together in re-formulating an effectual national framework that will prevent us from becoming hopelessly polarized.

## The Danger of Civil Religion

With these characteristics in mind, I do not view the political involvement of conservative Christians with alarm. In fact, for my thirty years in public life, I have sought as a primary goal to involve more of my evangelical friends in participatory democracy.

What I do view with alarm is the seeking to shape Jesus into the Messiah of a particular political ideology. Utilization of religion to anoint a certain political issue and equate it with the "right" position is a frightening and heretical misappropriation of the power of the risen Lord. This stance leads to an equating of political issues with one's morality, ethics, and relationship to God. If one does not agree with a person of this mindset on particular litmus test issues, then salvation is called into question. This has often been my experience, as I had my faith called into question during the Vietnam years. Now in the Reagan Administration, my dissent about the obscene malappropriation of resources toward technologies that destroy life rather than to those which protect and nurture life once again inspires questions such as, "Who are you to question God's anointed, the President?"

But whether it is my position or someone's who is more conservative than I, it is at least questionable, and possibly reprehensible, to baptize issues with religious ideology. To defeat Caesar by becoming Caesar is what Jesus rejected when he mourned Jerusalem's lack of vision. Jesus refused to become Caesar. Instead, he laid down his life for his friends as a spiritual Savior, so that people's hearts could be open to one another. Christ's way was demonstrated to us as being a way of love. He forsook both extremes as they were represented by the Zealots and by the Sadducees. He condemned the Sadducees, who were blinded to their injustice, and he resisted the Zealots, who believed that injustice had to be met with violence.

He proclaimed the way of love. His very physical force upon the Cross was an exemplification of God's love. His life demonstrates that God's Kingdom does not come through the world's means of political power.

We must be very pointed that any movement that substitutes a false gospel has to be called to account. There has been some maturing already among the leaders of the far

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**"Much more than a moral majority, we need a redemptive minority of people who are willing to transcend differences to carry out the biblical imperative."**

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right in not persisting in calling people's religious commitments into question because of differences on political issues. I have had very healing conversations and times of prayer with several of the leaders in the movement, and I not only understand their concerns, but, find myself in complete agreement on some issues. However, an increasing number of pastors and parishioners have demanded of me that I affirm a certain conservative political ideology. I often respond with a gentle reminder that the classic question that provides the only true test for Christians is, "What think ye of Christ?" The Apostle Paul states that "the secret is simply this: Christ in you bringing with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come."

Until the Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven, Christian people are going to differ on political issues, and it is legitimate to take opposing positions, just as Senator Sam Nunn and I do on military questions. A movement that assesses one's salvation on any basis other than a biblical one is apostasy, pure and simple.

It is essential to recall that the Religious Right movement includes many sincere and concerned people, who have as much right to organize as any other group, and it is only fair to note that they are not the first group to embrace single-issue politics. Many critics of the Moral Majority and the

Christian Voice single-issue approach were, in fact, pioneers of it, and are crying in alarm about violations of principles of separation of church and state when they themselves have been similarly criticized in the past. There is no one group that is ever going to speak on behalf of all evangelical Protestants and Catholics, or Christians generally. In fact, many evangelicals share my concern that

the sins of militarism and materialism are as grievous as abortion, pornography, and a weak defense. Because of the diversity here in this country, no movement is going to be monolithic.

Much more than a moral majority, we need a redemptive minority of people who are willing to transcend differences to carry out the biblical imperative. The need today is for more sacrificing followers like Mother Teresa, who are willing to lay down their lives for one another rather than be power brokers in ecclesiastical trappings. History has taught us that we must be vigilant about zealots in any camp who would diminish our freedoms for the sake of their definition of morality. Iran is only our most recent illustration of the dangers of that approach.

In addition to reshaping theology to sanctify a political agenda, another danger that I see is the tendency to idealize American history to undergird a particular point of view. Many conservative Christians have, I think, unwittingly exaggerated the role of religion in American history, making America God's nation of the New Covenant. An organization called Citizens for God and Country claims exclusivity for the Christian religion and purports that all others are "against the law." It is good to remind ourselves that many of our Founding Fathers were Deists, children of the Enlightenment, not the Reformation.

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## . . . Government

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Many people are pleading for us to “return to our Christian roots” with prayer in schools and other specific legislation. This becomes dangerous when idealized history becomes spiritual justification for blind patriotism. An arrogant intolerance is possibly the most frightful side of this “Christianizing America” movement. Practitioners quote the Proverb, “When the righteous rule, the people rejoice; when the unrighteous rule, people mourn.” We should add for a caution that when the self-righteous rule, people are oppressed.

But no matter what the valid criticisms, we cannot and must not totally dismiss or scorn the Christian wing of the New Right. The movement is significant on at least three levels.

**Politically**, it now has proven its potential as a powerful force in America. The analysis is mixed. They were not the determining factor, but they were one important factor in the election of Ronald Reagan. Their efforts, like Garfield’s friends, were praiseworthy in their ability to get voters registered.

**Spiritually**, the credibility of the Christian church is at stake in the world today; and the identity of Christianity in a modern, complex world is being envisioned with the help of the Religious Right. Jesus was, and expects us to be, faithful representations of the Kingdom of God as we stand with people in their suffering, confusion, poverty, and need for a true biblical vision. Certainly the whole Gospel is being preached with greater regularity in

churches of all theological-political persuasions because the gauntlet has been laid down by our right-wing friends.

And **socially**, profound questions are raised for not only Americans, but all of Western society. There is no question that the movement is the symptom of a deep sense of disenchantment with things as they are. It gives us pause over the similarities with other troublesome times, as in Germany. It raises questions about the moral and spiritual basis of our social order that cannot survive without some legitimation.

