

A Match Made in Heaven?
*A Reexamination of the alliance between the Christian Right and the
Republican Party*

By Sophie Kaiser

In Devils Lake, North Dakota Pastor Becky Fischer runs a summer camp entitled *Kids on Fire*. According to Fischer, the camp grooms children between the ages of 7 and 9 to be soldiers in “God’s army.”ⁱ By teaching the children to speak in tongues and perform war dances with wooden swords, Fischer hopes to prepare a future generation of evangelical Christians for the inevitable “culture war” they will have to face. Fischer even maintains that the growing evangelical movement in the United States will one day end the constitutional ban separating church and state. In Washington, D.C. Jeremy Bouma runs the Statesman Institute, a program aimed at teaching rising evangelical leaders that compromise is a sin and that every vote is a religious duty.ⁱⁱ The Statesman Institute is one of a dozen evangelical leadership programs that are “making steady inroads into Washington.”ⁱⁱⁱ These examples demonstrate that many evangelical Christians today still perceive the need to fight a “culture war” in order to validate a conservative, evangelical view of morality and religion. Many Americans, however, do not want to engage in such a “battle” and fear evangelical Christian groups strive to limit American civil liberties. Although Americans’ concerns are understandable, their panic often leads many analysts to misinterpret the power of evangelical movements, such as the Christian Right, on society.

According to historian Matthew Moen, in order to explain the rise of the Christian Right, certain scholars contributed to the false impression that the group was suspect and spawned by master manipulators.^{iv} One of the main arguments of this paper is that Moen’s claims from 1994

still hold. Today many analysts of the Christian Right, such as Henry Giroux, mistakenly describe the Christian Right as a divisive force that has corrupted the American political system through its alliance with the GOP. These scholars further argue that the George W. Bush administration has been particularly receptive to the Christian Right. This paper will show, however, that the evidence suggests otherwise. As the Christian Right has become a pivotal constituency within the Republican Party, it appears that GOP leaders have been hesitant to advance a conservative social agenda. This paper will also highlight recent changes within the Christian Right. Not only are its structures, institutions, and methods of communication evolving, but former supporters of what was called the “New Christian Right” in the late 1970s now seem to be split into three factions. Thus, the future of the GOP-Christian Right alliance will depend on how Republican leaders address both Christian Right activists’ growing disillusionment with the Party and the underlying changes within the movement itself.

Historians Rozell and Wilcox define the Christian Right as a movement that seeks to restore “traditional values” in public policy by means of mobilizing evangelical Protestants.^v However, because of historical similarities and theological overlap, this paper will assume that the Christian Right is also comprised of Baptists, fundamentalists, Pentecostals and other Protestant sects and therefore will refer to Christian Right supporters as “conservative Christians.” Although it is crucial to understand the relationships between these denominations within the movement, such an analysis is beyond the scope of this address.

POLITICS AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

The history of the Christian Right suggests that conservative Christians have had trouble reconciling their religious and civil duties. Even though politics can serve to protect evangelical

and fundamentalists' way of life, these groups' political involvement can also alienate them from the rest of the American public. Because evangelicals and fundamentalists are often "rooted in the past," they, unlike other Americans, are particularly vulnerable to political change.^{vi} For example, when modernism took root in the early 20th century, conservative Christians responded by calling for the "purification of society."^{vii} Moreover, since the "moral decay of urban life" brought with it a decline in church influence, fundamentalist Protestants became increasingly outraged in the 1920s.^{viii} As theories of evolution crept into the classroom, fundamentalists began to participate in an antievolution crusade.^{ix} Originally non-political, this crusade "spilled into politics as fundamentalist ministers began to defend the literal interpretation of the Genesis creation story against scientific theories."^x The humiliation of Fundamentalists after their defeat in the 1925 Scopes trial, however, forced former antievolution activists to retreat from political life. These activists came to see politics as an ultimately futile endeavor.

While fears of Communism sparked the creation of many fundamentalist and evangelical anticommunist organizations in both the 1920s and 1950s, it was not until the campaign of born-again Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter that these Christian conservatives re-entered the political scene. Carter's declaration that "the most important thing in my life is Jesus Christ" forced evangelicals and fundamentalists to reconsider their disillusionment with politics. As the 1960s and 1970s brought a complex array of liberal and secular trends, ranging from the eradication of religion in schools and the easy availability of abortion to tax policies that affected the traditional family, fundamentalists feared modern culture was once again destroying their traditional values. Yet because President Carter failed to change America socially in a way that pleased evangelical and fundamentalist constituencies, these groups increasingly became dissatisfied with the Democratic Party. Therefore, in 1979 Reverend Jerry Falwell created a religious political action

group called the Moral Majority that advocated a more conservative social agenda. The extreme positions of this group and its recent conception made many historians question the true influence of the Moral Majority on the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. It is clear, however, that the Moral Majority changed the terms of debate in the early 1980s and through direct-mail and massive mobilization efforts “broke down the psychological barrier that prevented evangelicals from being informed, intelligent activists.”^{xi} Falwell and his allies succeeded in convincing thousands of religious conservatives that it was their religious duty to vote. Thus, many conservative Christians came to view involvement in politics not as something to abhor, but as part of God’s will.

Furthermore, during the election of 1980, Republicans came to realize how influential this “New Christian Right” movement could be. Thus after Reagan’s election, religious conservatives such as Falwell, Richard Viguerie, and Paul Weyrich gained increased access to the White House and inner circles of Washington. As Ralph Reed—future leader of the Christian Coalition—described the situation, “You are no longer throwing rocks at the building; you are in the building.”^{xii} However, with increased power in the political arena came increasing concessions for the Christian Right. In order to successfully join the political process, Christian conservatives often had to tone down or even alter their religious messages. Interviews with Christian Right activists demonstrate how they have come to deal with these sacrifices and how they use Biblical allusions to understand their ongoing dilemma between religious seclusion and political involvement. Many evangelicals identify two possible roles available to them. One is the role of a “Prophet” who may not have much influence but always speaks the truth. The other is the role of “Advisor,” who may have a sense of truth and value, but whose primary objective is to influence the political process.^{xiii} As the Christian Right has gained power in the American

political system, it has increasingly had to forsake its role as Prophet for the role of Advisor. Historian Matthew Moen describes a Christian Right that has abandoned “revolution for evolution” by adjusting itself to the “secular norms and practices of American politics.”^{xiv} Although many of today’s Christian Right leaders have actually taken on the role of “Advisor,” they still like to highlight the importance of the role of “Prophet”. For example, religious radio host Dr. James Dobson exclaimed, “Governing to maintain power [purpose of Advisor] is the surest way to lose it.”^{xv} Even though it is debatable *which* role the Christian Right has most frequently played, it is clear that the future success of the Christian Right will depend on *how* it reconciles the friction between its religious beliefs and participation in politics. The Christian Right will have to simultaneously retain support from its most religious advocates while also appealing to its most politically oriented members.

