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THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION*

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ABSTRACT. *The 'religious right' came to prominence in the US during the late 1970s by campaigning on 'social issues' and encouraging many fundamentalist and evangelical Christians to get involved in politics. However, the fact that it clashed with 'born again' President Jimmy Carter over tax breaks for religious schools believed to be discriminatory, together with its illiberal stances on many issues, meant that it was characterized as an extremist movement. I argue that this assessment is oversimplified. First, many Christian schools were not racially discriminatory, and their defenders resented being labelled as racists. Secondly, few historians have recognized that the Christians involved in the religious right were among the most secularized of their kind. The religious right was often mistakenly categorized alongside earlier American Christian political movements that had displayed extremist and anti-democratic tendencies. The Carter administration's records and oft-ignored religious right ephemeral literature partly substantiate the movement's contention that it was defensive rather than theocratic in nature. One of my conclusions is that more attention must be paid to the subtle nuances of the political and theological views of religious right leaders, because the confusion surrounding the religious right is partly a function of its leaders harbouring internally inconsistent views.*

I

We have enough votes to run the country … and when the people say, 'We've had enough' we are going to take over.

Pat Robertson, 1980[1]

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My research would have been impossible without use of the 'Fundamentalism File' at Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. Also vital were the archives at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta, Georgia. I am grateful for the help of the staff at both institutions with locating pertinent material.

Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation kindly agreed for me to conduct a telephone interview with him. Other leading religious right figures were contacted. Jerry Falwell provided an autographed copy of his autobiography. Pat Robertson's office said he would answer written questions, but no answers have been received to date.

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[1] E. J. Dionne, Jr, *Why Americans hate politics* (New York, 1992), p. 211.

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The 'religious right' shocked informed opinion by helping to eject evangelical president Jimmy Carter in 1980. However, this shock was largely the result of ignorance of who exactly 'evangelicals' were and what they believed. One of the consequences of this shock was that contemporary observers and historians too readily used socio-psychological theories to explain the movement, rather than view it as a more straightforward 'interest-based' movement.

The form of Christianity known as 'fundamentalism' emerged as a reaction to 'higher criticism' of the Bible by 'modernist' churches in the late nineteenth century. Fundamentalists believe in a personal relationship with God through being 'born again' and premillenial dispensational apocalypticism – that the Bible outlined a divinely ordained path of history, culminating in a battle between Christ and Satan at Armageddon.[2] However, the antithetical forces of the Calvinist imperative to impose moral order on the world and the existence of a 'primary moral agreement' among the 'saved' precluding contact with the 'unsaved'[3] have forced believers to suffer the quandary of whether to involve themselves in politics or not. Somewhat ironically, the religious right originated amongst those fundamentalists sufficiently secularized to fight for their beliefs in the political arena.

Many fundamentalists believe in the separation of church and state and stress the freedom of the individual to mediate his own relationship with God. The tension between strident moralism and belief in freedom of conscience was evident in the relationship between Carter and the religious right.

By the 1940s, however, fundamentalism had declined to the margins of society, associated with poorer, rural areas and discredited causes such as creationism and prohibition.[4] Fundamentalists became insular, focusing on individual salvation and abandoning hope of societal change before Christ's return, a doctrine known as 'premillenialism'.[5]

During the 1940s and 1950s certain fundamentalists, particularly those associated with Reverend Carl McIntire's American Council of Christian Churches, participated in the extreme right and McCarthyism.[6] However, their dogmatism confined them to the extremes where the total lack of ambiguity offered them assurance that they were not unwittingly associating with the godless.

Eventually two new subsets of fundamentalism, similar in theology but socially distinct, emerged to revitalize the religion during the post-war period.

[2] Sharon Linzey Georgianna, *The Moral Majority and fundamentalism: plausibility and disonnance* (Ceredigion, 1989), p. 7.

[3] James A. Speer, 'The new Christian right and its parent company: a study in political contrasts', in David G. Bromley and Anson Shupe, eds., *New Christian politics* (Atlanta, 1984), p. 25.

[4] Speer, 'The new Christian right and its parent company', pp. 29–31.

[5] Richard V. Pierard, *The unequal yoke: evangelical Christianity and political conservatism* (Philadelphia and New York, 1970), pp. 29–33.

[6] Speer, 'The new Christian right and its parent company', pp. 31–5.

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The first subtype is sometimes referred to as 'neofundamentalism',[7] which arose when some fundamentalists accepted the difference between norms in their home and church lives and in the public sphere. Neofundamentalism marketed itself 'aggressively to individual consumers' but did not require them to cut themselves off from the world.[8] It flourished in states such as California, where there were many recent migrants who were upwardly mobile but where there was also little sense of organic community. 'Religious entrepreneurs' emphasized self-help and the relationship between religion and worldly success and 'won adherents exactly because they failed to account for the material causes for the social breakdown of families, for drugs, and for social violence, namely, the free market and the deep class divisions it generated'. Neofundamentalism also attracted young people searching for authenticity in a materialistic society.[9] Reverends Robert Schuller, Jerry Falwell, and others began to establish 'megachurches' from the 1950s onward, often with memberships in the tens of thousands by the 1970s. However, the emphasis on the personal 'made it difficult for the evangelical tradition to develop an acceptable doctrine of society and politics'.[10]

Another subtype of fundamentalism was 'neoevangelicalism.' Commonly referred to as 'evangelicals' (although this is also often used as a blanket term for all shades of fundamentalism!), the Reverend Billy Graham personified this movement.[11] Unlike the arguably more shallow neofundamentalist leaders, Graham et al. 'had in mind the creation of a philosophically defensible biblical theology',[12] founding theological colleges and publications such as *Christianity Today*.[13] Evangelicals tended to avoid the political extremes and could be found on both the right and left.

As these new fundamentalisms emerged, new forms of ministry were invented to satisfy the demand for information and entertainment uncorrupted by secularism. The most significant invention was 'televangelism', which boomed after the Federal Communications Commission allowed stations to charge for religious programmes yet still count them as public service broadcasts. In 1960, Pat Robertson set up the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN). By 1979, CBN's *700 Club* news/talk show had over 5 million viewers and the network received over $50m annually in donations. By the late 1970s, over 25 million people watched such broadcasts weekly. When combined with Christian schools and universities, fundamentalists 'controlled more non-mainstream media resources than any

[7] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban warriors: the origins of the new American right* (Princeton and Oxford, 2001), pp. 251–4.

[8] Duane Murray Oldfield, *The right and the righteous: the Christian right confronts the Republican party* (Lanham, MD, and London, 1996), pp. 43–7.

[9] McGirr, *Suburban warriors*, pp. 241–2, 257.

[10] Kenneth E. Morris, *Jimmy Carter, American moralist* (Athens, GA, and London, 1996), p. 158.

[11] Speer, 'The new Christian right and its parent company', p. 31.

[12] Robert Wuthnow, *The restructuring of American religion: society and faith since World War II* (Pinceton, NJ, 1988), p. 180.

[13] Sara Diamond, *Roads to dominion: right-wing movements and political power in the United States* (New York and London, 1995), p. 93.

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other sector of society', a fact noted by conservatives.[14] However, the *700 Club* and Jerry Falwell's *Old-Time Gospel Hour* were not notably political at first.[15]

Harding argues that this process of secularization among fundamentalists made the religious right possible. In the 1970s and 1980s, Falwell and fundamentalist theologian Francis Schaeffer 'pared separatism down to its ecclesiastical essence',[16] arguing that Christianity was best served through ministry in a broad sense.[17] A logical conclusion was that Christians could use politics as a form of ministry.

By the late 1970s over 40 million Americans considered themselves 'born again'.[18] *Time* labelled 1976 'The Year of the Evangelical'.[19] However, 'evangelical' meant many different things and the nuances were not always understood. Furthermore, the various types did not correlate with political attitudes. Some of the most traditional fundamentalists opposed the religious right, whilst some more secular fundamentalists, and those outside the fundamentalist and even Christian traditions, supported it.

Many observers believe that the religious right was part of the 'radical right',[20] rather than a more straightforward movement seeking to promote the interests of its constituency. Lipset and Raab argued that those left behind by social change embraced the 'radical right' because it offered to replace the uncertainties of a pluralistic society with a fixed moral-political order in which their position would be secure.[21] Adorno argued that these 'authoritarian personalities' displaced their self-loathing into hatred of the 'other' and tended toward the political extremes.[22]

Hofstadter elaborated on this with his theory of 'pseudoconservatism'. He argued that throughout American history, the lower middle classes had periodically become worried that the 'elite' was promoting the poor and minorities at their expense. This 'status anxiety' caused them to embrace movements such as McCarthyism, not due to an interest-based fear of communism, but because anti-communism was a subtle way of attacking the 'establishment'. Politicized fundamentalists such as McIntire were pseudoconservatives because they combined 'the economic prejudices of the newly well-to-do with the moral prejudices of the revolt against modernity'.[23] The moral certainties of a literally read Bible complemented extremist political movements with a stark, binary worldview of good and evil. State welfare meant that many fundamentalists 'felt that that their way

[14] Ibid., pp. 163–5. [15] Speer, 'The new Christian right and its parent company', pp. 55–7.
[16] Susan Friend Harding, *The book of Jerry Falwell: fundamentalist language and politics* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), p. 150. [17] Ibid., pp. 130–6. [18] Ibid, p. 35.
[19] Diamond, *Roads to dominion*, p. 163.
[20] See Daniel Bell et al., *The radical right* (3rd edn, New Brunswick and London, 2002).
[21] Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The politics of unreason: right-wing extremism in America* (2nd edn, Chicago and London, 1978), pp. 6, 13, 16, 24.
[22] Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian soldiers? The religious right in American politics* (Boulder, CO, and Oxford, 1996), pp. 96–7.
[23] Richard Hofstadter, 'Pseudo-conservatism revisited: 1965', in Richard Hofstadter, ed., *The paranoid style in American politics and other essays* (London, 1966), pp. 74–5.

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of life has been officially and insultingly repudiated'.[24] Wilcox later found evidence of alienation and authoritarian attitudes among Moral Majority activists.[25]

During the 1970s, Warren estimated that 30 per cent of white Americans were 'Middle American Radicals' (MARs) who supported the 'backlash' against civil rights and welfare policies that 'forced Middle America to subsidize the laziness and immorality of the poor, and exposed good people to various hedonistic lifestyles'.[26] Although many evangelicals shared MAR attitudes, such as distrust of the establishment,[27] they were *ascending* the socio-economic ladder, not descending it as status anxiety theory would suggest.