### The Dilemma We Face

We have today, in the United States, little cohesive, moral philosophy in our social order. As Meg Greenfield has observed: “Government-grown values are, by definition and necessity, spiritually deformed. They tend to be lowest-common-denominator generalities or pressure-group-cooked outrages. But we have become so tolerant, we have refused to view practically any indecency, outrage or pathological assault on our sense of rightness in any way but a civil liberties problem.” The American creed has become a benevolent unitarianism that provides neither protection nor healing for our assailed spirits. The American civil religion, of course, has no confession of Jesus Christ as ultimate authority over all; there is no repentance of sin or promise of salvation. Biblical standards of justice and righteousness are little known and even less practiced. We have embraced an idolatrous and exclusive American deity that is an object of national folk religion, devoid of moral content. Even the church, in many ways, is captive to our hedonistic culture. The separation between church and state in our Constitution did not, until very recently, come to be interpreted that the state had to be antiseptically clean of all religious qualities. What is traditionally understood is that the

state must not give unfair advantage to one denomination over another. The assumptions of the framers of the Constitution were pluralistic, not secularist. We know that from the time-honored and respected tradition of exemption from taxation for religious organizations and the appointing of chaplains in our public institutions. But because of a lack of historic definition about “church-state” relations, individuals, churches and legislative bodies have been hesitant effectively and appropriately to intertwine biblical imperatives with policy debate. And if there is no relative consensus about what constitutes meaning in a nation, then it must be asked whether anything other than a dictatorship can result.

“Despotism may govern without faith, but liberty cannot,” de Toqueville observed. We cannot remove religion from society without grave consequences, but neither can we embrace an idolatry that reduces religion merely to the glue of society.

We of orthodox Christian faith who are highly committed to having it impact both our corporate life and our personal life are impaled, it appears, on the horns of a dilemma: on the one hand, the idiocy of saying that faith has no impact or, on the other, the idolatry of embracing state religion. There is no doubt in my mind that the present rise of the Christian Right is pushing us, effectively, toward a resolution of this dilemma, or, at least, toward a desire to live lovingly and at peace in the ambiguity of our “answers” and “solutions.” Joining the New Right choir there is a growing chorus among non-evangelicals in our land that we have “lost our virtue” because we have disconnected ourselves from our theological, although pluralistic roots, and embraced a secularism that has brought us to the edge of unrestrained decadence.

Kathleen Kennedy Townsend wrote in *The Washington Monthly* that “we should accept the idea that virtue is not relative at all. It is very definite, it means love, generosity, and responsibility, not only for yourself

and your family, but for other people. It means private citizens and public officials who have the honor and courage to do what is right, whatever the risk. It means not simply the ability to distinguish right from wrong, but a restless quest to do good and seek justice. Until we start talking about it and teaching it in those terms, until we realize that virtue really does *mean* something, we won't stop crime or callousness or any of the other symptoms of moral disintegration." She goes on to point out that one does not have to be a "self-righteous dogmatist" in order to realize that religious belief could be a foundation for virtuous action.

It has long been my contention that

without a deep spiritual renewal, much like the Great Awakenings of our history, we will not have the substance to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly after our God." Without the compassionate heart that comes to institutional structures through caring and committed people, the central function of government to provide and protect the basic needs of the poor and the weak, and to limit the greed and power of the strong, will not be possible.

If the alternatives are as I have described, then our situation serves to underline that it is no longer an exaggeration to say that spiritual revival is the key to physical survival. In this situation, nothing is more

dangerous than a false, exclusivistic, extreme, and divisive religion, but nothing is as necessary as true biblical religion that reaches out to the needs of all the people of our society.

**Mark O. Hatfield, Senator (R) from Oregon, was first elected to the United States Senate in 1966. He currently serves as Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Senator Hatfield is a committed Christian, a deacon, and an active Baptist churchman who has long been an active spokesman for peace with justice and for Christian involvement in politics.**

## Christians in Politics: An Interview with Carl F. H. Henry

**Carl F. H. Henry was editor of *Christianity Today* from 1956 to 1968. He currently is Lecturer-at-Large for World Vision International and resides in Alexandria, Virginia. Henry is the author of many books, including *God, Revelation and Authority*, (Word) now in four volumes.**

**LIGHT: You have said that "spiritual rebirth bestows no special competence for resolving political specifics, although it should assure a high level of moral integrity." What do Christians have to contribute to the political process?**

**HENRY:** Much every way. First, by clarifying to the world who is truly the Lord, King, Fuhrer of the universe, and by calling mankind above all else to knowing and doing God's revealed will. This Christians do best through the church's vital existence in the world as the New Society ruled by the crucified and risen Jesus—a body of humanity that insists upon obeying God above man. In a fallen society, God wills the church for certain

objectives, through evangelism as a means, and civil government for other objectives, through legislation or coercion as the means. Civil government therefore has a *necessary* but *limited* function (against chaos and anarchy on the one hand and against totalitarian rule on the other). Christians should affirm that God is the source of justice and of universal human rights. They should no less affirm, but through voluntary evangelism as the means, that God is the fountain of mercy who provides a salvation without which all men are doomed in their iniquity, forgives the sins of the penitent, and gives a new power for righteousness. A just political order presupposes both a constitution as a relatively stable standard by which successive regimes or administrations are to be judged, and a transcendent standard of justice by which all constitutions are judged. Christians should promote respect for law, therefore, without promoting an idolatry of law. They should be on the side of government and law and order as the ideal framework through which God seeks to promote earthly justice

and peace in a fallen, pluralistic society. Christians should pray for rulers and for national righteousness, be exemplary citizens, promote justice in public affairs, and serve with integrity in public office as opportunity arises.

**LIGHT: Why is it important for Christians to be involved in politics?**

**HENRY:** If godly people do not become involved they will inevitably be ruled by the ungodly. Moreover, Christians are to support civil authority not only for expedience sake but for conscience sake (Rom. 13). They are to pray for (not against) rulers, and are to promote public righteousness. Justice, moreover, is not self-defining; Christians can illumine the debate over the public order in terms of imperatives enunciated by the biblically-revealed God of justice.

**LIGHT: How relevant is the theocratic model of government seen in the Old Testament for Christians trying to exert an influence on American government?**

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## . . .Politics

(continued from page 9)

**HENRY:** America is not a covenant nation as was ancient Israel. Since New Testament times, God has willed the dispersion of believers throughout the politically pluralistic nations for the sake of world witness and service. The Old Testament reveals not only the universal principles of social ethics but also stipulates specific legislation for the theocracy. Some of that legislation may have value beyond the Old Testament, but not on a covenant-nation basis. The alternative to theocracy is not secular political relativism, unbridled self-interest, and military expansionism. America has had a providential role in modern history, and has been a source of blessing to many nations; presently her future is clouded.