Although this paper has described a brief history of how conservative Christians have jumped in and out of the political arena and has identified the dilemma that comes with such political engagement, it is also important to understand the reasons *why* political engagement poses such problems for the Christian Right. The first visible friction between the religion of Christian Right activists and involvement in politics is the necessity of compromise. In order for the Christian Right to promote its pro-life, pro-family platform, it must inevitably concede its position on other issues. Religious theology holds, however, that one cannot compromise for God. Moreover, compromise is particularly difficult for fundamentalist and evangelical Christians, who believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God and often deny the validity of any other set of beliefs. A survey found that only 43% of the members of Christian conservatives groups attending the 1994 Virginia Republican Conventions agreed that compromise was sometimes necessary in politics and nearly half claimed that on most matters of

public policy there was only one correct Christian view.^{xvi} Moreover, fundamentalist pastor Ed Dobson and evangelical journalist Cal Thomas assert, “We are firm in our aversion to any kind of political involvement because on some issues, such as abortion, there is a clear and non-negotiable Christian position.”^{xvii} Both question radio host Dr. James Dobson’s commitment to politics because they believe he “settles for the good instead of the best.” In this sense they view Dobson as playing the Advisor instead of the propitious Prophet. Moreover, Thomas and E. Dobson believe, like many Christian conservatives, that politics obscures the central message of the gospel, which is about personal, not political, redemption.^{xviii}

The demand for religious political leaders creates a second obstacle for political involvement by the Christian Right. Since many Christian Right activists believe that God visits His judgment on a nation based on the actions of its leaders, they claim it is vitally important to elect a “true Christian” to the White House.^{xix} Yet electing religious leaders to high levels of government is often not politically possible and therefore this requirement only thwarts the expansion of a Christian Right agenda. Furthermore, not only are many Christian Right activists hesitant to support moderate candidates, but survey data also indicate that activists are more likely than other citizens to want to limit the civil liberties of groups they see as threatening.^{xx} These facts are consistent since the Christian Right often views its political battles in eschatological terms by identifying the political opposition as “the enemy.” For example, Reverend Falwell claims that “when the righteous are in authority the people rejoice and when the evil are in authority the people mourn.”^{xxi} According to the documentary *With God on Our Side*, evangelicals believe that a real and personable devil exists, capable of corrupting society by working through dictators such as Stalin, Hitler and Saddam Hussein.^{xxii} Because activists

maintain that they cannot “work with the devil,” they strive to elect officials who support their agenda and who activists claim understand the dynamics of faith.^{xxiii}

Although the Christian Right’s hesitance to compromise or work with secular individuals has hampered its progress by alienating many potential allies, this movement has gained a certain amount of political support by utilizing the language of victimization. Soon after the Christian Right saw that its “defensive offensive” in the 1980s against the secularization of America was only forcing many Americans to view it as an extremist faction, the Christian Right strove to soften its image. It did so by identifying itself as a victimized group whose religious rights were being trampled on by its political opponents. The Christian Right still argues that older prejudices of race and gender are now being replaced by a new prejudice against religion itself. In effect this group maintains the same language of victimization used by African-Americans, women, and gays during the socio-political movements of the 1960s.^{xxiv} Moreover, by asserting that institutions are “controlled by the enemy” and darkly warning of the conspiracies of liberal groups, the Christian Right has been able to garner support from citizens who view politics in such eschatological terms.^{xxv} Thus, this paper has proposed several reasons for why religious conservatives have continually entered and exited the American political system. Once involved in politics, conservative Christian activists must continue to find ways to retain support by reconciling understood theological beliefs with American political processes.

THE GOP AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Analysts currently disagree as to the precise timing and factors that drove white evangelicals, the Christian Right’s strongest supporters, into a Republican alignment. Some argue that the tax policies and cultural conflicts of the late 1960s and early 1970s provide the

historical origins of this hypothesized shift, while others identify the shift as occurring in tandem with the rise of the electoral activities of the Christian Right in the 1980s.^{xxvi} Historians do agree, however, that over the past three decades white evangelicals have become more steadily Republican in both their partisanship and voting behavior.^{xxvii} Although 60% of evangelical Protestants identified themselves as Democrats in 1960, only 40% supported the Democratic Party in 1988.^{xxviii} Moreover, the number of white evangelicals who identify themselves as Republicans grew dramatically in 1999 and peaked in 2004 and 2005.^{xxix} According to analyst Scott Keeter, this level of movement among evangelicals is startling given how slowly party affiliation in the American public tends to change.^{xxx} He further concludes that white evangelicals have become one of the most important parts of the Republican Party's electoral base, making up over 1/3 of those who identify with the GOP and about 1/4 of the American electorate. This block of the American electorate is particularly significant because it compares roughly in size to that of other constituencies, such as labor unions and African-Americans.^{xxxi}

There appear to be two reasons for this Republican realignment. First, the Republican Party and the Christian Right have similar agendas. As the middle-class expanded and average incomes rose in the 1950s, white evangelicals became more economically conservative. According to data by historian Lyman Kellstedt, by 1992 evangelicals were the most conservative group on economic and domestic issues including aid to minorities, national health insurance and environmental regulation.^{xxxii} As mentioned earlier, the cultural conflicts of the 1960s also alarmed many evangelicals and strengthened their belief in the necessity of "traditional moral values." Yet it was not until 1980 that the GOP embraced a pro-life plank in its presidential platform. The fact that the Republican Party has maintained this position in all subsequent elections, however, most likely reinforces evangelicals' attraction to the Party.

Like many Republicans, white evangelicals are also more likely to be pro-Israel and in favor of a large military. Historian Ira Chernus argues that conservative moralists “find it easy to support the war on terror because that story so closely mirrors their own stories about a domestic war on sin and secular humanism.”^{xxxiii} Writer David Domke similarly argues that the Reagan administration gave birth to a form of political fundamentalism--emphasis on absolutes, authority, tradition, and belief in a divine hand in history upon the U.S.--that is supported by Christian conservatives and has become ascendant under the current Bush administration.^{xxxiv} Chernus further hypothesizes that evangelicals during the 2004 campaign were less swayed by Bush’s stand on domestic social issues than by his war on terrorism policies. Post-election analyses neither support nor refute Chernus’s argument; data from the 2004 presidential election show that evangelicals tended to give Bush very high marks on social issues, somewhat lower ratings on foreign policy, and generally positive scores on economic policy.^{xxxv} Thus as the GOP became more socially conservative and as the Christian Right simultaneously became more conservative on economic and foreign policy issues, an alliance proved inescapable.