MARs were at the heart of the populist 'New Right'. Richard Nixon's strategist Kevin Phillips coined the term to describe the politics of 'social issues' evident in the campaigns of Barry Goldwater, George Wallace, and Nixon.[28] The New Right represented the white lower middle classes' desire for moral order and economic stability, and was articulated by organizations such as the Heritage Foundation, a think tank created by Paul Weyrich, and the Conservative Caucus, a grassroots body set up by Howard Phillips, both established in the early 1970s.[29] The Federal Election Campaign Acts of the 1970s boosted the New Right by allowing organizations to spend 'soft money' on behalf of issues or candidates, money easier to come by for a movement that exploited local grievances to generate many small donations.[30] Money was often solicited through direct mail to bypass the 'mainstream media'.[31]

The Supreme Court's banning of public school prayer (1962) and legalization of abortion (1973) outraged many evangelicals and fundamentalists. However, few decided to participate actively in politics as a result. Paul Weyrich told the author that he was unable to involve them in politics in their own right because their most important concern was that they could raise their families and teach their children in their own way, which had not yet been threatened by the government.[32]

Some local campaigns against social liberalism involved fundamentalists. In 1966 the California League for Enlisting Action Now (CLEAN) campaigned for 'Proposition 16', a measure designed to reverse the Supreme Court's relaxation of obscenity laws. Reverend Tim LaHaye of Scott Memorial Baptist Church was on CLEAN's advisory board. Although supported by gubernatorial candidate Ronald Reagan, Proposition 16 failed. A 1969–70 campaign against sex education

[24] Ibid., p. 90.
[25] Wilcox, *Onward Christian soldiers?* pp. 90–9.
[26] Cited in Bruce Nesmith, *The new Republican coalition: the Reagan campaigns and white evangelicals* (New York, 1994), p. 20.
[27] Donald I. Warren, *The radical center: middle Americans and the politics of alienation* (Notre Dame and London, 1976), p. 7.
[28] Richard A. Viguerie, *The New Right: we're ready to lead* (revised edn, Falls Church, VA, 1981), p. 53.
[29] Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the right: the 'New Right' and the politics of resentment* (New York, 1980), p. 65.
[30] Gillian Peele, *Revival and reaction: the right in contemporary America* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 73–4.
[31] Dionne, *Why Americans hate politics*, p. 229.
[32] Paul M. Weyrich, telephone interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.

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led to a state law requiring parental consent.[33] In 1974, parents in Kanawha County, West Virginia, protested about cultural relativism in school textbooks. Fundamentalist ministers, the Klu Klux Klan and the Heritage Foundation provided support.[34] Arizona Republican congressman John Conlan encouraged travelling salesman Ed McAteer, who had extensive contacts with southern evangelicals, to head the right-wing Christian Freedom Foundation in 1974.[35]

However, these campaigns were not the genesis of the religious right. Weyrich believes that the Carter administration's policy toward Christian schools was the turning point, because those affected realized that 'unless they got active in the political process … they were going to have regulations forced upon them that they found unacceptable'.[36]

II

Jimmy Carter was a modern southern Baptist and a relatively conservative Democrat. His distaste for interest-group politics was appealing even though it made coalition building difficult. His combination of modernity with conservatism helped to win over both religious and secular voters.[37] Baptists contributed to some of his primary victories,[38] but fundamentalists did not vote *en bloc* because the state had not interfered with their religious freedom, and in any case there was little to choose between Carter and his opponent President Ford on social issues. Carter supported banning Medicaid for abortions but opposed a constitutional amendment against abortion, which Ford supported. Indeed, 'at no time were southern evangelicals addressed as specific group with distinctive policy concerns, or as a target for particular appeals. Carter's campaign treated them as southerners rather than evangelicals.'[39] Ford used CBN,[40] yet some supporters used the slogan 'Jimmy Carter wears his religion on his sleeve, but Jerry Ford wears it in his heart.'[41] Ford's campaign anticipated that 'The image of a "holier than thou" re-born Christian imposing his personal brand of morality on the nation will "wear thin" in an intense campaign with great numbers of Americans.' Although Carter merely explained his beliefs when questioned,[42] a backlash occurred. One letter writer found 'his inability – or unwillingness – to draw a clear line between his religious sensibility (church) and his secular calling (state) disturbing'.[43]

[33] McGirr, *Suburban warriors*, pp. 226–30.

[34] Diamond, *Roads to dominion*, p. 171; Kenneth J. Heineman, *God is a conservative: religion, politics and morality in contemporary America* (New York and London, 1998), p. 107.

[35] Diamond, *Roads to dominion*, p. 173.

[36] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.

[37] Dionne, *Why Americans hate politics*, pp. 120–1.

[38] 'Politics and religion' by James Reston, *New York Times*, 2 May 1976, Sec. 4, p. 15 col. 1.

[39] Nesmith, *The new Republican coalition*, pp. 44–5, 61, 59.

[40] Heineman, *God is a conservative*, p. 76.

[41] 'Ford, in appeal to evangelists, stresses his religious beliefs' by Kenneth A. Briggs, *New York Times*, 10 Oct. 1976, p. 41 col. 1.

[42] Nesmith, *The new Republican coalition*, pp. 63–4.

[43] 'Carter's sermons', letter of 28 June 1976 from Mary E. Curtis to the *New York Times*, 4 July 1976, Sec. 4, p. 10 col. 3.

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The main fundamentalist opposition came from hardliners who later *opposed* the religious right. Guy Archer Weniger, president of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship, attacked Carter on grounds of character rather than policy, unlike the religious right. He was concerned about Carter's interview with *Playboy*, claiming that evangelicals were 'overwhelmed that he would lend presidential respectability to one of the most wicked magazines of filth which has contributed so heavily to the moral decay of our nation'. Weniger maintained that Carter was not born-again, and was misleading born-again voters, 'all of whom would be attracted by a truly born again candidate'.[44]

Carter however *did* regard himself as 'truly born again'. He was 'reborn' following his failure in the 1966 Georgia gubernatorial race, and subsequently 'conceptualized politics as a vehicle for advancing God's kingdom on earth by alleviating human suffering and despair on a scale that infinitely magnified what one individual could do alone'. He read the work of liberal theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who believed that Christians could participate in politics without compromising their beliefs.[45] Jerry Falwell and Francis Schaeffer later argued a similar case from a conservative perspective. Paradoxically, Carter and many religious right leaders came from similar backgrounds and were influenced by similar justifications for political involvement. Unreconstructed fundamentalists remained aloof from such involvement – Weniger at various points denounced Niebuhr, Carter, and Falwell in equal measures!

Carter's administration demonstrated that it did not recognize conservative Christians of any creed as an interest group well before the Christian schools crisis. Neither liberals nor conservatives found Carter's nuanced views on social issues satisfactory. In March 1977, born-again singer Anita Bryant denounced Margaret 'Midge' Costanza, Carter's special assistant for women's affairs, for meeting with gays, claiming that they were 'really asking to be blessed in their abnormal lifestyle by the office of the President of the United States'.[46] A Catholic complained about the 'raucously pro-abortion' Costanza,[47] yet in July 1977 Costanza told Carter that she had received an 'overwhelming number of phone calls … expressing concern and even anger' over his opposition to government funding for non-medically necessary abortions. Carter's annotations to her memo encapsulated his quandary. 'My opinion was well defined to U.S. during Campaign. My Statement is actually more liberal than I feel

[44] Guy Archer Weniger, 'Jimmy Carter and the evangelical conscience', *Fundamental Baptist Fellowship Information Bulletin*, vol. 20, no. 2, 7 Oct. 1976, Greenville, South Carolina, Bob Jones University, Bob Jones University Fundamentalism File (BJUFF), 'Carter, James Earl' folder, No. 4485.

[45] Peter G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: a comprehensive biography from plains to postpresidency* (New York, 1997), pp. 171–8.

[46] 'Anita Bryant scores White House talks with homosexuals', *New York Times*, 28 Mar. 1977, p. 56 col. 5.

[47] Letter from Joseph P. Reilly to President Carter, 29 Sept. 1978, Atlanta, Georgia, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (JCPL), White House Central Files (WHCF)-Subject File, Box RM-2, folder 'Religious matters RM3 10/1/79-5/31/79'.

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personally.'[48] Carter's later dismissal of Costanza for publicly questioning his abortion policy did not assuage conservative concerns that the administration was overly feminist. For example, in 1979 religious right leader Phyllis Schlafly, testifying in Congress against an administration-backed bill to fund domestic violence shelters, hysterically condemned them as feminist indoctrination centres.[49]

Other perceived slights also strained relations. Weyrich explained that Carter's failure to appoint evangelicals to his administration, as promised to Pat Robertson, was 'very upsetting' for his religious supporters.[50] Robertson backed Ford following Carter's *Playboy* interview, but otherwise remained favourably disposed toward Carter, referring to him in first name terms as a 'Christian brother' in a December 1976 letter.[51]

Alienation turned to outrage when the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) withdrew the automatic tax-exempt status of Christian schools, giving fundamentalists a compelling reason to enter politics. The number of students in these schools was negligible as late as the mid-1960s, then increased dramatically to 1·45 m by 1981. Many suspected that the growth, concentrated in the south, was linked to public school desegregation. In the 1960s the IRS had adopted regulations governing the tax-exempt status of such institutions in order to avoid subsidizing those that were segregated. Because both parties opposed blatant discrimination, the IRS was allowed, apparently with little interference from any administration, periodically to refine the regulations. IRS commissioner Jerome Kurtz must have expected a similarly muted response when in August 1978 he proposed going beyond requiring such institutions to adopt formal statements of non-discrimination.[52]

There is no evidence that the Carter administration was involved in drafting the regulations, indicating that they were regarded as in line with established policy. The new regulations forced such institutions formed or expanded at the time of public school desegregation in the locality and with a low minority presence either to meet a quota of minority students or to prove operation 'in good faith on a racially non-discriminatory basis' through specific measures mandated by the IRS.[53] Furthermore, the institutions would be categorized on *prima facie* evidence and they bore the burden of proof. Yet the sectarian nature of Christian

[48] Memorandum from Margaret 'Midge' Costanza to the president, 'Staff and interest group reactions to president's abortion statements', 13 July 1977, pp. 1–2, JCPL, WHCF-Name File, 'Abortion 1/77-12/77' folder.

[49] Susan M. Hartmann, 'Feminism, public policy, and the Carter administration', in Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham, eds., *The Carter presidency: policy choices in the post-New Deal era* (Lawrence, KA, 1998) p. 235.

[50] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.