**LIGHT:** Is government in the New Testament more pluralistic than in the Old Testament? What insights do you draw from the New Testament to guide Christians?

**HENRY:** In the sense that there are now more than 150 nations, the political arena is clearly more pluralistic; in New Testament times the Roman empire was the world power. God wills civil government but reveals no single preferred form. The millennium involves a beneficent monarchy. But since in a sinful society accumulated power invites corruption, democracy is preferable, for in principle the masses can then determine their own destiny. Yet democracy has been in retreat in this century as the shadow of totalitarian tyranny falls over the modern world and as it staggers under internal

weaknesses, through its elevation of majority will over the will of God, and through the pressure of disparate minorities. Christians are called to live in many contexts. They should not be anti-government but rather pro-justice. Thus they topple governments only indirectly, as government places itself in the service of injustice, although civil disobedience has apostolic precedent when the state requires the church to do what God forbids.

**LIGHT:** Tell **LIGHT** readers what groups and individuals you associate with the term “New Religious Right.” Which ones are the most important in 1982?

**HENRY:** Moral Majority, Religious Roundtable, Christian Voice, and *Conservative Digest*. Moral Majority is probably most significant, though the number of financially supportive contributions is considerably less than the constituency numbers frequently bandied about.

**LIGHT:** The influence of the New Religious Right on the 1980 presidential election is a widely discussed topic. Some have claimed it is responsible for Reagan’s success. Jerry Falwell has said that the perception of that influence is much greater than the reality. How important do you think the New Religious Right was in Reagan’s success?

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“Christians are called to live in many contexts. They should not be anti-government but rather pro-justice.”  
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**HENRY:** It was clearly a factor in the election of Ronald Reagan. It counted *doubly* because of a conservative, evangelical defection from President Carter and an aggressive switch to candidate Reagan.

**LIGHT:** A frequent criticism of the New Religious Right is a strong tendency in the direction of single-issue politics. Is this a valid criticism? Is a comprehensive political program necessary?

**HENRY:** Sometimes single issues

are of immense importance; that can be said of the abortion issue, for example, although even that issue might better have been perceived as part of a cluster of issues bearing on preservation of the family as the basic unit of society. A comprehensive political philosophy is even more imperative than a comprehensive program. The slaughter of a million fetuses a year, mostly in the interest of birth control, is a horrendous outbreak of pagan immorality. But the political left, it should be noted, has been as prone as the political right to promote single issues.

**LIGHT:** What do Christians getting involved in politics need to learn?

**HENRY:** That political candidates even for the presidency now run on one platform and after election, readily forget their promises; that effective political involvement begins at the precinct level; that the providence of God is a neglected factor in political considerations; that the paucity of leadership may reflect the judgment of God; that biblical principles sometimes accommodate a variety of inferences; that statute law is fashioned in an arena of political compromise and is vulnerable to revision; that political engagement is not a matter of bringing in the kingdom of God; that Christians ought nonetheless to be politically

active to the limit of their competence and ability.

**LIGHT:** Is secular humanism as much of a consistent philosophy as some of the religious critics of public schools say it is? Are the public schools really inculcating a “religion”?

**HENRY:** The public schools by and large engender the notion that religion is irrelevant. Many teachers are not secular humanists; some are devout Christians. But the philosophy that more influentially than any other gets

through the classroom today is secular humanism: the reduction of reality to space-time processes and events, the transiency of all existence, the relativity of all ideas and ideals to their cultural setting, and man as the definer of truth and the good. To be sure, the university world has gone anti-intellectual at the student level. Students embrace humanism less as an intellectual commitment than they do as an excuse for defecting from the inherited religion of the West. But many professors are astounded because despite the classroom orientation thousands of students, despite the humanistic mind-set, have become evangelical believers. My guess would be that on balance the secular universities more effectively communicate humanism than many of our religious colleges succeed in communicating biblical theism. Many humanists, incidentally, are not reluctant to regard humanism as a religion.

**LIGHT: Senator Helms has said that he would regard as voluntary prayer a teacher writing the words to a Catholic prayer on the board and asking the students to join the teacher in reciting those words. Do you agree?**

**HENRY:** If they join voluntarily I suppose it is voluntary. But prayer won't help matters much if it becomes a Jewish prayer on Monday, a Catholic prayer on Tuesday, a Lutheran prayer on Wednesday, a Southern Baptist prayer on Thursday, a humanistic prayer on Friday, or if it becomes a least-common-denominator alternative through the week, or no prayer on Sunday or at midweek prayer meeting. There should be opportunity for voluntary prayer, but not officially-stipulated prayers.

**LIGHT: Why does the New Religious Right have such a strong pro-Israel emphasis? Do you see any dangers in it?**

**HENRY:** It considers the return of Jewry to Palestine a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, sees Israel as the one sure bulwark against Soviet expansion in the Near East, and

emphasizes that the Bible promises blessing to those who befriend God's covenant-people. The dangers are clear. Some New Right statements are less critical of Israeli policy than of American policy. While Jewry could

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**“. . . what is forgotten is that God will judge the injustices of Israel no less than those of any other nation. . . .”**  
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hardly survive in Palestine unless Israel survives, what is forgotten is that God will judge the injustices of Israel no less than those of any other nation, that the provocations between Israel and her Arab neighbor nations continue to invite a horrendous confrontation, and that the failure of the Jew to recognize Jesus as Messiah is from the New Testament standpoint a matter of culpable blindness.

**LIGHT: Jerry Falwell identifies a pro-Israel emphasis as a part of the pro-America agenda for Moral Majority. Yet he says that the Moral Majority is strictly political and not religious. Do you think these claims are consistent?**

**HENRY:** Jerry Falwell wears numerous hats and it is often unclear which one he has just put on. He has modified some positions, however, when implications and inconsistencies are clarified. Instead of putting fellow evangelicals on a "hit list" over their isolated or objectionable differences from ours, we ought first to probe areas of mutual agreement, concentrate on commonalities, and put differences in this larger perspective.