A second reason for white evangelicals’ realignment to the Republican Party can be found in GOP candidates’ increasing use of religious rhetoric. Since proselytizing and spreading the Gospel is an important part of the evangelical tradition, a politician’s speech can have profound effects on Christian Right constituencies. Scholar George Lakoff contends that U.S. political conservatives are more effective at communicating strategic moral politics because they have spent more time comprehending religious myths and designing a language capable of evoking certain established values through powerful slogans; he contends that politicians have evoked these images so frequently that the connection between their rhetoric and certain accepted values seems natural to many in the public and media.^{xxxvi} Sociologist Scott Coltrane

reaffirms this argument by asserting, “A key to mobilizing within the Christian Right is to frame political issues in ways that reaffirm one’s belief in Christ, church and in ways that support the idea of that politician as a good Christian.”^{xxxvii} Moreover, not only are the Pentecostal and fundamentalist cores of the Christian Right drawn to politicians who use religious language, but data further prove that these constituents are particularly receptive to political “cue-giving.”^{xxxviii}

As the Christian Right began mobilizing in the late 1970s, it appears that presidential candidate Ronald Reagan played to the evangelical constituency rather skillfully. Although Reagan did not profess a “born-again” experience, he evoked themes of personal morality and family values in addition to expressing his opposition to abortion.^{xxxix} A few months before the 1980 election, Reagan claimed to “endorse” influential Christian pastors at a National Affairs Briefing. Reagan’s statements at the Briefing sent important signals to Christian conservatives across America, for these “outsiders” believed they now had a potential president to protect them from the perils of American mainstream culture.

Even though religious leader Pat Buchanan argues that Reagan’s successor, George H.W. Bush, did not have a special rapport with the evangelical community, Buchanan claims Bush’s son and future president George W. Bush certainly had.^{xi} Many argue that George W. Bush speaks the language of religion better than any president by effectively linking his faith to his policy positions.^{xli} Buchanan further asserts that Bush has gained such support from the Christian Right because “he is a man that stands up and says it.”^{xlii} No one can forget the shocking moment in 1999 at the Republican debates in Iowa when George W. Bush was asked to name the philosopher or thinker with whom he most identified. While other GOP candidates cited names such as Rousseau, without hesitation Bush blurted out, “Christ, because he changed my heart.” This was a pivotal turning point in the 2000 Bush campaign; while many political

analysts believed Bush's response would ruin his chances for the presidency, in fact Bush's reply revealed to Christian conservatives that he was speaking directly to them and that his politics could not be separated from his faith. Bush's second response had an even greater effect on the evangelical constituency. When the somewhat shocked announcer asked Bush to clarify his first reply, Bush exclaimed that people "would understand what I'm talking about." This second response reinforces journalist Bill Keller's argument that Bush's evocation of God often becomes "a kind of fraternity handshake."^{xliii}

Some analysts argue that Bush's religion is one of his greatest political assets. Bush has been known to tell supporters, "I believe God wants me to be president."^{xliv} Professor Scott Kline further argues that Bush's moral discourse, with its many references to evil, has roots in an interdependent relationship between neo-conservatism and the Religious Right.^{xlv} Like many Christian Right supporters, it appears that Bush often identifies evil as an actual thing or force. For example, after analyzing Bush's speeches from the time he took office until June 2003, historian Peter Singer found that George W. Bush not only used the word evil in about 30 percent of his speeches, but that he also used it far more often as a noun than as an adjective.^{xlvi} Although the appropriateness and sincerity of Bush's moral rhetoric are debatable, it is clear that George W. Bush's evocation of God and morality is a pivotal factor in his ongoing relationship with and support among Christian conservatives. The power of speech on this constituency, therefore, cannot be over-emphasized. Moreover, it is because conservative Christians have seen themselves as "outsiders" for so long that they are particularly receptive to "insider" political candidates who seem to advocate their most valued beliefs. Thus, one must account for the increase in religious expression among GOP politicians since the late 1970s in order to fully understand the growing relationship between the Republican Party and the Christian Right.

However oversimplified, it would not be altogether wrong to argue that the Christian Right is more interested in *who* a politician is than *what* a politician actually does. Since the Christian Right is still a fairly new social movement that is continually learning the ups and downs of American politics, this group often believes that verbal promises and religious advocacy automatically assure changes in policy. This belief was made manifest by white evangelicals' overwhelming support for George H.W. Bush in the 1992 presidential elections. As noted earlier, George H.W. Bush was not particularly successful in appealing to religious conservatives; unlike his son, he was often uncomfortable openly professing his personal religious values. Moreover, not only did George H. W. Bush do little to promote the social agenda of the Christian Right during his first term, but he also did many things, such as invite gay activists to the White House, that strongly offended Christian conservatives.

Yet, post-analysis election results reveal that white evangelicals were Bush's strongest supporters. 63% of evangelicals gave Bush their vote which, according to political scientist Lyman Kellstedt, is a very impressive showing for a three-way race.^{xlvii} Evangelicals' support is even more surprising considering the fact that they were generally less affluent and more likely to be affected by the recession in 1991. In fact, while other GOP moderates deserted the Republican Party, which political scientists claim was a result of Bush's handling of the economy, Christian Right supporters stood firm. Kellstedt therefore concluded that the 1992 election proved that evangelical Protestants' key position in the GOP coalition was strong enough to persist even in a very bad Republican year. What the 1992 election also indicates is that even when a Republican incumbent offers a "diluted religious rhetoric" or upsets Christian Right leaders, the very fact that that incumbent supports a more conservative *social* agenda, reassures the Christian Right's overwhelming support for him. George H.W. Bush's re-election

campaign also demonstrates that the Christian Right, at least in 1992, still believed social change was possible through an alliance with the Republican Party.

In order to assess the future of the Christian Right and GOP coalition, one must look at how the Republican Party has implemented or failed to implement the policies of Christian conservatives. Even though Reagan provided many “symbolic” benefits to conservative Christians by mentioning Christian Right issues in his televised speeches, ultimately Christian Right activists became disenchanted with Reagan, because providing large tax cuts and undertaking a massive military buildup became his administration’s primary focus.^{xlviii} Although the Christian Right’s disenchantment with the GOP only grew during the George H.W. Bush administration, the Christian Right still voted primarily Republican in each election after 1980. In fact, Christian Right activism and its alliance with the GOP only increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Historian Duane Oldfield attributes the rise of many Christian Right organizations during this period to the moral scandals during the Clinton presidency.^{xlix} According to Ralph Reed, the former president of the Christian Coalition, “Clinton’s greatest legacy will be a reawakened grassroots movement. The conservative community, largely asphyxiated during Bush years, awoke from slumber like Rip Van Winkle on steroids after the Clinton inaugural.”¹ Therefore, the Christian Right’s disgust with President Bill Clinton only made it easier for George W. Bush to rally their support. Yet counter to what many historians claim, evidence suggests that in both terms the George W. Bush administration, like that of Reagan, has done little to promote Christian Right objectives.