[51] Letter from Pat Robertson, president of the Christian Broadcasting Network Inc., to President-Elect Jimmy Carter, 19 Dec. 1976, JCPL, WHCF-Name File, folder 'Robertson, P. '.

[52] Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain reaction: the impact of race, rights and taxes on American politics* (New York and London, 1991), pp. 132–3.

[53] News Release, Public Affairs Division of the Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service No. IR-2027, 21 Aug. 1978, JCPL, Domestic Policy Staff (Civil Rights and Justice) – White (Frank), Box 13, 'IRS-private schools' folder.

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schools made it difficult to meet such quotas whether they were discriminatory or not.

Some of the institutions were discriminatory, such as Bob Jones University of South Carolina, which justified its policies with Biblical references.[54] Dionne argues that 'Most of the evangelical conservatives [in the religious right] were white southerners who began voting against the Democrats because of civil rights',[55] and Jerry Falwell himself admitted that he had not been 'Christian enough' to realize that he was a racist during the civil rights era.[56]

But it was trends in public school curricula rather than integration that offended many evangelicals and fundamentalists. Weyrich explained that the schools welcomed 'any colour, any creed' but insisted on teaching their way.[57] The newsletter of the Cornerstone Baptist Church of Belmont, Massachusetts (hardly a segregationist stronghold!), declared 'Sex education in the public schools is growing and the evils of it cannot be exaggerated.' Noting that the New Jersey Board of Education had instituted it from kindergarten upward with 'an appreciation for the whole range of sexuality' the article concluded, in no uncertain terms, 'Christian schools are a must for believers!'[58] A letter to Carter from New York explained:

> the several private religious schools with which we are acquainted could in no way be called racist. It is not economically feasible for them to actively and specifically recruit members of minority groups, but they do heartily accept students from such groups. The main reason we favour private Christian schools is that, by and large, the public schools do not adhere to, or even set, acceptable moral and/or academic standards for our children.[59]

Another letter protested: 'Our schools are not racially discriminatory, and we strongly dislike being placed in the position of being considered guilty until proven innocent.'[60] The simple facts that fees might increase if a school lost its tax-exempt status and that many Christian schools performed better than public schools gave parents a stake in defending them.[61] An October 1978 letter warned that secularism in public schools and the new regulations were 'the first step to undermining and destroying our country' and concluded 'I have never written

[54] Walter H. Capps, *The new religious right: piety, patriotism and politics* (Columbia, SC, 1990), p. 106.

[55] Dionne, *Why Americans hate politics*, p. 234.

[56] Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the journey: an autobiography* (New York, 1987), pp. 291–9.

[57] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.

[58] The *Cornerstone Challenge*, a publication of the Cornerstone Baptist Church, Belmont, Massachussetts, 18 Aug. 1980, BJUFF, 'Moral Majority – finances' folder, No. 10666.

[59] Letter from Herman J. and Emily S. Eckelmann of Ithaca, New York, to President Carter, 23 Apr. 1979, JCPL, WHCF-Subject File, Box EX FI 31, 'FI 10-2 1/1/79-6/30/79' folder.

[60] Letter from Mr and Mrs Glenn Brohard to President Carter, 8 May 1979, JCPL, WHCF-Subject File, Box F10-2, 9/21/78-12/3/78, 'FI34 (Gen)' folder.

[61] William Martin, *With God on our side: the rise of the religious right in America* (New York, 1996), pp. 169–73.

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to any political power before, but feeling the grave importance of killing this proposal and any of its kind, I felt I must.'[62]

Kurtz received 126,000 letters of protest. New Right direct mail pioneer Richard Viguerie claimed that the decision 'kicked a sleeping dog … It was the episode that ignited the religious right's involvement in real politics.'[63] In February 1979, following consultation, more flexible guidelines were published,[64] but protest continued because many Christian schools with few minority students were not racist.

Republican Senator John Ashbrook of Ohio wrote to Carter in October 1978 stating that:

> To impose student and faculty quotas on private schools is a treacherous intervention into a Constitutionally protected activity. By imposing severe compliance standards, and volumes of paperwork, the Federal Government would sign the death warrant of more than half the nation's religious schools … Its arbitrary formula for student and staff recruitment will place Federal bureaucrats at the helm of policy formation for private schools … This plan violates the Constitutional separation of Church and State … Mr. Carter, as a Presidential candidate, you were portrayed as one seeking to become 'a pastor of 230 million'. You must not desert your religious followers by inaction.[65]

His colleague Senator Bob Dornan of California was more direct in July 1979, calling for the resignation of Kurtz and his chief counsel, whom he believed had violated the First Amendment rights of the schools: 'Contrary to our Anglo-Saxon legal tradition, a party was assumed guilty until proven innocent … People all over this land are sick and tired of unelected bureaucrats engaging in social engineering at the expense of our cherished liberties.'[66]

It was a golden opportunity for the New Right. Weyrich encouraged Bob Billings, a former public school principal who became disgusted with secularism in the system,[67] to form Christian School Action (CSA) in 1977.[68] Billings had earlier written 'A guide to the Christian school', a widely read volume within the Christian school community.[69] Billings organized a meeting of preachers opposed to the decision. Weyrich recalled that they 'were so committed and enthused and dedicated … that it immediately occurred to me that "wow, this could be a

[62] Letter from Ralph J. Keefes, Jr, of Pennsylvania, to President Carter, 17 Oct. 1978, JCPL, WHCF-Subject File, Box F10-2, 9/21/78-12/3/78, 'FI34 (Gen)' folder.

[63] Edsall and Edsall, *Chain reaction*, pp. 132–3.

[64] *Written statement of James P. Turner, deputy assistant attorney general, Civil Rights Division, to the Committee on Finance, Subcommittee on Taxation and Debt, United States Senate, concerning proposed IRS procedures on tax-exempt private schools*, 14 May 1979, p. 25, JCPL, Domestic Policy Staff (Civil Rights and Justice) – White (Frank), Box 13, 'IRS – private schools' folder.

[65] Letter from Representative John M. Ashbrook to President Carter, 31 Oct. 1978, pp. 1–2, JCPL, WHCF-Subject File, Box FI31 EX, 'FI 10-2 10/1/78-12/31/78' folder.

[66] Letter from Representative Robert K. Dornan to President Carter, JCPL, WHCF-Name File, 'Dornan, Robert K. (Cong.) 1/1/79-1/20/81' folder.

[67] William B. Hixson, Jr, *Search for the American right wing: an analysis of the social science record, 1955–1987* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), p. 232.

[68] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.

[69] Martin, *With God on our side*, p. 169.

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tremendous asset"'.[70] Billings claimed that 'Jerome Kurtz has done more to bring Christians together than any man since the Apostle Paul.'[71] The establishment of a Federal Department of Education in 1979 raised the spectre of further intrusion by 'social engineers' in Christian schools.[72]

Networks like CSA later fed into larger organizations. In the short term CSA lobbied against the regulations. Dornan, Ashbrook, and Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina took action in the Senate that prevented the IRS from enforcing the new regulations.[73] The administration's response was nonchalant. Frank White of the Domestic Policy Staff either ignored or was unaware of the sentiments expressed in the letters sent to Carter, claiming that most opposition came from 'those interested in protecting the segregated academies'. White argued that the White House should deny responsibility for the regulations, despite the fact that his name was on the attendance list for what was described as a 'Meeting on Private School Rev. Proc.'.[74] In preparation for a breakfast with evangelical leaders in January 1980, White's suggested response for Carter to the question 'Will you help us to get IRS to rewrite the procedures?' was 'My policy has been to leave administration of the tax laws to tax officials. We have not gotten involved in such matters and I don't want to begin now.'[75]

The response was surprising given that less hostile figures had also questioned the regulations. Senator Robert Morgan wrote to Carter that there was 'no statutory authority' for them and that several Senators 'from both sides of the aisle have addressed a letter to Mr. Kurtz expressing their concern that while these regulations may be well intended, they are misdirected and overbroad'.[76]

III

The administration's support for feminism and gay rights also alienated conservatives, even if the Christian schools issue was paramount. The campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), for example, was cross-denominational and national, appealing to both fundamentalists and Catholics who supported equal rights but opposed abortion. Leader of the anti-ERA 'Eagle Forum' Phyllis Schlafly claimed that the pro-ERA National Organization for Women was 'militantly pro-abortion and is working for government-financed abortion and to remove the tax-exemption of churches who oppose

[70] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003. [71] Edsall and Edsall, *Chain reaction*, p. 133.

[72] Garland A. Haas, *Jimmy Carter and the politics of frustration* (Jefferson, NC, and London, 1992), p. 89.

[73] Memo from Frank White to Anne Wexler's office, 18 Jan. 1980, p. 2, JCPL, Domestic Policy Staff (Civil Rights and Justice) – White, Box 13, 'IRS – private schools' folder.

[74] Note 'Meeting on private school rev. proc.', 15 Feb. 1979, JCPL, Domestic Policy Staff (Civil Rights and Justice) – White (Frank), Box 13, 'IRS – private schools' folder.

[75] Memo from Frank White to Anne Wexler's office, 18 Jan. 1980, p. 3, JCPL, Domestic Policy Staff (Civil Rights and Justice) – White, Box 13, 'IRS – private schools' folder.

[76] Letter from Stuart E. Eizenstat, assistant to the president for domestic affairs and policy, to Senator Morgan, 3 Jan. 1979, JCPL, WHCF-Subject File, Box FI 10-2 1/1/79-6/30/79, 'FI31 EX' folder.

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abortion'.[77] At one ERA rally, anti-abortion Catholic ERA supporters were in fact prohibited from distributing anti-abortion literature.[78] Jerry Falwell later claimed that he supported 'absolute equal rights for women' but opposed ERA because of its implications for abortion and gay rights.[79] The campaign also revealed links between the New Right and the far right. One far-right pamphlet, *The Independent American* decried 'Carter and the anti-family, pro-lesbian E.R.A.' and approvingly quoted the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*.[80]

The growing size and confidence of the gay rights movement also unnerved social conservatives.[81] Fundamentalists feared that God would punish America for permitting sin. Falwell cited Psalm 9:17, which stated 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forgot God.'[82] California State Senator John Briggs tabled 'Proposition 6' in the November 1978 elections, proposing to fire all teachers 'who publicly admit being homosexual or who promote homosexuality as a life-style'. Reverend Robert Grant and Gary Jarmin led pastors from over 500 mostly fundamentalist churches in support, forming the 'American Christian Cause'.[83] Carter asked 'everybody to vote against Prop. 6', which Weniger claimed 'cast grave doubt over the credibility of his confession of being born again by associating himself on the side of moral perversion and homosexual wickedness'[84] even though Carter had never been a zealot. Even several conservatives, including Ronald Reagan, opposed Proposition 6.[85] In 1978, Anita Bryant, supported by Falwell, formed 'Save Our Children' to fight gay rights.[86] In June, in front of 21,000 southern Baptists waiting to be addressed by Carter, she said that she 'wanted to say publicly how much I appreciated your support, and especially the strong stand southern Baptists took with Anita Bryant'.[87]

Falwell stated 'I see the church getting very involved in moral issues in the next few years … I don't see it getting involved in purely political matters.'[88] Bryant was less certain: 'I believe the day of the comfortable Christian is over. Maybe it hasn't reached everybody in the rural areas, but it's a battle in the cities to keep them from taking over and reaching private and religious schools.'[89]

[77] 'The abortion connection' by the Eagle Forum, JCPL, Staff Offices – Special Assistant (Women's Affairs) – ERA (Weddington), Box 29, 'ERA [7]' folder.