**LIGHT: Do you see this pro-Israel emphasis and eschatological views as reasons for support of President Reagan's current military buildup?**

**HENRY:** Possibly. But the big factor is the expansionism of the predator powers—the Soviets and Afghanistan, Cuba, and so on. The United States should in the present world condition be second to no power militarily. But massive military budgets place an immense burden on modern nations; they continually

damage themselves and provoke each other by this endless escalation. A bilateral halt in the arms race involving on-site verification should be an international objective.

**LIGHT: Is the current military buildup moving us closer to war or peace?**

**HENRY:** Who but God knows? But if to war, we had best be ready. The cost of not being prepared will be higher than the cost of being prepared. The Eastern European peoples are paying an almost unbelievably high price for their totalitarian subjection; read Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipeligo*.

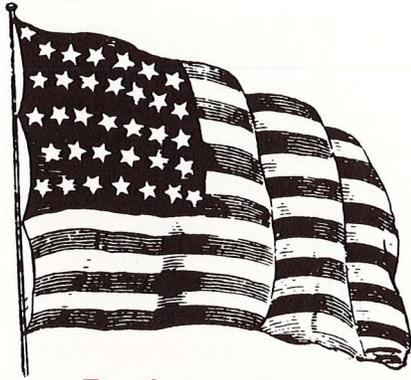
**LIGHT: Jerry Falwell, with his strong pro-Israel perspective, argued against the AWACS sale. Billy Graham, who has identified working for peace as the second priority for his ministry (behind a continuation of his evangelistic preaching), apparently sought to counter this strong pro-Israel view in the Senate vote. How do these two major Christian voices arrive at such different conclusions?**

**HENRY:** The question seems somewhat loaded. Billy Graham is not for unilateral disarmament; Jerry Falwell thinks the AWACS sale works against stability and peace. It's best to let them explain their reasons first-hand, rather than to run the risk of misjudging motivations and intentions. I suspect that neither Graham, Falwell, Henry nor Foy Valentine has infallibility in this area, and I know of no verse even in the Amplified Bible that settles the matter.

**LIGHT: Why do you think the New Religious Right has so strongly identified with conservative fiscal policy?**

**HENRY:** Because unless a sound monetary policy is achieved, America will go down the drain economically and the other nations with it. Inflation

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## . . .Politics

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is a moral issue. A sound dollar is one of the best ways to help the unemployed, the poor, the elderly, the working class, and the nation as a whole.

**LIGHT: Do you think the emphasis upon voluntarism, charity, and the private sector is a realistic way of dealing with poverty and welfare?**

**HENRY:** It surely is the option that apostolic Christianity exercised in reaching out to needs of the household of faith and then beyond. It should say something significant to a nation and to the world that a godly people respond compassionately to the needs of the congregation. There should be a job corps in each of the Christian churches, concerned to probe work opportunities for unemployed members. To be sure, Christians have high motivations for reaching out beyond the household of faith to others in need: God made all humans in his image, and Christ died for sinners everywhere. But responding to destitution is not a duty of Christians only but of every man everywhere. The masses in the great centers of destitution—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia—are Muslims and Hindus. It is scandalous that petrol-rich Arab oil sheiks drop millions of dollars in a single night at the gaming tables in London, and that Hindu leaders oppose aid to the lowest caste as an attack on established religion, culture, and social stability. The government of India sells grain to Russia. Social action and

evangelism are therefore both needed, to change human motivation and compassion. To be sure, government must be involved where voluntarism fails, but it should not be a first resort, and all governments would ideally be involved on some justly proportionate basis.

**LIGHT: It is obvious that Christians differ widely in what they think Christian involvement in politics means. How specific is the Bible in providing insights for Christians to follow? Does it have a word for us on issues like nuclear power, building missiles, and caring for the poor in our society?**

**HENRY:** The Bible gives us revealed principles of social ethics but few specifics for resolving the political dilemmas facing the twentieth century or any other. It leaves to successive generations the ways in which nations can best use their legitimate power to restrain injustice, preserve peace, and respond to needs of the poor. Nuclear power is no more evil than is matter (as some Greek philosophers thought); it is the use to which it is put that is decisive.

**LIGHT: The United States is a pluralistic society. American Christianity is quite diverse. What do you foresee for organized efforts at influencing the government of the United States? Should an attempt be made to establish a Christian party?**

**HENRY:** If there is a Christian party, the churches will inherit the blame for all political failures of that party. I see no likelihood at the

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**“The Bible gives us revealed principles of social ethics but few specifics for resolving the political dilemmas facing the twentieth century or any other.”**

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moment of a national Christian party. But either American evangelicals will align themselves in coalition on certain political objectives that they share in common or there will be evangelical collapse, conflict, and chaos in their political stance, and the last state of

their involvement will be worse than their earlier noninvolvement.

**LIGHT: Describe for LIGHT readers some elements of a strategy you recommend for penetrating the political realm with Christian influence.**

**HENRY:** Christians should be the champions, first and foremost, of freedom, especially in an age of totalitarian tyranny. They should be perceived not simply as promoters of a particular political and religious agenda, but as champions of the rights of all humans under God, as advocates of liberty to act according to the will of God rather than submit to the arbitrary demands of rulers or even the preferences of a majority of fellow citizens. Christians should agree on certain national goals—I would put the stability of the family high on the list, and the issues of work and poverty, and war and peace—and chart their agreements and disagreements. They should not press upon a pluralistic society specifically theological reasons why citizens generally should support the views Christians advocate, except where government requires Christians to do what God forbids, or where government invites a statement of ecclesial positions, or where Christians have first joined others in a common public protest against protracted injustice and then mounted a supplementary witness to the God of justice and of justification. But it is through effective evangelistic preaching in a media age that the church has its great (and too much neglected) opportunity of preaching to the conscience of the nation, and of indicating the criteria by which Christ at his return will judge men and nations and is in fact currently judging them, and by which standards they ought therefore now to live.