THE GEORGE W. BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Although it is true that the Bush administration has slowly pushed a conservative Christian agenda forward, some analysts portray the Christian Right as more influential and powerful than it actually is.^{li} These authors liken the Christian Right to an anti-democratic constituency that has gradually corrupted the American political system through its alliance with the GOP. Commentators argue that the Christian Right has been most successful under the current Bush administration and that the Republican Party is “unmistakably in the grips of its own Christian theocratic base.”^{lii} For example, analyst Scott Kline argues that since the Christian Right formed a significant part of the electorate that failed to turnout in 2000, Bush’s domestic agenda was “rigged from the outset.”^{liii} Author Esther Kaplan also mistakenly claims that “when power brokers in Washington’s family values lobby set their sights on an issue, the Bush administration responds.”^{liv} Not only does Professor Henry A. Giroux assert that “the Republican party under Bush has increasingly become an extension of the Religious Right,” but he also claims that the president will continue to create a “faith-based presidency” in his second term.^{lv} However, there are four key reasons why the George W. Bush administration should not be described as a captive of the Christian Right.

First, although Bush’s speeches undoubtedly contain a high level of moral rhetoric, they are more often laced with generally religious terms than with a predominantly Christian vocabulary. Bush has emphasized the importance of all religious beliefs in America and has gone out of his way to reassure Muslims that he admires their religion. For example, Bush has hosted a number of Ramadan dinners and periodically criticized evangelicals who denounce Islam as a corrupt and violent faith.^{lvi} In this sense, Bush has not endorsed many Christian Right activists’ conception of a “Christian nation” but has reinforced many Americans’ belief in the importance of a “religious nation.” Thus, through a more openly religious rhetoric, Bush can

simultaneously acquire support from many denominations while still appealing to his conservative Christian base. One of the reasons Bush has been such a successful politician is because, like Reagan, he “uses his psychological insight and rhetorical flexibility to weld disparate beliefs of constituents into a coherent whole.”^{lvii} Bush’s rhetoric further suggests that the GOP often realizes that an explicit alliance with Christian conservatives is not always politically valuable. This GOP realization is understandable since one of the first Christian Right groups, the Moral Majority, “left a bad taste in the mouth of middle-class America that it may never be able to neutralize.”^{lviii}

Second, Bush has been hesitant to explicitly denounce abortions and gay marriage, two of the most important Christian Right concerns. Only after impatient Christian leaders put immense pressure on the White House did Bush finally endorse a constitutional amendment to define marriage as between a man and a woman.^{lix} In fact, journalist Frank Rich asserts that the “GOP isn’t as homophobic as it pretends to be.”^{lx} According to Rich, many openly gay officials work in high branches of the current Bush administration. Furthermore, during both presidential campaigns, instead of laying out a concrete position on abortion, Bush chose to express his support for what he described as a “culture of life.”^{lxi} Since Bush argues that *Roe v. Wade* will not be overturned because “America’s hearts are not ready,” Bush favors promoting policies that he believes reduce abortions.^{lxii}

In March of 2003 Bush signed a Senate bill preventing partial-birth abortions. Bush then authorized the Unborn Victims of Violence Act in April of 2004, which allows a pregnant woman’s murder to be tried as a double homicide. Finally in July of this year Bush vetoed a bill allowing federal funds to go to embryonic stem-cell research. Although a vast majority of Americans condemn partial birth abortions and many are wary of stem-cell research, it would be

wrong to assume that Bush endorsed these bills strictly to cater to the Christian Right.^{lxiii} In fact, according to Bush’s speechwriter and policy advisor, Michael Gerson, Bush is an “incrementalist” who will not make wholesale social changes.^{lxiv} One might argue that Bush appointed Judges Samuel Alito and John Roberts to the Supreme Court to appease the Christian Right, yet historian Clyde Wilcox maintains that the movement’s “ultimate response will depend strictly on how these judges vote on the bench.”^{lxv}

Third, the 2004 presidential election provides yet another example of how analysts and the media misinterpreted the influence of the Christian Right on George W. Bush’s politics and the 2004 Republican victory. Some journalists and analysts today still perceive that the primary goal of the Bush re-election campaign was to attract those evangelicals who failed to turn out for Bush in 2000.^{lxvi} Historian Robert Denton even suggests that Bush’s advisor, Karl Rove, worked to get anti-gay marriage initiatives on state ballots in order to increase evangelical turnout for Bush.^{lxvii} Reporters Cooperman and Edsall, however, reveal a quite different story. According to national religious leaders and grass-roots activists, evangelical “Christian groups were often more aggressive and sometimes better organized than the Bush campaign,” even in battleground states.^{lxviii} Charles Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries, recalls reminding White House Aides that marriage issues were likely to be a big factor in the presidential election. Colson claims that instead of proposing strategies for mobilization, White House leaders resisted on the grounds that they “hadn’t decided what position [they] wanted to take”.^{lxix} This cautiousness on the part of the Republicans to support same-sex marriage initiatives further proves that the GOP often has other political objectives in mind and does not cater directly to the Christian Right.

Some analysts are also mistaken in their conclusions about the determining factors of the 2004 presidential election. After a Los Angeles exit poll claimed that “moral values” was the issue that mattered most to voters, many in the media and public concluded that Bush’s socially conservative base was essential to his victory.^{lxx} Yet such a conclusion is questionable since “moral values” is a vague term that may mean different things to various people. Although some may associate the importance of “moral values” with a conservative social agenda, others may believe an emphasis on “moral values” indicates that voters desire a candidate with good character.

Moreover, further post-election analyses suggest that the importance of religion in Bush’s victory was well overstated.^{lxxi} Although the “vote was significantly more ideological than in 2000,” pollster Barry Burden and Andrew Kohut of PEW saw no evidence of higher participation on the part of white evangelical Protestants.^{lxxii} Therefore it would be wrong to conclude that the salience of gay-marriage and abortion sparked interest in individuals who were otherwise unlikely to vote.^{lxxiii} In fact, post-election analyses indicate that moderates, not the Christian Right defeated Kerry, and that the Iraq War, economy and terrorism had larger impacts on vote choices than did same-sex marriage.^{lxxiv} Thus, claims that anti-gay marriage initiatives were the key components of Rove’s 2004 electoral strategy and that these ballot initiatives and other social issues forced Bush’s socially conservative base to go to the polls and thus swing the election, are unfounded.

Instead the 2004 campaign indicates an imbalance in the GOP-Christian Right- coalition. Although the Christian Right may have been “the GOP’s most organized and energized constituency,” it appears that the GOP was neither interested nor prepared to solidify this alliance through an emphasis on social conservatism.^{lxxv} According to author Mark Taylor, the

Republican Party is far more dependent on “wealthy voters” in an election than on its conservative Christian base.^{lxxvi} Thus the 2004 election proves not only that the GOP often diverts its attention to other political issues and constituencies, but it also indicates how certain journalists and analysts exaggerate the power of the Christian Right on American political processes.