[78] Heineman, *God is a conservative*, pp. 108–9.

[79] Jerry Falwell, *Falwell: an autobiography* (Lynchburg, VA, 1997), p. 396.

[80] *Carter … a one-term president? Are Carter's domestic policies what the majority of the voters want?* By 'The Independent American', Littleton, Colorado, Feb. 1978, BJUFF, 'Carter, James Earl' folder, No. 0389353.

[81] Heineman, *God is a conservative*, p. 99.

[82] Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City, NY, 1980), pp. 24–5.

[83] McGirr, *Suburban warriors*, pp. 257–8.

[84] 'Jimmy Carter supports the homosexuals', *The Blu-Print*, vol. 29, no. 43, 7 Nov. 1978, p. 1, BJUFF, 'Carter, James Earl' folder, No. 2087.

[85] McGirr, *Suburban warriors*, p. 258.

[86] Diamond, *Roads to dominion*, p. 171; Heineman, *God is a conservative*, p. 108.

[87] *New York Times*, 12 June 1978, p. 16, col. 6.

[88] 'Falwell credited with voter influence outside Virginia' by Jon Hall, *Journal-Champion*, Dec. 1978, p. 5, BJUFF, 'Falwell, Jerry' folder, No. 2018.

[89] 'Anita stands firm with God, faces moral issues' by Brenda Easterling, *Journal-Champion*, 11 Oct. 1978.

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Yet despite this upsurge in activity, Paul Weyrich claims that when he advised Republican National Committee Chairman Bill Brock to appeal to evangelical and fundamentalist voters in 1977, 'he didn't understand what I was talking about … it was so foreign to him that it didn't make any sense'. To demonstrate the movement's potential, 'we had to go out and elect some improbable people in the '78 elections', such as Roger Jepsen in Iowa, Gordon Humphrey in New Hampshire, Bill Armstrong in Colorado, and Rudy Boschwitz in Minnesota. Weyrich recalled that the schools issue was key, and that both northern and southern evangelicals were energized by the campaigns.[90] The movement established its credibility and demonstrated its differences with the old anti-communist fundamentalists by proving that it could reach out beyond sectarian lines – Boschwitz, for example, was Jewish. In Virginia, both Republican John Warner and his Democratic opponent 'campaigned among black church leaders, and both showed up for a service at the big Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, where Jerry Falwell introduced them to his television audience'.[91] Anti-abortion advocates claimed that leafleting in church car parks on the Sunday before the elections provided the margin to elect Jepsen.[92]

The Republican alliance was also ideological. Many evangelicals had a Calvinist appetite for the market, creating common ground with otherwise libertarian conservatives. Falwell quoted St Paul's dictum 'if any would not work, neither should he eat' in support of his belief that 'Our whole welfare system is built on a premise that is detrimental to our society.'[93] However, this also meant that few religious right issues were exclusive, making it difficult to quantify to what extent social issues motivated supporters. Things were clearer in states like New Hampshire, where Gordon Humphrey himself chaired the state Conservative Caucus and churches substituted for precinct organizations in his campaign.[94]

In January 1979 'Christian Voice' was established as the first major religious right organization. Leader Robert Grant claimed 'If Christians unite, we can do anything. We can pass any law or any amendment.'[95] Christian Voice built on the California anti-gay rights campaign. Executive director Richard Zone explained that during that campaign:

> the IRS stepped in and told us that if we continued our action we were endangering not only our tax status but the tax status of all the churches that were involved. I realized that this moral issue had been politicized and that our government was telling the moral

[90] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.

[91] 'Religion at the polls: strength and conflict', *Christianity Today*, 1 Dec. 1978, p. 41, BJUFF, 'Politics and Christianity – elections' folder, No. 2115.

[92] 'Surge in independent campaign spending' by Barry Light, *Congressional Quarterly*, 14 June 1980, p. 1637, JCPL, Staff Offices – Counsel, Box 57, 'Campaign 1980 – litigation, 6/16-29/80' folder.

[93] Falwell, *Listen, America!*, p. 77.

[94] Peele, *Revival and reaction*, p. 109.

[95] James E. Wood, 'Religious fundamentalism and the New Right', *Journal of Church and State*, 22 (1980), p. 414.

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conscience of the nation (the church) to stay out of the battle … We are a full-fledged lobby and our cause is Christian morality.[96]

Weyrich emphasized the independent, grassroots nature of the campaigns, recalling that 'what Christian Voice was doing was a surprise' and 'I heard about what Anita Bryant was doing when I got a mailing!'[97]

In contrast, the second major religious right organization, and the most famous, Moral Majority, was created when New Right leaders, convinced of the potential of social issues, convinced Jerry Falwell to act as a charismatic figurehead.

Moral Majority had a relatively long gestation period. The process began in 1978, when Paul Weyrich and Bob Billings formed an organization named the 'National Christian Action Coalition' (NCAC) to fight the IRS. Billings denied that the Christian schools were racist, and explained that the implications of the new regulations went beyond fundamentalists and evangelicals: '[The] potential consequences of this are frightening. If you can tax private religious schools … why not tax churches? And why not tax the particular churches with which the government disagrees? Why not tax the Quakers for their pacifism [or] the Catholics for their opposition to abortion?'[98]

However, the NCAC also had a wider agenda, which was something of a new departure. An article in the January 1979 *Christian School Alert* stated that the NCAC would lobby for a 'Family Protection Act', described as 'a comprehensive piece of legislation that will protect our family rights and Christian freedoms without this constant running battle with the IRS or other branches of government'.

An article in the newsletter condemning Carter's recognition of communist China provided evidence of broader concerns, and the article promised that the NCAC would 'encourage Christian participation in government, restore Christian principles to governmental policies, help protect the family against further governmental encroachment … Christians must learn to master politics or be mastered by those who do so'.[99]

During the 1960s, Jerry Falwell had argued that Christians should stay out of politics. However, his involvement in the anti-gay rights movement and other campaigns, such as one to prevent the legalization of betting in Virginia,[100] demonstrated that his position had changed somewhat. Falwell later justified his involvement on the basis that strong families were vital for a healthy nation, and that government policy, economic decline, drugs, and alcohol were undermining

[96] 'Morality', *Christian Life* (Jan. 1980), p. 44, BJUFF, 'Christian Voice' folder, No. 4910.

[97] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.

[98] 'Christian Group, conservative union united in fight against IRS guidelines' by the Religious News Service, *Christian News*, 13 Nov. 1978, p. 14, BJUFF, 'National Christian Action Coalition' folder, No. 4258.

[99] *Christian School Alert*, Jan. 1979, published by Christian School Action, pp. 1–2, BJUFF, 'National Christian Action Coalition' folder, No. 1989.

[100] 'Religion at the polls: strength and conflict', *Christianity Today*, 1 Dec. 1978, p. 40.

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the family.[101] The call to render Caesar's things to Caesar did not prevent Christians from being good citizens. In 1975–6 Falwell conducted a series of 'I Love America' rallies, encouraging Christians to get involved in politics because they would only be safe if they elected friendly representatives.[102]

In 1979, Bob Billings, Ed McAteer, Howard Phillips, Paul Weyrich, and Richard Viguerie visited Falwell to persuade him to use his church, show, and contacts for wider political purposes. The name 'Moral Majority' arose almost accidentally. Whilst waiting for Phillips to arrive, McAteer invited Weyrich to comment on the political situation. He began 'out there is what you might term a "moral majority", but that group has been fractured by history, by politics, by denominational differences, and what we have to do is to try and unite that majority, and if we do we can elect anybody'. Falwell declared 'That's the name of our organisation.'[103] Ironically, for opponents the name became the 'byword for the entire New Christian Right', exaggerating the group's presence and credibility. The men agreed to try to influence the 1980 Republican platform.[104]

Bob Billings became the first president[105] and executive director. Half of the first fifty state chairs were affiliated with churches that had schools affected by the new IRS regulations.[106] McAteer also set up the 'Religious Roundtable' in 1979 to act as a co-ordinating body for religious leaders interested in social conservatism.[107]

Nevertheless, the religious right's momentum on a national level had stalled somewhat until the Carter administration made good on a campaign promise to hold a 'White House Conference on the Family' (WHCF).[108] Carter proposed the conference in 1976 in order to court the evangelical vote.[109] Oldfield explains that the family is particularly important to evangelicals as a 'realm of nurturance isolated from the competition of the market, a private realm in which women promote values threatened in the world outside'.[110] The 1970s saw rising divorce and illegitimacy rates,[111] so the conference appeared timely.

In reality, the Conference became something of a cause célèbre for the religious right. The fact that Carter changed the title from a conference on 'the family' to 'families' made conservatives suspicious from the start.[112] Paul Weyrich believes that the WHCF was 'very instrumental' in changing evangelical and fundamentalist attitudes toward Carter, because rather than endorsing traditional family life, it 'came out for lesbian marriages and adoption' which 'absolutely electrified that community again'. He recalls that people 'were in total disbelief'

[101] Falwell, *Listen, America!*, p. 121.
[102] Falwell, *Strength for the journey*, pp. 342–7.
[103] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.
[104] Georgianna, *The Moral Majority and fundamentalism*, p. 27.
[105] Oldfield, *The right and the righteous*, p. 101.
[106] Edsall and Edsall, *Chain reaction*, p. 133.
[107] Wood, 'Religious fundamentalism and the New Right', p. 416.
[108] Martin, *With God on our side*, p. 174.
[109] Heineman, *God is a conservative*, p. 110.
[110] Oldfield, *The right and the righteous*, p. 67.
[111] A. James Reichley, *Religion in American public life* (Washington DC, 1985), pp. 316–17.
[112] Martin, *With God on our side*, 177.