# Recovering The Good News

by Jim Wallis

To be a Christian means to identify oneself with the good news which Jesus preached, namely, the gospel of the kingdom of God. Christ's inaugural sermon in the little town of Nazareth made clear how, why, and to whom his message was such good news.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to  
preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim  
release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to  
the blind,  
to set at liberty those who  
are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year  
of the Lord."

(Luke 4:18-19, RSV)

To the Jewish masses under the yoke of Roman domination, the message was good news indeed. The ruling religious and political authorities, however, found this message very bad news and set themselves against Jesus right from the beginning.

Today, the greatest number of the world's people are also poor and oppressed. They too would find the message of Jesus to be the best news they had ever heard.

But is that the message heard today from Christian preachers? Do the affluent millions in today's churches find their identity in the promise of salvation, freedom, healing, and liberation proclaimed by Jesus at the outset of his ministry? Does the word "Christian" conjure up the vision of a gospel that turns the social order upside down? Listening to many modern preachers leaves one with the distinct impression that the content of the message has been changed.

The image of American Christianity that often goes out from the pulpits and over the airwaves is a religion for those at the top, not those at the bottom of the world system, and



frequently bears almost no resemblance to the original message.

It has not always been so. Christian movements have in England and the United States led struggles for the abolition of slavery, for economic justice, and for women's rights. Eighteenth century English preachers and nineteenth century American evangelists deliberately linked revivalism to social change and proclaimed a gospel that was indeed good news to the poor, the captives, and the oppressed.

However, in what sociologist David Moburg has called "the great reversal," twentieth century evangelical Christianity in the United States came to thoroughly identify with the mainstream values of wealth and power. As the country became rich and fat, so did its Bible-believing Christians who soon replaced the good news of Christ's kingdom with a personal piety that comfortably supported the social and economic status quo.

For many years now, many American Christians have implicitly endorsed a vision of America that is white, prosperous, and number one in the world. In the last few years, however, that vision has been made much more explicit and highly politicized.

Conservative political forces have

successfully penetrated and recruited a substantial segment of American Christianity by forging an ideological alliance with a new breed of religionists: the television preachers of America's electronic churches. These forces have for some time seen in the nation's growing conservative Christian population fertile ground for a new right-wing movement.

The preachers and their political friends say they have just begun to harvest the crop. Their program is to "restore American morality," interpreted as strengthening the power of the American capitalist system, military establishment, and the affluent "haves." These political religionists can be called *evangelical nationalists*.

Their problem is not in mixing faith and politics (biblical faith does have political meaning), but in the fact that this patriotic religion does not stand for the same things as the original Christian message. If we are to evaluate every claim to Christian politics by the standard of the gospel, this evangelical nationalism is not genuinely Christian. The long accommodation of Christianity to the values of American power and its recent hardening into a religious vision of zealous nationalism have all but destroyed the integrity of the term evangelical.

Evangelical nationalists in our day are not known as friends of the poor. Rather, they are known to have a decided preference for the successful and prosperous who see their wealth as a sign of God's favor.

Ironically, the Evangelical Christian movement which once fought to free slaves, support industrial workers, and liberate women now has a reputation for accommodating to racism, favoring business over labor, and resisting equal rights for women. In our nation's ghettos, barrios, and unions, these evangelical nationalists are generally not regarded as allies.

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## . . .Recovering

(continued from page 13)

Of particular danger is the way the Christian message has served to further rather than life the blindness of the nation. Many Christians have helped to buttress the myths and illusions which have led the American people to believe their nation is the best, greatest, and most blessed nation on earth. With God thought to be on our side, or, rather, with our being the last line of defense against God's enemies, our cause becomes righteous and our foreign policy noble.

Specifically, the evangelical nationalists are perpetuating a theology of empire. Ours is not the old kind of imperial system with occupied colonies named after conquering heroes. Rather, our American empire is based on a complex global system of economic and political domination which guarantees for us the largest share of benefits and goods by insuring that we have our way in the world. Our control over world events is declining, but America still leads an international economic system where 20 percent of the world's people control 80 percent of the wealth. Most modern-day Christians have never challenged that system but, on the contrary, have been on the side of every commercial conquest, political intervention, and military action undertaken by the United States in this century.

The "acceptable year of the Lord" Jesus came to proclaim was, many New Testament scholars suggest, a reference to the Jubilee year of the Old Testament which provided for a

periodic redistribution of land and wealth along with the freeing of slaves. The Jubilee was a corrective measure aimed at our sinful human tendency toward the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poor.

However, Christians today have not generally been calling for economic redistribution. Instead, they have tended to favor tax breaks for the rich and relatively rich and for big corporations, as well as increased military spending and budget balancing by cutting the amount of public resources allocated for the poor. Simplicity, stewardship, and redistribution are all biblical values no longer at the forefront of the Christian message.

I am deeply grieved by this image of Christianity presented to the public by the television preachers and their New Right allies. The super-patriotism of their movement flies in the face of the biblical vision of the people of God who know no national boundaries but live among the nations as ministers of reconciliation.

The evangelical nationalists exalt the nation at a time when America needs to be humble. They extol the virtue of wealth and power when most of the world is poor and powerless. They call for unrestrained economic growth in a world where resources are running out and much of God's creation is ravaged by industrial exploitation. They join in the national frenzy of fear and hostility toward our adversaries and call for more military buildup in a world already on the brink of total destruction; acceptance of

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**"It would be a great tragedy to allow a militant religious nationalism to change the meaning of our special Christian tradition."**

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nuclear weapons and strategy has made evangelical nationalists morally complicit in a potential holocaust.

We must recover the good news. The public image of Christianity in this country is a distortion of the best of our tradition. The evangelical nationalists offer a political vision that is a corruption of the original gospel

message and the radical impulses of Bible-believing Christians in more recent times.

The civil rights movement in the South was one place where the good news was upheld in recent decades. That movement was initially led not by northern white liberals but by black Christians, mostly Baptists, who appealed to the Old Testament prophets and the teaching of Jesus for their inspiration and authority.

It would be a great tragedy to allow a militant religious nationalism to change the meaning of our special Christian tradition. Rather, we must stand in that tradition and build a confessional movement in this country that testifies to the presence of the kingdom of God, and in so doing, resists corrupt power structures wherever they may be.