Fourth, it appears that some historians and analysts fail to understand the role of religion and the Christian Right on recent American foreign policy. Even though Israel is very important to many Christian conservatives because some believe the existence of Jews in Israel will hasten the second coming of Christ, it would be inaccurate to claim that “there may be no greater threat to the revived peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, than the influence of the Christian Right.”^{lxxvii} As this paper has argued, the Christian Right does not have unrivaled access to the cores of American government. To support his argument, Professor Stephen Zunes provided numerous examples of how the current Bush administration changed its position on certain crises in the Middle East after Christian Right constituents in protest flooded the White House with postcards and e-mails.^{lxxviii} Although the George W. Bush administration’s change of opinion on Middle-Eastern affairs may have *correlated* with increased pressure from Christian Right activists, one can never be sure that activists’ pressure *caused* Bush’s opinion to change. President Bush could very well have reversed his position due to his own personal beliefs, which may simply have coincided with those of the Christian Right. Moreover, although Zunes’s central argument is that the American government has become a “captive of the Christian Right,” he even admits that theological reasons may not have been the sole determining factor in Bush’s foreign policy decisions, because Israel is “an important asset to American strategic objectives” as well.^{lxxix}

Other scholars like to highlight the recent alliance between neo-conservatives and the Christian Right. Some historians argue that “neo-conservative idealists who wanted to spread freedom overseas and religious conservatives who wanted to protect the unborn at home” bound together because of the ideological similarities between political and religious fundamentalism.^{lxxx} While a neo-conservative and Christian Right alliance could prove to be a strong political force, one must remain doubtful that the “rise of religious fundamentalism has become one of the great problems facing the U.S. in the 21st century.”^{lxxxi} In fact, a 2005 Gallup study found that nearly 40% of evangelicals surveyed did not agree that the Iraq War was justified and that 38% no longer had high levels of trust in President Bush.^{lxxxii} Associate editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* Ross Douthat declares that over the past two years the possibility for a real and potent alliance between the Christian Right and the “neo-cons” has been lost.^{lxxxiii} Moreover, historian Martin Durham points out that although the Bush administration may be decisively on the right, it is not made up of strictly evangelicals. Durham accurately concludes, “Against a background of such political complexity, we should map evangelical Protestantism on to foreign policy only with the greatest caution.”^{lxxxiv}

Furthermore, Professor Zunes mistakenly assumes that Bush’s personal evangelical convictions are the driving force behind his foreign policies. According to Zunes, Bush told a former Palestinian Prime Minister that “God told me to strike Al-Qaeda and I struck them and then God instructed me to strike Saddam, which I did.”^{lxxxv} Like Zunes, Professor Scott Kline argues that Bush’s moral rhetoric surrounding the “war on terror” is not a rhetorical gloss, because Bush sincerely believes that this war remains at its core a battle between good and evil.^{lxxxvi} Yet, although Bush’s rhetoric clearly reveals that his faith could factor into his political decisions, it is also possible that Bush’s religious expressions are not literal and are simply a way

for Bush to think about political conflicts in terms that are understandable to him.^{lxxxvii} This example therefore demonstrates that analysts should be careful to assume that an official's rhetoric can lead to accurate conclusions about the determining factors of his political decisions.

Thus, there are many instances in which the influence of the Christian Right on and the role of faith in domestic and foreign policy have been exaggerated. Experts should be careful not to overstretch the evidence by making broad and sweeping claims about the power of the Christian Right, since many other concerns and factors need to be explained or taken into consideration. Although depicting the Christian Right as a manipulative, un-democratic constituency in American politics creates a more interesting story, it is important to grasp the true realities of this movement's power. A more reasonable conclusion would thus assume that the George W. Bush administration has been receptive but certainly not controlled by the Christian Right.

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND FAITH-BASED INITIATIVES

In order to better understand the dynamics between the Christian Right and the Bush administration, it is valuable to look at the history of George W. Bush's support for faith-based initiatives. One of the key highlights of George W. Bush's 2000 campaign was a call for "compassionate conservatism." This idea, coined by Professor Marvin Olasky, argued for a different, "softer" form of conservatism that could more effectively cure society's troubles.^{lxxxviii} Compassionate conservatism rejected the "Great Society" method of simply handing out funds to the poor and opted for a more communal and public approach. Olasky and Bush contended that only through compassion or direct "suffering with" the poor could society's troubles disappear.

In order to implement these ideas, compassionate conservatism demanded the government fund religious programs and institutions.

Historian Renee Formicola argues that Bush's advocacy for faith-based programs should be seen in a political context.^{lxxxix} Because conservative Christian groups often felt discriminated when social service funds went to their secular counterparts, scholars contend that Bush's support for faith-based initiatives was a way to secure his GOP base of conservative evangelicals.^{xc} In fact, former director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, John DiIulio, claims to have resigned because a "well-intentioned program had turned into a grab bag of political payoffs for the Christian Right."^{xcii} Other analysts argue that the faith-based initiatives were part of a larger minority outreach program fabricated by Karl Rove to "slice off pieces of the traditional Democratic coalitions."^{xciii} Formicola reaffirms this second claim, arguing that the faith-based programs became a way for Bush to expand his base among Catholic, Hispanic and African-American constituencies. This claim seems reasonable since many churches run by minority groups are often severely under-funded and could largely benefit from Bush's proposals. Moreover, data indicate that many evangelical organizations are often reluctant to receive government funding for fear that with these funds comes increased government interference. Thus, Bush's faith-based initiatives may have served not only to secure but also to expand his support among diverse American constituencies.^{xciii}

Formicola also declares that the faith-based initiatives were personally important to the president and that the strength of his commitment to these initiatives should be evident. She asserts, "Whenever policy proposals ran into significant obstacles the President personally revived the initiatives," whether by issuing executive orders or by trying to push legislation

through Congress. There thus appears to be several reasons why Bush may have been adamant in his call for “compassionate conservatism” and the implementation of faith-based programs.

According to Formicola, the events of 9/11 forever changed the future of Bush’s faith-based initiatives as the war on terrorism took clear precedence over the administration’s domestic policy proposals. However, David Kuo, former Deputy Director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, recently wrote that the Bush administration pushed aside the faith-based initiatives even before 9/11.^{xciv} Kuo claims that several months after Bush announced the creation of the Faith-Based Office, nothing was in place for the new office to start. He argues that Karl Rove demanded a “faith-based thing” quickly but failed to provide a director, staff, and office for some time. Moreover Kuo asserts that Bush personally knew of the huge problems the charitable world was facing, but did nothing. Although journalists like to depict a highly religious White House with direct channels to the Christian Right, Kuo contends that most of the White House staff saw evangelical leaders as people to be merely tolerated.^{xcv} Kuo describes how the faith-based office became “exactly like one of those small charities we were originally supposed to help-understaffed and under-funded.” Since the president’s 2006 budget contained across-the-board cuts to social programs and because money for the Office continues to come from already existing programs, Kuo believes the future of faith-based initiative looks grim.