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and that it 'lent credibility to those of us who insisted that Carter was a real problem', because less politically active people had thought 'he's a good evangelical and he just wouldn't be doing those kinds of things'.[113] The religious right believed that the WHCF associated presidential prestige with non-traditional lifestyles. Phyllis Schlafly claimed that the WHCF discredited itself 'when it refused to accept a traditional definition of the family, and then passed resolutions favoring abortion, homosexual lifestyles, and a long list of extravagant federal spending proposals'.[114]

However, much of the criticism by conservatives was unfair, because they did not want to have a real debate with people with other views. Connie Marshner, an experienced conservative activist, marshalled the conservative forces in the state and regional meetings that comprised the conference. In November 1979, twenty-two out of twenty-four delegates elected at the first state conference were against abortion. Later, many states decided to restrict the elected element of their delegations, to which conservatives cried foul, even though the restrictions affected liberal groups just as much.[115] In June 1980, the Eastern Region conference endorsed abortion, ERA and gay rights, and Marshner's 'Pro-Family Coalition' walked out.[116] However, Martin stresses that the resolution passed by only a single vote – therefore, it would have been easily defeated had the delegates remained in the conference. Indeed, it would appear that the religious right used the conference as a publicity stunt with which to humiliate Carter rather than as an opportunity to debate the issues (the conference's executive director, James Carr, himself opposed abortion and created more social conservative delegates in response to criticisms that the arrangements were unfair).[117]

IV

However, it is difficult to see how Carter could have pleased everyone. By early 1980, he was under severe pressure from Democrat's liberal wing. Senator Edward Kennedy was challenging him for the Democratic nomination, and press secretary Jody Powell warned 'I do not see how we can continue to alienate key groups of people who were responsible for your election and still maintain our political base.'[118] Powell was worried that Carter was alienating liberals through his economic austerity programme and arms build-up, but clearly did not recognize the religious right as a potentially equal threat, even though by this time the scale of the revolt was clear. In October 1979, Carter appointed Bob Maddox, a southern Baptist minister, as his special assistant for religious affairs. Maddox had fulfilled the role unofficially for some time and believed that Falwell et al.

[113] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.
[114] Phyllis Schlafly, 'Religion and politics', 1980?, source unknown, BJUFF, 'Politics and Christianity – New Right' folder, No. 7230.
[115] Falwell, *Listen, America!*, p. 134; Martin, *With God on our side*, pp. 180–7.
[116] Viguerie, *The New Right*, p. 158.
[117] Martin, *With God on our side*, pp. 180–7.
[118] Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 458.

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'already had their minds made up' about Carter. Yet nobody 'knew what bad trouble he was in on those issues, abortion, ERA, prayer in public schools because the White House staff was liberal'. They 'tended to discount the numbers and the intensity that was out there'.[119] Indeed, one article criticized Carter for spending time with 'liberal church leaders' rather than fundamentalists during the consultations preceding the mid-1979 cabinet reshuffle, arguing that 'the answers they would give to the spiritual crises would not include the need of a genuine spiritual revival, which would involve repentance of sin. That is what President Carter needs to hear.'[120] Maddox sent a memo concerning the religious right to Mrs Carter and senior aides in November.[121]

In January 1980, matters came to a head at what Maddox termed 'our famous Jerry Falwell breakfast'. Anne Wexler and Maddox did have high hopes for a meeting between Carter and prominent televangelists, although they were thinking of economic and foreign policy questions rather than social issues.[122] Carter himself had hoped to mend fences during the meeting, and was encouraged by a well-received speech to the National Religious Broadcasters the previous day.[123]

The meeting represented the only attempt seriously to engage with the religious right, and had some positive results. Televangelist Jim Bakker said 'it's easier to take potshots at the image on the screen than it is when you're in the same room with a warm, decent man confessing his faith in Jesus Christ'.[124] However, Falwell subsequently claimed that Carter had expressed support for gay rights, a claim retracted when Maddox's office produced a transcript in which Carter said 'my definition of the family does not include homosexual families'.[125] Nevertheless, the damage was done. One evangelical wrote to Ann Wexler that 'Everybody I talk to is voting for Reagan + [sic] most of them voted for Pres Carter before … In the last election 70% of evangelicals didn't vote. *This* time they are' (emphasis in the original). He had heard on good authority that Carter had received Falwell coolly in January,[126] to which Wexler replied that the two had had a 'very cordial and frank discussion'.[127]

In March 1980, several evangelical and fundamentalist leaders presented a petition against an executive order establishing gay rights. Billings claimed that it was a defensive measure after the 'National Gay Task Force' had asked Carter

[119] Bob Maddox exit interview, 8 Dec. 1980, JCPL Exit Interview Project.

[120] 'Where were the fundamentalists?' from 'Significant trends in the world of religion' by Dr Ralph G. Colas, pastor of South Holly Baptist Church, Littleton, Colorado, *The Biblical Evangelist*, Oct. 1979, BJUFF, 'Carter, James Earl' folder, No. 4517. [121] Bob Maddox exit interview.

[122] Memo from Anne Wexler to 'Phil', 10 Sept. 1979, JCPL, WHCF-Name File, 'Moral Majority' folder. [123] Martin, *With God on our side*, p. 189.

[124] 'Carter sways some evangelicals in 2-day blitz to regain support' by George Vesesey, *New York Times*, 28 Jan. 1980, Sec. 2, p. 5 col. 2. [125] Bob Maddox exit interview.

[126] Letter from John Lester to Anne Wexler, 23 June 1980, JCPL, Box PR2, 'PR-9 GEN 1/20/77-1/20/81' folder.

[127] Draft letter from Anne Wexler to John Lester, 11 July 1980, p. 1, JCPL, Box PR2, 'PR-9 GEN 1/20/77-1/20/81' folder.

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for such an order.[128] The *Christian News* reported that Carter had told a Christian delegation that he did not support gay rights, yet at a recent meeting with gay rights advocates, one of his staff had declared 'The President stands fully for civil and human rights for all Americans and I'm glad to say that includes homosexuals.'[129] Gay rights were included for the first time in the Democrat platform,[130] prompting conservative columnist Pat Buchanan to write:

> Our born again southern Baptist president has undergone another conversion. The government of the United States, he now contends, should provide a special protected status in law for individuals who profess and practice a life style that Carter's church teaches is aberrant, sinful and immoral … The president is not the sort of simpleton to allow Biblical beliefs to get in the way of carrying San Francisco.

Buchanan noted that Christian Voice had denounced the Democratic platform.[131]

Christian Voice's Richard Zone claimed that the ramifications of anti-discrimination laws were huge and could lead to Christians being forced to hire gays. He told a Christian magazine that a San Francisco church had been sued by an organist fired when he revealed his sexual orientation and that San Francisco had 'passed an ordinance which is very similar to the gay rights bill now being promoted in Washington. It says to discriminate on the basis of homosexuality is breaking the law. You are subjecting yourself to becoming a criminal and you can go to jail for it.'[132]

However, whilst the movement mostly portrayed itself in defensive terms, the opposition maintained that it was more radical and theocratic. Pat Robertson organized a 'Washington for Jesus' rally in April 1980. Delegations prayed for and visited members of Congress on the anniversary of the landing of the English settlers in 1607. Over 200,000 attended the rally, which made the cover of the *New York Times*.[133] Robertson's group's stated grievances hardly constituted a demand for a theocracy, although the group lamented that 'There is adultery, rape, fornication, homosexuality, and filthiness of mind throughout the land … We slaughter our unborn infants on the altar of personal selfishness … Our currency has been debased, our elderly beggared by inflation, our poor have become the perpetual wards of the state, and our armed forces weakened.'[134] Yet a self-described anti-New Right group claimed that Robertson's group favoured 'a series of repressive measures threatening the Constitution of the United States

[128] 'Rights for homosexuals denounced by preachers' by UPI, *New York Times*, 23 Mar. 1980, p. 47 col. 4.

[129] 'Carter's top religious aide confers with gay delegation', *Christian News*, 19 May 1980, BJUFF, 'Carter, James Earl' folder, No. 078935-3.

[130] Heineman, *God is a conservative*, pp. 105–6.

[131] 'Carter's pact with gay liberation' by Patrick J. Buchanan, *Christian News*, 21 July 1980, p. 15, BJUFF, 'Carter, James Earl' folder, No. 6732.

[132] 'Morality', *Christian Life*, pp. 46–7.

[133] '200,000 march and pray at Christian rally in capital' by Ben A. Franklin, *New York Times*, 30 Apr. 1980, p. 1 col. 2.

[134] 'Preamble' to 'Christian declaration', source unknown, JCPL, Staff Offices, Special Assistant (Women's Affairs – S. Weddington) – ERA, Box 33, 'ERA Strategy Group' folder.

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and the rights of all Americans'.[135] Robertson's comment 'God is not a right-winger or a left-winger' appeared to go unnoticed by the opposition.[136]

Most of the religious right's policy demands sought to enable Christians to preserve their way of life rather than to force it upon others. For example, Republican Senator Paul Laxalt introduced the 'Family Protection Act' that Bob Billings had drawn up into Congress. Had it passed, it would have given parents the right to review public school textbooks and would have required schools to obtain parental consent for children to participate in religious education lessons. The act would have introduced tax-exemptions for those who had children or adopted. This measure challenged the accusations of racism levelled at the religious right because the exemption would in fact be greater if a couple adopted a mixed race child.[137]

In December 1979 RNC Chairman Brock invited religious right leaders to a meeting to discuss concerns and meet Republican presidential candidates.[138] Weyrich remembered that support for Reagan 'was not a foregone conclusion' due to his divorce. Weyrich suggested Texas Governor John Connally as an alternative, and set up a meeting between Connally and several religious right leaders. All was proceeding smoothly when one leader asked 'What do you think of secular humanism?' Connally replied 'Well, I don't know much about it, but it sounds good to me!' According to Weyrich, 'that was the end of that meeting' and the leaders settled for Reagan.[139] Bob Maddox thought that the movement's ideal candidates were Congressman Phillip Crane and Senator Jesse Helms[140] – the latter had introduced a constitutional amendment allowing school prayer into the Senate in 1979.[141]

Reagan's selection of the socially moderate George Bush as his running mate was unpopular,[142] Falwell having failed at the 1980 Republican convention to get Helms or Texas Governor Bill Clements chosen.[143] Yet the religious right's eventual willingness to compromise contrasted with the stridency of earlier right-wing Christian movements. Nevertheless, the 1980 party platforms contained unprecedented division over social issues as the religious right and its opponents mirrored the partisan divide. The Democrats supported abortion 'as a basic human right' and the Republicans a 'human life' amendment.[144] The Republicans dropped support for the ERA and denounced the WHCF whilst the

[135] 'A statement in response to the "Washington for Jesus" march' by Interchange, JCPL, Staff Offices, Special Assistant (Women's Affairs – S. Weddington) – ERA, Box 33, 'ERA Strategy Group' folder.
[136] Heinemann, *God is a conservative*, p. 117.
[137] 'The far right's newest effort: Washington for Jesus Day' by Carol J. Sheffer, p. 2, JCPL, Staff Offices, Special Assistant (Women's Affairs) Sarah Weddington – ERA, Box 33, 'ERA Strategy Group' folder.
[138] Oldfield, *The right and the righteous*, pp. 116–17.
[139] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.
[140] Bob Maddox exit interview.
[141] Falwell, *Listen, America!*, pp. 221–2.
[142] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.
[143] 'Falwell describes advice offered candidate Reagan' by Helen Parmley, *Christian News*, 4–25 Aug. 1980, BJUFF, 'Falwell, Jerry – political activity' folder, No. 7126.
[144] Ronnie Dugger, *On Reagan: the man and his presidency* (New York, 1983), p. 231.