We want to restore the true meaning of the Christian gospel. Our interest in the unborn must be connected to interest in the lives of enemy populations targeted for nuclear genocide. Our concern for the family must be extended to children of families who are starving because of the present way the global economic system is arranged. Our support for sexual morality must include support for women in a culture that still exploits them and refuses to grant them equality. Our criticism of welfare bureaucracies which control the poor must be linked to a radical call for economic justice. Neither "conservative" nor "liberal," we call for a Christianity that espouses a radical social vision rooted in the

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**"It would be a great tragedy to allow a militant religious nationalism to change the meaning of our special Christian tradition."**

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Bible's concern for the poor and for peace, for justice and for human rights.

The evangelical nationalist preachers and strategists claim credit for the victory of Ronald Reagan and the conservative Congress. Whether or not their influence was decisive is less important that is their public

identification with that new regime and its nationalistic vision for America's future. Their enormous support and energy expended on behalf of the political Right has not saddled them with responsibility for the results of the 1980 elections.

The evangelical nationalists will not go unchallenged. The resistance will not simply be from "godless secular humanists," as they frequently describe their opponents, but from their fellow Christians whose public dissent to their agenda is rooted firmly in the gospel that once was good news to all the afflicted.

The compelling evangelistic power

of the early church, many historians agree, was due in large part to the reputation of the Christian community as a radically open, inclusive, caring and sharing fellowship where the poor and oppressed were especially welcomed.

Aristides described the Christians to the Roman emperor Hadrian in this way:

"They love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something they give freely to the man who has nothing; if they see a stranger, they take him home, and are happy, as though he were a

real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit, in God."

To live in such a way is to be Christian indeed.

**Jim Wallis is editor of *Sojourners* magazine. He has been active in many causes for applied Christianity but is perhaps best known for his work for peace and in behalf of the poor and disadvantaged. His recent book, *The Call to Conversion* (Harper and Row), deals with "recovering the Gospel for these times."**



## Graham Voices Concern About Political Involvement

by Marguerite Michaels

**EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article is an excerpt from an article in *Parade* magazine and is used by permission.**

Moral Majority, Inc., a conservative political action organization led by TV evangelist Falwell, is dedicated to the return of "morality" in America. Its "agenda for the '80s" is pro-family, pro-life and against the ERA, gay rights, pornography, SALT II and defense cuts.

"It would be unfortunate if people got the impression all evangelists

belong to that group," says evangelist Billy Graham. "The majority do not. I don't wish to be identified with them.

"I'm for morality. But morality goes beyond sex to human freedom and social justice. We as clergy know so very little to speak out with such authority on the Panama Canal or superiority of armaments. Evangelists can't be closely identified with any particular party or person. We have to stand in the middle in order to preach to all people, right and left. I haven't been faithful to my own advice in the past. I will be in the future."

Graham has talked with Jerry Falwell. "I told him to preach the Gospel. That's our calling. I want to preserve the purity of the Gospel and the freedom of religion in America. I don't want to see religious bigotry in any form. Liberals organized in the '60s, and conservatives certainly have a right to organize in the '80s, but it would disturb me if there was a wedding between the religious fundamentalists and the political right. The hard right has no interest in religion except to manipulate it," Graham said.

# The New Religious Right: A Personal Encounter

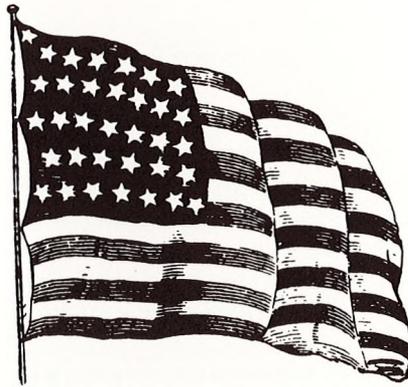
by John H. Buchanan

It was the summer of 1980. Conservative Christians from all across the land gathered in our nation's capital for the "March for Jesus." As a Baptist Christian completing my sixteenth year in Congress, I felt a special obligation to reach out to them, and did so. I attended their rally at the Mall, participated in the march, and met with the Alabama group as they voiced their concern to their Congressional delegation.

It seemed apparent to me that these were sincere people who were concerned about their country. They felt a hunger for strength and purity in political leadership and the need for a revival of morality and religion in our society. It was equally apparent that their list of concerns read like a litany of New Right politics in the United States. I knew all too well why this was true. While the Moral Majority and the forces of the New Religious Right in the United States have been carried forward on the shoulders of sincere, dedicated, conservative Christians, the movement had its origins in Washington and in politics.

## The Lord Has Anointed Me?

Many months before, a small group of very sophisticated, far-right ideologues and politicians in Washington, D.C., had caught a vision of the potential political value of conservative Christian leaders using the electronic church to further their interests in the American political process. Subsequently, they had made their case for the Reverend Jerry Falwell to organize the Moral Majority. They had provided political education and helped to select the issues which were to be used as tests. The



effectiveness of their work was already becoming plain and would become quite clear by the elections of 1980.

When my time came to speak, I first thanked my brothers and sisters of Alabama for their concern for our country and for their prayers for people like me. I urged them to continue. I made it plain that I shared their belief that Jesus Christ is the

naked and you clothed me; I was sick and in prison and you visited me; I was a stranger and you took me in."

Because the Lord had laid on me the plight of disadvantaged people in the United States and around the world—the plight of those who are repressed, the need for such things as education and health care and housing for the American people—I simply could not share the far right politics of my friends in the Moral Majority movement. Therefore, I reminded them how good it was to know that our salvation was dependent not on the politics of the left or the politics of the right, but on faith in, and relationship to, the Lord Jesus Christ, plus or minus nothing. Afterward, a series of the participants from Alabama came up to me and said, "We can tell that you are one of us." And to each I replied, "Yes I am. I am your brother. We simply disagree."



**"Further, some of those most liberal in their politics have been quite conservative Christians in their theology. One simply cannot measure Christians by their politics."**



hope of men and nations and their conviction that our country needs a revival. Then I tried to share my feelings with them as honestly as they had shared theirs with me. I pointed out that the Bible said, "the body hath many members and not every member hath the same function."