The history of Bush’s faith-based initiatives is significant because it demonstrates more clearly the relationship between the George W. Bush administration and the Christian Right. Bush and Karl Rove’s attitudes toward the faith-based initiatives reveal that they are committed to satisfying supporters of the Christian Right through policy proposals up to a point. Clearly, when other political issues come into play or GOP leaders no longer need to mobilize Christian

conservatives for an election, these leaders tend to defect on their promises. Bush's diversion to other policy issues (tax cuts, Iraq War) in both of his terms forces one to re-examine the meaning of his religious rhetoric and support for "compassionate conservatism." In conclusion, Bush's proposals for "compassionate conservatism" through the execution of faith-based initiatives prove once again how the Christian Right has not infiltrated the GOP apparatus or come to dominate the current Bush administration.

A FRACTURING ALLIANCE?

In fact, the GOP and Christian Right alliance is called into question because of the failure of the Bush administration and Congress to follow through on their rhetoric and commitments to Christian conservatives. Radio host Dr. James Dobson, who many argue is the most powerful leader of conservative Christianity, declared that the Republican Congress and executive branch "squandered the opportunity to push a faith-based agenda" and let the "great promise of Faith-Based Initiatives die."^{xcvi} After the 2006 Congressional elections, Dobson claimed that "our loyalty should be to the issues, not the party."^{xcvii} However, one must question the actual consequences of Dobson's disenchantment with the GOP. Although some declare that Dobson has a "huge and loyal following that he can reach easily through an impressive media empire," this is not the first time that Dobson has threatened to breach political ties with the Republican Party.

Dobson announced in 1998 that he would abandon the GOP and form his own political organization by taking with him some of the 28 million people who follow his broadcast. According to journalist James Carney, GOP leaders panicked and thus tried to appease Dobson by pushing voucher programs through Congress and sending Dobson a social progress report.

By 2004, Dobson was ready to re-enter the political arena through his support for George W. Bush; Dobson explained that he simply couldn't sit out since Bush was committed to a system of beliefs.^{xcviii} Political Scientist David Leege claims that voters' wishes must either be satisfied by policy or manipulated by symbols.^{xcix} It thus appears that Dr. James Dobson and his followers have been influenced to a certain degree by the rhetoric and "symbols" of prominent GOP leaders. Although Dobson recognizes these leaders have "dropped the ball," his loyalty to "the issues" is likely to force him and his followers to continue working with Republican candidates who at least claim to support a social conservative agenda.^c

Additional evidence suggests that some Christian Right activists are more hesitant to run back to the Republican Party. A certain percentage of evangelicals are actively angry about the lack of social progress, along with the increased corruption in the GOP apparatus.^{ci} "It has not escaped our notice that they [Republicans] waited until just a few months before the November elections to address our agenda," claims Kenyn Cureton, executive committee member of the Southern Baptist Convention—the nation's largest Protestant denomination with nearly 16 million members.^{cii} In fact, a recent study found that under half of evangelicals (49%) say that the GOP is friendly to religion, a decline of 14 points from the year before.^{ciii} Another study found that evangelicals remain the GOP's most supportive group, but at levels significantly diminished from where they were in 2002 and 2004.^{civ}

Although polls indicate that the Democrats have made slight gains among moderate white evangelicals, the 2006 Congressional elections prove that Christian Right supporters are not ready to forsake their connections with the Republican Party.^{cv} In 2006, white evangelical and born-again Christians neither deserted GOP congressional candidates, nor did they stay home.^{cvi} Turnout among white evangelicals increased by 1 point from 2004 and 70% of white

evangelicals voted the Republican ticket compared to 72% in 2004.^{cvi} According to Steven Waldman, editor in chief of Beliefnet.com, a Web site on issues of faith, the 2006 elections showed some movement away from Republicans, but “by no means was there a stampede of evangelicals toward the Democrats.”^{cvi} Moreover, the 2006 congressional election results support Duane Oldfield’s conclusion in 1996 that Republicans have little reason to fear a defection by the Christian Right to the Democrats.

One may argue that the Democrats were successful in 2006 in part because Democratic candidates spoke more openly about socially conservative issues and their faith. But, as mentioned earlier, Christian Right voters are affected by a politicians’ increased use of religious rhetoric only up to a point. If politicians, once elected, do not sustain their moral rhetoric with policies favorable to the Christian Right, some Christian Right members will likely withdraw their support for that politician or party. Thus, unless the Democratic Party as a whole changes its social platform or prominent Democratic leaders push through legislation that appeals to the Christian Right, it is unlikely that a significant portion of Christian Right supporters will realign with the Democrats.

Moreover, although the Christian Right and GOP consider the other its “greatest strength but constant irritant,” analysts indicate that both groups rely too heavily on each other to split.^{cix} The Christian Right needs the Republican Party as a “vehicle to form the broad-based coalitions the movement is incapable of forming on its own.”^{cix} And the GOP needs an association with Christian Right leaders to not only help soften its image as the party of “big business,” but also to help mobilize conservative Christians come election time.

Thus, as the Christian Right becomes more experienced in politics, it remains to be seen at what point critical factions within the movement will no longer accept symbols and promises

from the GOP and demand more action. In 1994 Lyman Kellstedt hypothesized that the limits of the Christian Right's support for the GOP had not been reached.^{cxix} Since Kellstedt's hypothesis, it appears that the Christian Right has been crucial in electing Republican candidates; some scholars maintain that Bush could not have won the 2000 election without the concentrated support of the Christian Right.^{cxii} This paper has demonstrated that in the eyes of the Christian Right, Republican leaders have not upheld their part of the bargain. Former Christian Right leader Paul Weyrich asserts, "I don't have any illusions about Karl Rove. I think he advocates conservatism because he believes it's the way to win."^{cxiii} Moreover, a White House insider described that "there has been no domestic policy, really. The Bush administration dances this way and that on minute political calculations and whatever was needed for a few paragraphs of a speech."^{cxiv} The insider argues that the last two years of the Bush administration could be considered not a case of "benign neglect" but "brilliant neglect" for Christian Right concerns, since GOP leaders have been able to capitalize on Christian Right support without providing much in return. The future of the GOP-Christian Right alliance will thus depend on whether new Republican leaders offer the Christian Right more than lip service by seriously undertaking a Christian Right agenda.