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Democrats supported the family 'in all its diverse forms'. The Republicans also called for a halt to the IRS's action against private schools. [145]

The large number of evangelicals and fundamentalists in the south made it worthwhile for the Republicans to take their concerns on board. As late as October, Reagan's campaign still believed that Carter would carry the south.[146] But the religious right 'gave Republicans something which they had always previously lacked: a vital connection with Southern culture'.[147] At a 'National Affairs Briefing' organized by Ed McAteer's Religious Roundtable, Reagan denounced the policy to 'force all tax-exempt schools – including church schools – to abide by affirmative action orders drawn up by – who else? – IRS bureaucrats'.[148] He stated 'I know you can't endorse me because this is a non-partisan meeting' but 'I endorse you.'[149] Weyrich remembered 'the place just went wild'.[150] Privately, Reagan assured evangelical leaders that he would appoint 'godly men' to his administration.[151]

Despite these developments, Carter's campaign still believed that the 'natural attraction of a southerner' would provide the key to his victory.[152] This assessment of the situation may have been encouraged by friendly evangelicals such as Assemblies of God leader R. Douglas Wead, who praised Carter for his 'sensitivity to the evangelical voter' who was 'coming into her own as a political force and may be your best friend in a crisis'. Wead believed that Carter's religious liaison team was 'having an impact on evangelical leaders (ie, Jim Bakker) whose ideological and cultural leanings are conservative, but find themselves drawn by the spirit of your team'. Carter replied with an annotation on a copy of the letter, 'Doug – Thanks – I agree.'[153] As late as September, Maddox acknowledged concern over the religious right but expected Carter to receive a majority of 'born again' votes.[154]

In August two 'campaign strategy meetings with religious leaders' were held at the White House. They involved moderate evangelical leaders and major Protestant leaders, those for Carter and those 'opposed to Reagan and strongly against the far right activities of certain evangelicals'. Carter would attend and

[145] Oldfield, *The right and the righteous*, pp. 109–10.

[146] Richard B. Wirthlin, 'The Republican strategy and its electoral consequences', in Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *Party coalitions in the 1980s* (New Brunswick and London, 1981), pp. 250–3.

[147] Nesmith, *The new Republican coalition*, p. 96.

[148] Sara Diamond, *Not by politics alone – the enduring influence of the Christian right* (New York and London, 1998), p. 68.

[149] 'Briefing challenges "Christian soldiers"', *Life's Answer*, Oct. 1980, p. 7, BJUFF, 'Religious roundtable – national affairs briefing' folder, No. 7405.

[150] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.

[151] 'Evangelicals give Reagan a "non-partisan" stump', *Christianity Today*, 19 Sept. 1980, p. 50, BJUFF, 'Religious roundtable – national affairs briefing' folder, No. 6770.

[152] Nesmith, *The new Republican coalition*, p. 68.

[153] Letter from R. Douglas Wead to President Jimmy Carter, 14 Aug. 1980, JCPL, WHCF-Subject File, Box FG-52, 'FG6-1-1/Maddox, Robert 1/20/77–1/20/81' folder.

[154] 'Moral Majority-type groups called danger' by Carl Carter, news religion editor, *Birmingham News*, 14 Sept. 1980, BJUFF, 'Maddox, Robert' folder, No. 7249.

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Mrs Carter was advised to attend to 'demonstrate our conviction that the help of these people is essential'.[155] Figures invited to the first meeting included Wead and Dr Jimmy Allen, president of the SBC Radio and Television Commission.[156] Talking points recommended included 'With you I am deeply concerned about the moral and spiritual climate of the country … With you I encourage greater involvement in government and leadership by people with a firm religious commitment … But we must not overlook some of the threats posed by the coalition of certain fundamentalist religious groups and extreme right political groups.'[157] Falwell's office claimed that the participants 'discussed how to discredit some of these national evangelical spokesmen' in 'an attempt by the White House to discredit … evangelical ministers who disagree with him on many social and political issues'. Maddox replied 'There was no attempt to discredit Mr. Falwell. He does it himself.'[158]

V

The campaign was sluggish in response to the religious right even though Maddox recognized the links between the ostensibly non-partisan movement and Reagan's campaign. Bob Billings left his Moral Majority position to become the Reagan campaign's religious adviser, and by early summer 'all kinds of anti Jimmy Carter pro Reagan pieces of literature were being cranked out and mailed all over the country … supposedly bipartisan but always painting Reagan as the paragon of Christian virtue and Carter as kind of the Antichrist … We had no effective way to combat it.' Some of the anti-Carter material was 'satanic' in nature. The Carter campaign put out a mailing one week before the election, to 250,000 ministers and laymen. Maddox campaigned on his own time in the south. The only noticeable change in attitudes was that people stopped referring to Carter as non-Christian.[159] Adviser Charles Kirbo admitted that the campaign's southern strategy was 'undercut by evangelicals and fundamentalists. Carter's campaign didn't recognize this threat early enough, and never met it very well.'[160] Maddox, Powell, and Wexler urged Carter to do an interview on religious television, speaking about faith and social issues, but by September it was

[155] Memorandum from Anne Wexler to Mrs Carter re campaign strategy sessions with key religious leaders – 10:30 A.M. – 11:45 A.M., Tuesday, 5 Aug. and Thursday, 7 Aug., 30 July 1980, p. 1, JCPL, WHCF-Subject File, Box RM-2, 'RM religious matters, 1/20/77-1/2-/81' folder.

[156] Notes 'Evangelical leaders meeting, August 5, 1980' attached to memo from Anne Wexler to President Carter re 'Meeting with moderate evangelical leaders, Tuesday, August 5, 1980', JCPL, WHCF-Subject File, Box RM-2, 'RM religious matters, 1/20/77-1/2-/81' folder.

[157] Memorandum from Anne Wexler to President Carter re 'Meeting with moderate evangelical leaders, Tuesday, August 5, 1980', p. 2, JCPL, WHCF-Subject File, 'RM religious matters, 1/20/77-1/2-/81' folder.

[158] 'Carter aide denies anti-Falwell effort' by Jim Roberts, *Richmond Times-Despatch*, 8 Aug. 1980, BJUFF, 'Falwell, Jerry – political activity' folder, No. 7012.

[159] Bob Maddox exit interview.

[160] Nesmith, *The new Republican coalition*, p. 68.

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too late.[161] Of course, the state of the Iranian hostage crisis by this stage must also be taken into account, because many people wanted a leader who would restore international respect for America.

Moral Majority claimed 300,000 members by mid-1980 and to have registered 4–8m new voters by November (a still staggering 2m is more likely). By 1980 it had at least skeleton chapters in every state. By 1981, the *Moral Majority Report* newsletter reached over 840,000 homes and daily commentaries were broadcast on over 300 radio stations.[162] Organizational capability was boosted by use of the *Old-Time Gospel Hour* mailing list. Moral Majority's Political Action Committee supported twelve Congressional challengers, of whom eleven won.[163] Christian Voice raised $500,000 to spend on behalf of candidates.[164] $2,148,293 was spent independently on elections in 1979 and the first three months of 1980, compared to $792,953 for the entire 1975–6 cycle, spending dominated by conservatives.[165]

The movement's effectiveness was enhanced by the interlocking nature of the organizations. The 'Library Court' group, comprising the heads of social conservative organizations, met with Weyrich fortnightly at his Library Court, Washington, offices.[166] Republican senators Orrin Hatch, Roger Jepsen, and Bob Dornan were on Christian Voice's advisory committee.[167]

Christian Voice released a 'moral issues index' two days before the elections with information on votes from arms limitations to the IRS, highlighting that the average House Republican score was 77 per cent, compared to 33 per cent for Democrats. Robert Grant stated 'these ratings are not intended nor should be interpreted as a judgement of any Congressman's personal morality or spiritual relationship with God'.[168] Diamond questions this assertion.[169]

The religious right had an impact in many states, not just in the south. Moral Majority supported the Catholic Don Nickles's successful Senate bid in Oklahoma[170] – 'Thus did the Moral Majority help the nation overcome old denominational prejudices in the interest of a new conservative politics.'[171] In Alabama, another Catholic, Jeremiah Denton, won the Senate for the Republicans against James Folsom Jr with a greater margin than Reagan's over

[161] Memorandum for the president from Jody Powell, Anne Wexler, Bob Maddox, re 'Interview for religious television', JCPL, WHCF-Name File, 'Robertson, P' folder.

[162] Diamond, *Not by politics alone*, pp. 66–7. [163] Hixson, *Search for the American right wing*, p. 255.

[164] Reichley, *Religion in American public life*, pp. 321–2.

[165] 'Surge in independent campaign spending' by Barry Light, *Congressional Quarterly*, 14 June 1980, p. 1635, JCPL, Staff Offices – Counsel, Box 57, 'Campaign 1980 – litigation, 6/16-29/80' folder.

[166] 'Christian New Right's rush to power' by Dudley Clendinen, *New York Times*, 18 Aug. 1980, Sec. 2, p. 7, col. 1. [167] Wuthnow, *The restructuring of American religion*, p. 205.

[168] 'Christian Voice releases "moral issues index" rating for 96th Congress, 1979–1980', Christian Voice press release 2 Nov. 1980, BJUFF, 'Christian Voice' folder, No. 7340.