I told them what the Lord had laid on me was the plight of millions of people, for whom Christ died, who would starve to death somewhere on earth that year. He gave me the burden of educating the young and caring for the old. I said that what I had heard from our Lord is that "I was hungry and you gave me meat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was

Some of the finest Christians I have known have been quite conservative in their politics. As a long-time participant in the House Prayer Breakfast Group, I was repeatedly struck by the composition of that gathering of members of Congress, who once each week set aside a breakfast time for prayer and sharing. Among the most active, year in and year out, have been members ranging from the most conservative of the Republicans to the most liberal of the Democrats. Further, some of those most liberal in their politics have been quite conservative Christians in their theology. One simply cannot measure Christians by their politics. Jesus said

Christians are measured by their love. This is, however, the very beginning point of my own deep concern about the New Religious Right and American politics.

Party affiliation and the shadings of our political opinions may be electives, but love for the brethren and compassion toward the poor are required courses for Christian people. We can and certainly do disagree as to which things ought to be the functions of government, which should not, and what level of government is responsible for a particular area of need. What we cannot be, if we are Christians, is uncaring about and insensitive to a world which God loves and for which Christ died. Jesus has said that "you shall be known as my disciples if you love one another." He has said without equivocation, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

At this point in American history, Christians are faced with a particular challenge. If our government is to reduce its role in such areas as education, health care, housing, aid to and opportunities for the handicapped, foreign assistance to areas of starvation or hunger abroad, and nutrition programs here at home, what shall we Christians do to make sure that this revision of responsibility in Washington does not have as its end result new deprivations for the disadvantaged and a time of hardship and despair for many of the people of our society?

Our Lord spent a great deal of time meeting the needs and healing the hurts of the people about him. As we Baptists have recognized through a variety of programs of missions and benevolence, it is our task to carry forward this ministry in our time, and we cannot escape it as Christian people. Ours is not a religion of judgment and condemnation and anger, but one of caring, compassion, and love in action. I am therefore especially disturbed to read in Jerry Falwell's introduction to New Right

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politician Richard Viguerie's book, *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead*, Falwell's description of the group he represents as "sick and tired, angry, disturbed, opposed, alarmed." In contrast, the Bible says the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Like the Pharisees of old, the leaders of the New Right forces, including the New Religious Right, would use the government to impose their own concepts of morality and order upon their fellow citizens. The New Religious Right sees clearly the need for government to prohibit wrongdoing and immorality and to punish the criminal and the wrongdoer. It perceives the need for the nation to raise a strong national defense to guard itself and others against such forces as those of godless communism. It seems, however, to have little perception of the need for government to "promote the general welfare," and even less understanding of the words of our forefathers that man is endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among them are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that governments are instituted among men to secure and protect those rights.

**Good News to the Afflicted?**

One of the truly troubling moral questions in which the Moral Majority has joined conservative Roman Catholics in a very effective political effort concerns the question of abortion. Indeed, the Religious Right has joined in working for the passage of a Constitutional Amendment to prohibit all abortions in the United States. In 1980, *Christian Voice* graded

down national legislators who voted to include rape and incest along with the life of the mother as circumstances in which the absolute prohibition against the use of federal funds for purposes of abortion could be weighed.

Abortion is a deeply troubling moral issue. Yet those same New Right political forces that are so absolute in their condemnation of abortion under any circumstances seem equally willing to call out for the death penalty for criminals and for the production of weapons of war and death such as the neutron bomb. The sensitivity that marks their concern for the unborn does not seem apparent in terms of compassion for those who have already been born.

The evidence would indicate, for example, that present nutrition efforts on the part of the federal government, such as the supplemental feeding program for women, infants and children (WIC), reach only a small portion of several million Americans who are affected by malnutrition in the earliest years of life. This program, which provides special help from pregnancy through the first five or six years of life, guards against the cruel problem of malnutrition. A child during this period suffering malnutrition can suffer permanent handicaps—mentally and physically. Yet this is one of the nutrition programs being cut by the influence of the far right forces in American politics. Similarly, our cutbacks in foreign assistance to the poorest of the poor countries of earth can be quite clearly measured in human lives. In October 1981, a large group of churchmen met in Chicago, Illinois, including representatives from conservative Wheaton College. They adopted a four-page statement in response to the New Religious Right

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which, among other things, pointed out that since human life is indeed sacred, we must extend our concern to the born as well as to the unborn.

It is harder to be absolute when dealing with real human beings confronted with tragedy. I know a young Christian teenage girl who a few months ago was the victim of a brutal rape and has been under psychiatric care ever since. Had this sensitive girl been impregnated by that violation of her personhood, would she be a murderer, would she be a criminal, should she, her parents and her doctor choose to end that pregnancy?

It is not really very difficult for a Christian to decide that he or she wants to do what is right in the world. What sometimes becomes difficult is deciding what is right to do. Wherever Jesus encountered humanity in extreme need, his response was compassion, from the woman taken in adultery to the thief on the cross. And so it must ever be with us who are his followers.

## Bind Up the Brokenhearted?

One strange position of the New Religious Right concerns the issue of child and spouse abuse. The Moral Majority and related entities fought hard in Congress against the passage of legislation designed to provide limited federal help to local and private efforts to deal with this problem.

The federal role would have been

confined to providing financial help to local government and groups providing such services as refuge for the victims and counseling for the entire family. In the view of the New Religious Right, this was interference with family life and with parental authority. I still have a very poignant memory of my futile efforts as a young pastor to deal with one such case of this tragic moral blight. I can still see the ugly bruises on the beautiful face of the young wife and mother who was a member of my church and a faithful Christian, and the ugly smirk on the face of her husband who was not.

The anger welled up in me as he smugly told me to read my Bible, which he said made plain that he was the head of his family. He went on to say that what he did to his own wife in his own house was completely his own business and not at all mine. What I did was to try to witness to him. The incidents usually occurred after he had been drinking heavily. So, with the wife, I tried in my much too limited way to work with him on problems of alcohol and the deeper problem of his

know this was a family which badly needed the professional help of the kind the federal legislation in question would help provide. In such cases, the offending party often needs professional help even more than his victims.