Moreover, Republican leaders will need to address two conflicting GOP constituencies. Many evangelicals within the Christian Right do not necessarily agree with the economic policies of libertarians within the GOP. Historian Scott Kline highlights this tension between Republican factions by arguing that the "very values religious conservatives want to protect are eroded by the implementation of a free-market society."^{cxv} Perhaps it is because of the conflict among GOP constituents that Republicans are often hesitant to support radical social policies. Historian Wilcox hypothesizes, however, that Christian Right activists could "bolt the Party" if

the next Republican candidate is less supportive of the Christian Right agenda than George W. Bush.^{cxvi} Although George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan were able to weld together a socially and economically conservative alliance, because segments of the Christian Right are currently disillusioned at the lack of social progress by current Republican officials, retaining this coalition will be no easy task for future GOP leaders.

THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT IN AMERICA: PAST AND PRESENT

In addition to reevaluating its relationship with the Republican Party, the Christian Right movement will also need to ensure that the social issues it deems important remain in American political discourse. The Christian Right movement has been less successful in implementing policy changes and more successful in changing the terms of debate by engaging in what some call a “culture war.”^{cxvii} Ed Dobson, a former leader of the Moral Majority, confesses that its members were “good at being *against* something, but were never good at being *for* something.”^{cxviii} As mentioned previously, it is because the Christian Right often views itself as an embattled minority that must engage in a “culture war” against its political enemies that it has garnered such support from the American grass-roots, enabling it to progress into the twenty-first century. Even though Christian conservatives engage in politics because they consider it necessary to fight against those with opposing ideologies, Religious Right scholar John Green asserts that these activists half expect to lose and be betrayed.^{cxix} Furthermore, Senior Fellow Morris Fiorina of the Hoover Institution disputes most pundits’ claim that a “culture war” exists, by arguing that Americans hold moderate views on even the stickiest of social issues.^{cxx}

New evidence suggests that Fiorina is correct to counter claims that America is becoming a nation stricken by a deep ideological divide. Data show that compared to the 1960s and 1970s Americans are much more tolerant of the views of different groups in society such as African-

Americans, Jews, homosexuals and atheists.^{cxxxi} According to journalist David Brooks, Americans are hungry for a morality that is neither absolutist nor nihilistic.^{cxxii} For example, while most U.S. citizens oppose same-sex marriage, most are against overturning *Roe v. Wade*.^{cxxiii} Moreover, some political analysts maintain that some Americans are burned out on the subject of marriage and its boundaries.^{cxxiv} Pollster Robert Wyatt asserts that same-sex marriage “doesn’t seem to be as salient to what most Tennesseans are concerned about now.”^{cxxv} Thus, in the future it will be crucial for the Christian Right to convince potential supporters that its moral agenda is relevant and that there still is a culture war to be fought.

Finally, the Christian Right will need to reevaluate its institutions, structure, and means of communicating with and retaining its supporters. Throughout the past two decades scholars have written the obituary for the Christian Right, yet each time it has “generally risen from the dead.”^{cxxvi} One of the first Christian Right groups, the Moral Majority, arose in 1979 and attracted mostly fundamentalist supporters who were often intolerant of their evangelical and Pentecostal brethren. This organization relied primarily on funding from direct-mail efforts and was often “long on morality, but short on skill.”^{cxxvii} Not only was the Moral Majority “politically inept,” but it also often alienated its allies.^{cxxviii} The fall of the Moral Majority in 1989 thus led to the rise of the Christian Coalition, founded by Pat Robertson, that same year. The Christian Coalition was able to attract a broader and more ecumenical membership than had the Moral Majority and even became more influential among political elites.^{cxxix} Leaders of the Christian Coalition began to learn that politics involved compromise and replaced ineffective direct-mail efforts with membership fees. Its first executive director, Ralph Reed, often supported moderate Republican candidates even when they did not oppose abortion or support the Coalition’s goals.

Although Christian Right organizations prospered under the Clinton administration, the failure to impeach Clinton dismayed many Christian Right activists, leading, conservative leader Paul Weyrich to write a letter in 1999 announcing the defeat of the Christian Right. Weyrich explained, “I believe we have lost the culture war...I no longer believe there is a moral majority and politics itself has failed.”^{cxxx} That same year the Christian Coalition began to fracture amidst financial scandals and disputes within the organization. By 2000 the organization seemed to have lost its focus and therefore the Christian Right became less active and influential in the 2000 general election than it had been in 1996.^{cxxxi} Yet George W. Bush reawakened the Christian Right movement by emphasizing the importance of speaking openly about faith. Instead of paying homage to the dying Christian Coalition, Bush appealed to Christian conservatives directly. In this way he could disassociate himself from contentious Christian Right leaders and garner direct support from the movement’s constituents. Journalist Milbank wrote, “Pat Robertson’s resignation this month as president of the Christian Coalition confirmed the ascendance of a new leader of the Religious Right: George W. Bush.”^{cxxxii} Moreover, the decision of a Massachusetts Court to legalize gay-marriage in 2003 also reinvigorated the movement and forced Christian Right activists to rally behind state ballot initiatives preventing gay-marriage in the 2004 election. Thus, as Christian Right organizations and leaders have come and gone, the movement has adjusted itself to the traditional practices of American politics.^{cxxxiii}

Although some may argue that the recent fall of Christian Right organizations will lead to the movement’s demise, it appears that other forms of outreach and communication are emerging.^{cxxxiv} As mentioned earlier, Dr. James Dobson’s media ministry is huge, consisting of radio programs, television outlets and newspaper columns, just to name a few. In 2004 Dobson’s Focus on the Family teamed up with the Southern Baptist Convention to create the 2004

iVoteValues initiative, a massive voter mobilization effort to convince conservative Christians to “vote their values”.^{cxxxv} Through events, rallies and several websites, the iVoteValues initiative used new media outlets to compare the platforms of the Democratic and Republican Parties and provide voter registration information.

Moreover, Historian Stephen Wayne professes that the Christian Right remains an important electoral force even when it is not fully mobilized, such as in 2000.^{cxxxvi} Because many issues of great concern to the Christian Right are being decided at the state level, the movement is beginning to re-focus much of its attention on lower levels of government.^{cxxxvii} By doing so, the Christian Right could have a greater impact on state political processes and would no longer need as much direction from a larger national organization such as the Christian Coalition.

Therefore, it appears the Christian Right is neither dead nor will it soon collapse. As the movement has matured, Christian Right leaders seem to be playing less of a dominant role, while supporters have become more independent and directly in touch with the movement’s Republican allies and more local levels of government. New technologies and forms of mass communicative have also helped the movement diffuse into a host of groups instead of one central organization. Thus, one should not mistake changes for a collapse within the Christian Right.