[169] Diamond, *Not by politics alone*, p. 69.

[170] 'Religious right played key role in many races for U.S. Senate – Moral Majority and other groups turned out voters who supported Denton, Nickles, and Grassley' by Patrick B. McGuigan, Associate Editor, *Family Protection Report*, *Conservative Digest*, Jan. 1981, p. 9, BJUFF, 'Moral Majority – elections' folder, No. 8442. [171] Dionne, *Why Americans hate politics*, p. 235.

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Carter. Denton courted conservative evangelicals in the primary against his more established opponent. The religious right helped Denton in the cities, indicating the changing demographics of evangelicalism, whereas Folsom's strength was rural. Denton also campaigned in black churches.[172] The Moral Majority credited Denton's victory to the fact that the voters they had helped to register had almost certainly voted. In Iowa, Charles Grassley defeated incumbent Senator John Culver with strong religious right support. Exit polls showed that whilst 10 per cent of voters supported Grassley due to his support for a 'Human Life Amendment', only 5 per cent supported Culver because of his opposition to it. However, Grassley's campaign manager did admit that 'The union of fundamental Christianity and politics bothers some people. Perhaps they should keep the public relations aspect of their activities toned down a little.'[173] Christian Voice had used such heated rhetoric as including 'John Culver is part of the crowd which made legal the killing of babies, made the streets safe for criminals and rapists and kicked God out of our schools.'[174]

The movement's ecumenicalism was also demonstrated by its disregard for evangelical politicians who disagreed with it. Representative John Buchanan (R-AL) was an ordained Baptist minister and a Goldwater Republican who had moved to the centre. Groups including Moral Majority supported a challenger in the primaries. Volunteers organized registration and even used church buses to get supporters to the polls, and claimed credit when Buchanan, who wryly commented, 'They beat my brains out with Christian love',[175] was defeated.[176]

These examples do not detract from the fact that the religious right probably helped Reagan in the south. In the ninety-six most Baptist counties in the country, all southern, Carter ran 18 per cent behind 1976, compared to 10 per cent elsewhere, aided by the religious right's registering of voters.[177] Edsall notes that although the white evangelical vote was similar to the overall white vote, the 'most fundamentalist' voters went for Reagan by 85 per cent.[178]

However, the salience of social issues at the national level is questionable, and assessing the religious right's impact on its supporter's voting behaviour is complicated by the fact that they were often members of several 'constituencies'. Wilcox's research from the 1980s found that many Moral Majority members were relatively affluent,[179] which would have made them as sensitive to the economic problems that Carter presided over as other voters.[180] Indeed, Reverend David Eaton lambasted the organizers of 'Washington for Jesus' as

[172] Ibid., p. 115.

[173] McGuigan, 'Religious right played key role in many races for U.S. Senate', pp. 8–10.

[174] 'Politics from the pulpit – fundamentalists take aim at Carter and liberals nationwide' by George J. Church, *Time*, 13 Oct. 1980, p. 35, BJUFF, 'Politics and Christianity – New Right' folder, No. 7331.

[175] Ibid., p. 35.

[176] Wood, 'Religious fundamentalism and the New Right', pp. 414–16.

[177] Dionne, *Why Americans hate politics*, p. 235.

[178] Edsall and Edsall, *Chain reaction*, p. 154.

[179] Hixson, *Search for the American right wing*, p. 261.

[180] Burton I. Kaufman, *The presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr* (Lawrence, KA, 1993), p. 184.

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seeking to 'completely ignore the social gospel' and accused them of having 'no understanding of what it means to help the poor in this country.'[181] Himmelstein and McCrae did not believe that there was 'a new kind of class conflict over social issues' and claimed that these issues had 'been in part muted and in part transformed as the economy has worsened and economic problems have come to the fore'.[182] Whilst Carter voters ranked abortion fifth out of nine in their priorities, Reagan's ranked it seventh. Moreover, if social issues motivated white conservative evangelicals, we might expect them to have supported Reagan more than the wider white population. However, the figures were 62 per cent and 61 per cent respectively.[183] Paul Weyrich disagrees, arguing that survey research proved that between a quarter and a third of *all* voters voted on 'moral issues'.[184] On certain issues the general public concurred with the religious right – for example, in 1980, 75 per cent of the public favoured a school prayer amendment.[185]

VI

In contrast, many liberals argued that the movement was merely a front for darker extremist and even racist goals. In August 1980, the *New York Times* ran a four-issue special on the movement. The first article carried the sensationalist headline 'Ultraconservative evangelicals a surging new force in politics', thereby using the term 'evangelicals' in a sweeping and inaccurate manner. The language used in the article implied that the movement was uniquely sinister, describing how the religious right seized control of the Alaska Republican convention 'after they systematically purged party regulars in precinct and district caucuses',[186] as if other interest groups did not attempt to do the same. In reality, the Reverend Jerry Prevo, who had established the Alaska Moral Majority in 1979, only became involved in politics after a campaign against a municipal gay rights ordinance and state interference with the curriculum and staff at his church school.[187]

One Christian article noted as early as 1979 that 'fear of fascism and of the right is skilfully cultivated by the media'.[188] Paul Weyrich recalled how he had 'assumed' that the race card would be played, and 'had ready Jews who agreed with us, we had a very famous black preacher E. V. Hill, and we deployed a lot of these people to the point where it simply wasn't credible to make that charge

[181] '200,000 march and pray at Christian rally in capital' by Ben A. Franklin, *New York Times*, 30 Apr. 1980, p. 1, col. 2.

[182] Jerome L. Himmelstein and James A. McRae, Jr, 'Social conservatism, new Republicans, and the 1980 election', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 48, 3 (Autumn 1984), pp. 403–4.

[183] Oldfield, *The right and the righteous*, pp. 256–9.

[184] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003. [185] Nesmith, *The new Republican coalition*, p. 46.

[186] 'Ultraconservative evangelicals a surging new force in politics' by John Herbers, *New York Times*, 17 Aug. 1980, p. 1, col. 2.

[187] 'Group of evangelical Protestants takes over the G.O.P. in Alaska' by Wallace Turner, *New York Times*, 9 June 1980, Sec. 2, p. 12, col. 5.

[188] 'Muzzling the Christian ox' by Harold O.J. Brown, *Journal Champion*, 23 Nov. 1979, BJUFF, 'Politics and Christianity – New Right' folder, No. 4816.

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against us and the charge did not stick'.[189] Jerry Falwell joined Jesse Jackson at a black church and apologized for his earlier racism.[190] Polls later showed that minorities favoured social conservatism, such as the Moral Majority position on abortion, more than whites.[191] Carter became the first Democrat in fifty years to win a minority of Jewish votes (although this was partly due to the liberal third candidate John Anderson),[192] and in Orthodox areas of Brooklyn, Reagan received 75 per cent of the Jewish vote.[193]

Characterizations of the religious right as intolerant were fuelled by the frequent lapses of religious right leaders into highly charged rhetoric. Despite all the efforts to build a broad coalition, the fact remained that most of the religious right leadership and core support came from communities that had historically been inclined toward insularity. Evangelicals remained the movement's major constituency.[194] Pastors from Falwell's Baptist Bible Fellowship provided most of Moral Majority's state and county leaders.[195] Therefore, the movement occasionally strayed from talking about 'moral' issues in a broad sense to making old-fashioned sectarian attacks. Tim LaHaye claimed that Carter's election had 'resulted in a humanist takeover of the American government' and speculated that Carter was either 'a Christian who is naïve about humanism' or 'a humanist who masqueraded as a Christian to get elected and then showed his contempt for the 60 million "born agains" by excluding them from his government?'.[196] LaHaye's 1980 book *The battle for the mind* entertained conspiracy theories about 'secular humanists', involving the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), whose influence had 'moved our country from a biblically based society to an amoral "democratic" society during the past forty years'.[197]

Criticism of the NAACP raised the question of whether the religious right harboured racists. Bishop H. H. Brookins of 'Concerned Clergy for Carter' criticized the Moral Majority[198] and wrote a letter to black clergy asking them to campaign for Carter against a movement whose antecedents had 'supported slavery in the 19th century and supports apartheid in the Union of South Africa today'.[199] Such concerns were not eased by reports that Reagan had met with

[189] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003. [190] Heineman, *God is a conservative*, p. 115.

[191] Anson Shupe and William A. Stacey, *Born again politics and the Moral Majority: what social surveys really show* (New York and Toronto, 1982), pp. 68–9.

[192] Dionne, *Why Americans hate politics*, p. 159. [193] Heineman, *God is a conservative*, pp. 120–1.

[194] Hixson, *Search for the American right wing*, p. 241. [195] Wilcox, *Onward Christian soldiers?* p. 36.

[196] 'The questions? Is Carter a Christian … naïve about humanism? Is Carter a humanist … masquerading as Christian?' by Tim LaHaye, *Moral Majority Report*, 6 June 1980, p. 10, BJUFF, 'Carter, James Earl' folder, No. 6157. [197] Diamond, *Not by politics alone*, p. 70.

[198] 'Bishop H. H. Brookins lambasts Moral Majority', press release by Concerned Clergy for Carter, Washington DC, 4 Oct. 1980, p. 1, JCPL, Staff Offices – Special Assistant to the President – Martin, 'IC briefing and ministerial info, 24 Oct. 1980' folder.

[199] Letter from Bishop H. Hartford Brookins of Concerned Clergy for Carter, 6 Oct. 1980, p. 1, JCPL, Staff Offices – Special Assistant to the President – Martin, 'IC Briefing and Ministerial Info, 24 October 1980' folder.

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southern Republican convention delegates in 1980 and pledged to do more to roll back civil rights than the other presidential hopefuls, although it is unclear whether this referred to fundamental rights or more contentious issues such as affirmative action[200] (Reagan himself stressed that he had come to support the civil rights legislation of the 1960s).