It is truly shocking, therefore, to see religious leaders campaigning in the name of Christ against such help. The official blessing of the religious leaders of the Moral Majority notwithstanding, I find nothing in my Bible which gives parents the right to beat their children or a husband the right physically to abuse his wife.

## Proclaim Liberty to Captives?

Every American wants to be in what we call the "mainstream" of American life—to be involved politically and culturally, and, most important of all, to be self-sufficient. The necessary prerequisite for these accomplishments is education. The want ads still have some job offerings, but they are jobs for people who possess special



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need for Christ. Finally, we were able one week to persuade him to attend a church picnic, and I thought perhaps we were making a little progress. When he suddenly left the scene without explanation, I jumped into my car to follow him. He entered his favorite tavern; I entered behind him. I sat down just as he ordered his drink and urged him to return to his family and to our church gathering. His response was to laugh, then turn to the bartender and loudly order the preacher a beer. I must confess that in consternation I fled the scene and returned to the picnic. And although the wife continued to love him and did not wish to leave him, I did not succeed in my witnessing and counseling efforts. In retrospect, I

skills or educational backgrounds. The Department of Education was created so that this vital area would receive the necessary attention and funding by the Congress.

Great strides have been made in insuring the accessibility of higher education for all American young people. The Department of Education has been one of the primary targets of the New Religious Right who claim that it is a tool for the spread of "secular humanism." As a result of enormous political pressure, this department is threatened with dismantlement, and its assistance programs have been sharply cut. Thousands of young people are no longer able to receive loans guaranteed by the government. Nearly

one million needy students are losing grants provided by a federal college assistance program. There is a big reduction in campus-based student assistance programs, including work-study. All loans for graduate students are to be cut off. High school students who were counting on Social Security benefits, earned by a parent who is no longer living, to enable them to go to college are finding themselves out on the street competing for the dwindling number of jobs for the unskilled.

From a Christian perspective, few things are more important for our society to do than to help young people fulfill the gifts which God has placed within them. Surely this means providing opportunities for education and employment instead of denying them.

A federal program designed to help the unskilled, the Comprehensive

**“From a Christian perspective, few things are more important for our society to do than to help young people fulfill the gifts which God has placed within them.”**

Employment Training Act (CETA), is also being dismantled. It is estimated that 60 percent of the people with public service jobs will wind up on welfare. CETA has provided the hope for many to break out of welfare and work toward that all important human need—self-sufficiency. This program was specifically opposed by *Christian Voice* in its morality scorecard for the Congress.

The cutbacks in federal programs, combined with the economic recession, have resulted in massive unemployment. Caseloads have piled up at Employment Commission offices. In the Washington, D.C.,

metropolitan area alone, 1000 positions among the employment service staff which helps find jobs for the unemployed have been eliminated in the past few months.

### The Least of These?

There is another group of Americans who have only in recent years been given opportunities to enter into the “mainstream” of American life. These are the physically and mentally handicapped. In many ways the federal government has

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# LIGHT Focuses on Moral Issues

*LIGHT*, a bimonthly Christian social ethics publication, was introduced about 30 years ago as a monthly publication of the Social Service Commission, the forerunner of the Christian Life Commission.

*LIGHT* was distributed only as an “occasional bulletin” after the early 1960s, but in 1978 it was reactivated as a regular publication.

The current newsletter format is designed to communicate information and ideas about current ethical issues and appropriate social action to interested pastors, students, church staff and denominational workers in the field of Christian ethics.

*LIGHT* will be sent free of charge to interested Southern Baptists who request it.

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regulations concerning access to public buildings to special educational programs. In 1975 the Education of All Handicapped Children Act was passed by the Congress. Programs under this act, such as one on the eastern shore

citizens. But under the influence and prodding of the New Right, a profound change is taking place in the federal government's commitment to this ministry. Last year, more than \$2.8 billion was cut from federal expenditures for health care. Half of these cuts came from programs designed to aid those below or just above the poverty line. A six-year-old girl in Federalsburg, Maryland, who was born with a cleft palate, could have the chance to talk normally with an operation through the Crippled Children's Program in Maryland. But cuts in Federal health care funds may make her family, with an income of \$10,200 a year, ineligible for help. Among the programs which will be shutting their doors to those in need

**"Among the programs which will be shutting their doors to those in need are maternal and child health, alcohol and drug abuse, and community health centers."**

of Maryland designed to open up the sciences as career opportunities for the handicapped, are being threatened with extinction by the budget cuts.

Parents of a child with cerebral palsy wrote to the *Washington Post*: "If the U.S. Government backs away from helping our child and thousands and thousands of others like him, what is going to happen to these children? How can the nation neglect its own handicapped children, who may well have the potential of a Stockman or a Reagan, and pour money into weapons that will kill, cripple, and maim other children if, God forbid, they are ever used? Where are our values?" We live in the richest nation the world has ever known. We can afford this help so desperately needed by so many.

Cuts in Federal Health Care have perhaps the greatest potential for irrevocably damaging human lives. It is hard to read more than a page in the Gospels without hearing about Jesus' compassion for the sick. His ministry was one of the spirit and of the body. How wonderful it is for the Christian to live in a country which can afford to minister to the physical needs of its

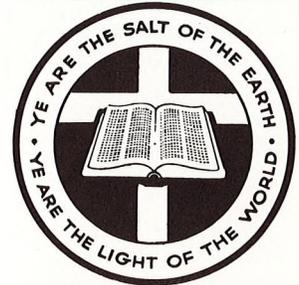
are maternal and child health, alcohol and drug abuse, and community health centers.

All of these crucial ministries were originally targeted for destruction by the New Right in the name of a balanced budget. A balanced budget achieved by cuts in "social programs" was demanded by *Christian Voice* on its morality scorecard. While turning their backs on those in need, these same New Religious Rightists accept and even welcome budget deficits created by ever increasing defense spending, an item which is also to be found on their morality scorecard. It is very difficult to understand how the life of the loving and compassionate Jesus has come to be interpreted in such terms.

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