THE NEW “NEW CHRISTIAN RIGHT”

The Christian Right is at a turning point for another reason. Not only is the movement reforming its structure and organizations, but segments of the group are also reconsidering the old Christian Right agenda by proposing new strategies. Currently many evangelicals and fundamentalists, the Christian Right’s most ardent supporters, are increasingly viewing politics,

the pursuit of justice and their Christian duty in a different light. Three competing viewpoints seem to be emerging out of the old Christian Right.

The first viewpoint encourages conservative Christians to continue what most Christian Right leaders have been doing for the past three decades. It maintains that Christian conservatives should engage in politics to prevent a corrupt American culture from inhibiting Christian growth and prosperity. Although, according to scholar Morris Fiorina, the American public may not be in the midst of a “culture war” as a whole, evangelical Protestants who maintain the first viewpoint believe in this clash of cultures and therefore view politics specifically as a struggle against an “external” culture. Reverend Falwell asserts, “It is the capitulation of the pulpits to culture that has been the major cause of the sinking and freefall we are in.”^{cxviii} According to Dr. James Dobson, the very fact that Democrats are emphasizing the importance of religion proves that moral values are important to America.^{cxix} Moreover he asserts that there is not a “scrap of evidence” to suggest that it is immoral for Christians to “get political.”^{cxl} Thus activists such as Falwell and Dobson continue to fight for the traditional Christian Right agenda: eliminating abortions, preventing gay-marriage, increasing religious prayer in public schools.

According to historian Clyde Wilcox, certain credible scholars predict the “inevitable failure” of the Christian Right to succeed in changing America’s moral landscape.^{cxli} Since America seems to be moving in a more moderate direction, one might agree with these scholars. Yet, “success” depends on how you define it. It is unlikely that activists who support the traditional Christian Right agenda will be able to completely prevent abortion or civil unions. However, these activists have and could continue to be successful in altering America’s political discourse. According to Professor Leege, “Americans are too culturally and religiously

pluralistic to withdraw the transcendent values and God-talk from the public square for long.”^{cxlii} Because judicial decisions have a great influence on the traditional Christian Right agenda, many activists view the judiciary as one of, if not the most important venue to garner support for their positions.^{cxliii} In fact, Christian Right activists who maintain viewpoint one have been highly successful at getting conservative judges on the bench.^{cxliv} Historian Clyde Wilcox claims that the more the Christian Right succeeds, the more heated the opposition to the movement becomes.^{cxlv} The opposite seems also to be true: the more moderate America becomes, the more heated the opposition by the Christian Right. Thus, it remains to be seen how supporters of viewpoint one will advance an old agenda amidst a more tolerant American culture.

Other Christian Right members have come to view politics quite differently. Activists with a second point of view believe that politics and religion do not mix and that one must view these “culture wars” as an internal struggle. Former Christian Right leaders Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson assert, “We failed because we were unable to redirect a nation top down. Real change must come from the bottom up or better yet from the inside out.”^{cxlvi} In fact, former Deputy Director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, David Kuo, argues that the failure of the Christian Right to fundamentally change most American’s position on social issues suggests a retreat from political life. Disillusioned Christian Right activists like Kuo maintain that conservative Christians should focus more on building alternative institutions such as churches instead of working through the Democratic or Republican Party.^{cxlvii} In other words, these activists believe that Christians should stop playing the role of Advisor and begin once again to perform the role of Prophet. Thus, these Christian Right supporters are highly critical of their allies who strive to change society through the political system. Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson profess, “If politicians could bring revival, we wouldn’t need God.”^{cxlviii}

Finally, a third viewpoint has emerged. A “slightly young, considerably less pugnacious and less reflexively Republican generation of conservative leaders” is questioning the attitudes and agenda of the older Christian Right.^{cxlix} These Christian conservatives, who in the past have supported the Republican Party, are emphasizing more liberal and communitarian economic and social policies.^{cl} As mentioned earlier, Republican political strategies can often run counter to the religious practices of many evangelicals and fundamentalist Christians. Not only are these former Christian Right and Republican supporters questioning the libertarian free-market and corporate economic policies of the GOP, but they are also demanding that the government focus on other problems such as poverty, AIDS, economic development, education and the environment. For example, vice-president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Richard Cizik, is reconsidering his silence on environmental issues.^{cli} Leaders such as Cizik are realizing that the Bible mandates stewardship of God’s creation and that environmental protection should therefore be a Christian concern. In fact, a recent survey indicates that 79% of evangelicals agree that the government should do more to protect the environment.^{clii} According to Michael Gerson, former White House aide and speechwriter for George W. Bush, this politically progressive evangelicalism is not an innovation, but a revival.^{cliii} Gerson explains that evangelicals were a pivotal force in legalizing strikes, getting women the right to vote and in creating the progressive income tax.

Gerson also confirms, however, that this “new evangelicalism” is more of a tendency than a movement. Rising evangelical leaders will need to convince potential supporters that political involvement is not anathema to the evangelical tradition—as some Christian Right members who maintain viewpoint two may claim—by emphasizing the role politics can play in the pursuit of justice. And while evangelical activists with the third viewpoint are generally

more liberal than the historical leaders of the Christian Right, these leaders have the potential to draw many former Christian Right supporters into a new coalition.

CONCLUSION

Thus, this paper has attempted to clarify the political strengths of the Christian Right in light of the many changes it has experienced within the past decade. The friction between political involvement and conservative Christians' religious beliefs continues to force many activists to make the difficult choice between playing the role of "Prophet" and the role of "Advisor." Although the Christian Right has formed a valuable alliance with the GOP in the last three decades, evidence suggests that the movement has helped elect Republican candidates yet gotten little but "religious rhetoric" in return. The evidence in this paper also indicates that the Christian Right has had neither a dominant impact on the domestic nor the foreign policies of the George W. Bush administration. Moreover, as the Christian Right has increasingly become disillusioned with the Republican Party, it seems to be split in three different segments. While some Christian Right activists, like Dr. James Dobson, advocate a more passionate and strategic political engagement, others such as Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson argue for a "fast" and complete break with politics. A third faction appears to be moving in a more liberal direction by calling for increased attention to world poverty, the environment and other global issues.

Furthermore, the turnout and support for GOP candidates by Christian conservatives in the 2006 elections indicate that the Christian Right-Republican alliance is unlikely to fall apart in the near future. However, because many Christian Right activists' are displeased with the corruption in and lack of social progress by Republicans within the last 6 years, it appears that this alliance is fragile. It thus remains to be seen how or even if rising GOP leaders will address Christian Right supporters' growing concerns. Therefore, the evolution of the Christian Right-

Republican alliance will generate many questions for scholars to answer. Although Mahatma Gandhi made a valid argument when he claimed, “He who says religion and politics don’t mix understands neither one,” it is essential that future Christian Right scholars accurately dissect the dynamics between religion and politics without exaggerating the power of one over the other.

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