Even Falwell occasionally betrayed his separatist origins. An advertisement in a Christian newspaper in the form of 'An open letter to Christian America' claimed 'We are a so-called Christian nation, and we are the first civilized nation to legalize abortion in the late months of pregnancy! … We must band together under the banner of the Moral Majority and wage open warfare against the forces of Satan, locally and nationally which threaten our freedom as Americans.'[201] Falwell later appeared to contradict this statement, saying 'I think America is great, but not because it is a Christian nation: it is not a Christian nation, it has never been a Christian nation, it is never going to be a Christian nation.'[202] He said that he 'would feel comfortable voting for a Jew or a Catholic or an atheist … as long as he or she agrees with us on the vital issues'.[203] Paul Weyrich denied that LaHaye's statements were symptomatic of a widespread paranoid mentality, and argued that denunciation of the ACLU was logical because the ACLU opposed the religious right on social issues.[204] Those who accused the movement of racism, possibly unfamiliar with televangelism, may not have known that Pat Robertson's *700 Club* had a sizeable minority audience and featured a black co-host from the mid-1970s, the first time in America a black had co-hosted a chat show.[205]

Sometimes the religious right was unfairly tarred with the extremist brush. For example, at the Religious Roundtable's 'National Affairs Briefing' in August 1980, the Reverend Bailey Smith had said 'God Almighty does not hear the prayer of the jew [sic].' The statement rightly provoked widespread condemnation. However, Secretary of Health and Human Services Patricia Robert Harris argued that this statement was characteristic of the entire religious right, criticizing the 'absolute certainty' of the movement as 'dangerous for our democracy'. She was 'beginning to fear that we could have an Ayatolloh [sic] Khomeini in this country, but that he will not have a beard, but he will have a television program'.[206] The *New York Times* went further, inaccurately attributing

[200] Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, p. 463.

[201] 'An open letter to Christian America' from Jerry Falwell, *Journal Champion*, 12 Oct. 1979, BJUFF, 'Moral Majority, definition of' folder, No. 4690.

[202] 'An interview with the lone ranger of American fundamentalism', *Christianity Today*, 4 Sept. 1981, BJUFF, 'Falwell, Jerry – political activity' folder, No. 10630.

[203] Falwell, *Strength for the journey*, p. 366.

[204] Interview with the author, 20 Feb. 2003.

[205] Heineman, *God is a conservative*, pp. 114–5.

[206] Patricia Roberts Harris, 'Religion and politics: a commitment to a pluralistic society', delivered to the American Whig-Cliosophic Society, Princeton, New Jersey, 23 Sept. 1980, reprinted in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 1 Nov. 1980, pp. 51–3, BJUFF, 'Politics and Christianity – New Right' folder, No. 7338.

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Smith's remarks to Jerry Falwell![207] Carter himself said that his faith was not 'that of the Jerry Falwells or the Gerald L. K. Smiths',[208] linking Falwell, without evidence, to the fascist Smith, somewhat hypocritically given that Carter's church desegregated later than Falwell's (although Carter had voted to desegregate his church in the mid 1960s).[209] Carter's campaign also made use of the incident. One Democratic television advert ominously warned 'Dr. Jerry Falwell has said that God doesn't hear the prayers of Jews … if Reagan goes on to the White House, Falwell will come with him, and they'll purify the land as someone else did years ago.' Moral Majority filed a lawsuit and the advert was soon withdrawn.[210]

In addition, even the movement's anti-communism, often likened to McCarthyism, had strong interest-based justifications. Many evangelicals saw America as God's providential instrument to lead redemption,[211] so the battle against secularism at home and 'Godless, atheistic Communism' abroad was very real.[212] Richard Zone blasted Carter's recognition of the People's Republic of China, noting that 'Red China has been vocal in its intent to take Taiwan … Many Taiwanees are our brothers and sisters – true believers.'

Some criticisms of the religious right from more liberal quarters delved into the distortion and exaggeration that the movement itself was often accused of. For example, an ACLU advert stated 'Their agenda is clear and frightening: they mean to capture the power of government and use it to establish a nightmare of religious and political orthodoxy.' The titles of certain contemporary books on the subject, such as Senator Thomas McIntyre's *The Fear Brokers*[213] and Alan Crawford's *Thunder on the Right*, illustrate this concentration on the more sensational aspects of the religious right. These early works, together with some of the more extreme statements made by religious right leaders, perhaps overly influenced early historians studying the religious right. Martin Marty claimed that 'echoes of the Iranian militants are loud and clear' and Wood wrote of a 'nativist longing for the certainties of the past that the New Religious Right readily seeks to fill'.[214] Only with the passage of time and the movement's limited influence on the Reagan administration did more nuanced studies from Wilcox, Harding et al. emerge. Indeed, only a limited number of studies published during the early years of the religious right took a balanced approach.

[207] 'Religious leaders denounce evangelists of "New Right"' by the Associated Press, *New York Times*, 7 Oct. 1980, Sec. 4, p. 21, col. 5.

[208] Leo P. Ribuffo, *The old Christian right – the Protestant far right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 270.

[209] Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, pp. 146–7.

[210] Falwell, *Strength for the journey*, p. 376.

[211] Reichley, *Religion in American public life*, p. 313.

[212] Brief article in *Fundamentalist Evangelistic Association News and Views*, published by the Fundamental Evangelistic Association, Los Osos, California, Sept./Oct. 1980, p. 30, BJUFF, 'Carter, James Earl' folder, No. 4289.

[213] James Davison, 'The liberal reaction', in Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow, eds., *The new Christian right: mobilization and legitimation* (New York, 1983), pp. 153–4.

[214] Wood, 'Religious fundamentalism and the New Right', p. 420.

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For example, James Davison's 1983 essay on the 'liberal reaction' to the religious right called into question the charge that the religious right was essentially anti-democratic because it had pursued its goals solely within the framework of civic plurality.[215]

Another source of criticism, often ignored by historians, were the hardline fundamentalists who were unwilling to form ecumenical alliances. This is important because these hardline fundamentalists often harboured the extremist views that the religious right was accused of propagating. Bob Jones Jr, whose own university had fought the IRS over the tax exemptions, decreed that Moral Majority was 'one of Satan's devices to build the world church of Antichrist'. Jerry Falwell denied this, explaining that the organization's intention was 'to maintain basic religious freedom in this nation so that we can maintain our religious practices regardless of how different they may be'.[216]

A 1980 editorial in Bob Jones University publication *The Voice of Fundamentalism* argued that Christians could only participate in politics when the Christian home or church was directly threatened by government[217] – for example, the dispute with the IRS.

The article condemned the 'Moral Majority movement', and claimed that such a majority did not exist because most people did not share the beliefs of hardline fundamentalists. It cautioned that 'Dr. Falwell will make little progress against the evils which he mentions are threatening America until he begins an earnest, vigorous crusade against religious apostasy.' The article decried attempts to de-link morality and theology, arguing that 'One of the Devil's greatest deceptive methods is his attempt to confuse God's people concerning priorities. In the subtle, distorted emphasis of the Moral Majority, he has done his work well.' Bob Jones III argued that 'America's greatest problems are not carpetbagging politicians on capitol hill, but compromising preachers in churches.'[218]

The article rebutted Moral Majority's claim to be a non-religious organization, citing an Illinois *Moral Majority Report* that described the movement as a 'coalition of the bible-believing churches'. In addition, the movement was 'heavily weighted with unscriptural religious alliances and permeated with religious language, orientation, and personnel'. The editorial noted that 'The Scriptures make it plain that it is impossible for Bible-believers to enter into common causes and alliances with apostates and to retain doctrinal purity … Under the Moral Majority banner, even PAGAN CULTS SUCH AS MORMONISM (Latter Day Saints) are receiving the recognition of "'Christian" without refutation' (emphasis in the original). Alliances with Catholics were denounced and several prominent

[215] Davison, 'The liberal reaction', pp. 162–3.
[216] All cited by Capps, *The new religious right*, pp. 99–100.
[217] 'Moral Majority or spiritual minority?', *The Voice of Fundamentalism*, Sept.–Oct. 1980, p. 10, BJUFF, 'Moral Majority – separation' folder, No. 7006.
[218] Ibid., pp. 15–17.

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fundamentalists were attacked as 'Compromising southern Baptists' for supporting the 'Washington for Jesus' rally.[219] The article concluded that

> Dr. Falwell's actions are *resembling* more and more that of a post-millennial modernist than a pre-milliennial [sic] fundamentalist … Dr. Falwell, however, is travelling a road that leads to the doorstep of apostasy. Those who follow in Dr. Falwell's 'Moral Majority' train and those whom they lead will have had all spiritual militancy drained from their constitutions and be easy victims for the ungodly and the ecumenical movement [emphasis in the original].[220]

In 1982 Bob Jones Jr labelled Jerry Falwell 'the most dangerous man in America'.[221]

Another fundamentalist mocked Falwell's fundraising appeals, asking 'where is his faith? In God, or in a huge mailing list and tear-jerking tactics … Believers ought not to be duped by such nonsense.'[222] Another questioned Reagan's claim to be 'born again'.[223] Carl McIntire lamented that 'Jerry Falwell was primarily responsible for stirring up the storm in bringing out into the open the venom and hatred of the religious establishment against the Fundamentalists … Fundamentalists have been abused, attacked, smeared, called fascists, Nazis and just about every evil name.'[224]

Moderate evangelicals criticized the religious right from a different perspective. An article in the evangelical *Moody Monthly* reminded readers that 'the harsh reality of purity-through-politics is: it doesn't work … There is no single "'Christian" position on these controversial matters, yet many evangelical leaders presume to speak God's mind on them … no Christian candidate or group of candidates has all the answers.'[225]

VII

There is no doubt that the religious right emerged partly from the radical right tradition. However, the main constituency of the religious right were fundamentalists more integrated into society than ever before – perhaps the opposite of the radical right archetype. Furthermore, it emerged *after* the 'white backlash', and only in response to specific threats to the direct interests of conservative Christians. Finally, the wider political concerns of the religious right, and its efforts to form ecumenical alliances demonstrated the gradual secularization of its

[219] Ibid., pp. 21–9. [220] Ibid., p. 32. [221] Capps, *The new religious right*, p. 99.

[222] The *Cornerstone Challenge*, a publication of the Cornerstone Baptist Church, Belmont, Massachusetts, 18 Aug. 1980, BJUFF, 'Moral Majority – finances' folder, No. 10066.

[223] 'Reagan is NOT a born again Christian' by George R. Plagenz, *Christian News*, 6 Oct. 1981, BJUFF, 'Reagan, Ronald' folder, No. 7036.

[224] 'Where do we go from here?' by Carl McIntire, *Christian Beacon*, 30 Oct. 1980, p. 1, BJUFF, 'Politics and Christianity – elections' folder, No. 7391.

[225] 'Shall we join the new "'Christian crusade?"' by Ted Miller, *Moody Monthly*, Sept. 1980, pp. 20–2, BJUFF, 'Politics and Christianity' folder, No. 6763.

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constituency. Indeed, the 'extremist' label better fitted the hardline fundamentalists who vehemently denounced the religious right.

The need for a more considered approach to the religious right is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that a movement often depicted as theocratic in intention rejected the religious, conservative Jimmy Carter for the essentially non-religious and libertarian Ronald Reagan.

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