

Religious Right: More Right than Religious

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Running head: More Right than Religious

Key Words: Religious Right, Religion, Conservatism, Politics

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a dramatic rise in the influence of conservative religious leaders on the American political system. These conservative religious leaders, predominantly Christian evangelicals, make up what is commonly known as the Religious Right. The groups use religious rhetoric in order to push a conservative political agenda, mobilizing conservative church members around the nation. This paper examines the structure and values of the religious right, and attempts to evaluate whether the foundations of the religious right's values are more politically conservative than religious. The research concludes that the religious right's values are politically conservative rather than religious, and uses religion as a tool to further a conservative political agenda.

The influence of politically conservative Christians has significantly increased over the last thirty years in the United States. This rising influence has culminated in recent years with the election of George W. Bush in 2000 and his re-election in 2004. Bush received strong support from the so-called Religious Right (RR), with exit polls from 2004 showing that 78% of Evangelicals¹ gave their vote to Bush over John Kerry (CNN, 2004). This influence has been seen even further in the recent case regarding Terri Schiavo² and judicial nominees³.

There is no doubt that the RR has influence in American politics, though the amount of influence has been debated and scrutinized of late. While 78% of Evangelicals voted for George Bush in the 2004 elections, Evangelicals were only 23% of the total sample (CNN, 2004). This would mean that the Evangelicals who voted for Bush represented approximately 18% of the total US population (78% of the 23% that identified themselves as Evangelicals). While this percentage does not seem incredibly influential, 18% of a population can greatly impact both an election and national policy decisions.

Yet it is becoming more and more obvious that people around this country are having concerns with the rising influence of the RR. A USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll last year found that significant numbers of Americans are concerned:

By more than 2-to-1, 39%-18%, Americans say the "religious right" has too much influence in the Bush administration. That's a change from when the question was asked in CBS News/*New York Times* polls taken from 2001 to 2003. Then, approximately equal numbers said conservative Christians had too much and too little influence. (Page, 2005).

¹ The Religious Right is typically made up of those that call themselves Evangelicals, though the two groups are not synonymous.

² In this case Schiavo was a woman who was determined to be brain dead and had been on life support for several years. Her husband had decided to have her feeding tube removed under the assumption that this was what she would have wanted. The RR rallied together in an attempt to keep Schiavo alive, and forced an emergency session of Congress and many political leaders to get involved in what is typically a personal family situation.

³ The RR has been quite vocal against the use of the filibuster to delay votes on judicial nominees. The RR has held several conferences called Justice Sunday at large churches to bring attention to the importance of confirming judges that adhere to conservative political and judicial philosophies.

But on top of the influence that the RR may have on national affairs, this paper examines the structure and values of the RR, and attempts to evaluate whether the foundations of the RR's values are more politically conservative than religious. The data suggests that these groups and organizations simply use religious rhetoric as a tool to further a conservative political (and often un-Biblical) agenda.

Who is the Religious Right?

The Religious Right typically consists of politically (and often theologically) conservative Christians. Other religious groups (both Jews and Muslims) can share similar values of the RR, specifically in terms of the social values, but these groups typically do not align themselves with the RR. There are several prominent leaders of the RR, including Pat Robertson (of the 700 Club), Dr. James Dobson (of Focus on the Family), Dr. Jerry Falwell (of the Moral Majority), Tony Perkins (of the Family Research Council), and Gary Bauer (of American Values). Yet the RR does not stop at these influential political and religious leaders, but continues into many of the churches throughout the United States. While the above leaders are leading the charge, there are millions of Americans who adhere to similar goals and ideologies.

In February of 2005 Time Magazine had a feature on who they viewed as the "25 Most Influential Evangelicals". Approximately 20 of the 25 are/were active in the Religious Right, often having significant connections/influence with the current Bush administration (2005). What this shows is that the current Evangelical movement is heavily influenced by political involvement and influence. Some would say that the religious aspect of the movement has become secondary to the political ideologies of the movement.

With that said, it is important to distinguish between Evangelicals and the Religious Right. Chip Berlet discusses this distinction:

Most Christian evangelicals, however, are not part of the Christian Right. I know from talking with evangelicals and fundamentalists across the country that they are offended by the rhetoric from some liberal and Democratic Party leaders who do not seem to be able to talk about religion without chewing on their foot. (Berlet, 2005)

This paper will refer to the Religious Right as the loosely affiliated coalition of organizations that are strongly political and led by the above mentioned leaders. It is important to realize that this movement is often at the macro level and not the micro level. The organizations and leadership tend to be more conservative politically than the lower members of these groups.

Early on in the movement (i.e. in the 1980's) the Religious Right became synonymous with the Republican Party. The Democrat Party moved away from religion, and more specifically strayed from the "values" argument. And this enabled the Republican Party and the RR to monopolize the rhetoric related to faith and values. Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners magazine, has this to say regarding the RR's monopoly on values: "So then the right says, 'Thank you very much. Now we'll define religion in totally partisan ways. It will be a wedge and a weapon to divide and conquer for our partisan agenda.'" (Cottle, 2005). The RR has used their religious rhetoric to establish politically conservative ideologies at the state and national level, and has used it as a wedge issue that has been used against the "left" in electoral politics.

Goals and Values of the Religious Right

It is at times difficult to determine the exact goals of the Religious Right. Like most political groups and coalitions, their mission, vision, and goals are often filled with meaningless rhetoric and differ from group to group. Most of the organizations of the RR are focused around "family" and "life". The Christian Coalition begins with the following statement when discussing "what they believe":

Christian Coalition of America is a political organization, made up of pro-family Americans who care deeply about becoming active citizens for the purpose of guaranteeing that government acts in ways that strengthen, rather than threaten, families. As such, we work together with Christians of all denominations, as well as with other Americans who agree with our mission and with our ideals. (2005a)

The Christian Coalition (CC) also lists its priorities for the 109th congress (2005b). The CC lists 18 priorities, ranging from the approval of President George Bush's judicial nominees to passing Bush's social security reform to increasing abstinence-only education funding [see Appendix for the entire list]. Significant portions of the list could be replaced with the Republican Party Platform with few changes.

The Moral Majority takes a very political path with their four major platforms:

- 1 – The Moral Majority Coalition will conduct an intensive four-year "Voter Registration Campaign" through America's conservative churches, para-church ministries, pro-life and pro-family organizations.
- 2 – The Moral Majority Coalition will conduct well organized "Get-Out-The-Vote Campaigns" in 2006 and 2008.
- 3 – The Moral Majority Coalition will engage in the massive recruitment and mobilization of social conservatives through television, radio, direct mail (U.S.P.S. and Internet) and public rallies.
- 4 – The Moral Majority Coalition will encourage the promotion of continuous private and corporate prayer for America's moral renaissance based on 2 Chronicles 7:14. (2005)

And Gary Bauer's American Values focuses on life and family:

Our vision is a nation that embraces *life, marriage, family, faith, and freedom*. We work for streets without bullets, schools that prepare our children for success, laws that protect our people, and a government that serves its citizens. We can get there. But we need to start now.

Sadly, the culture of death continues to be promoted in our media, courts and legislatures. Millions of unborn children have been killed over the last 30 years as a result of our country's selfishness justified under the euphemisms of choice and privacy. (2005)

As is shown in the above statements, these RR organizations focus on political action focusing on a handful of issues that can be summed up as this: life, family, and faith.

Life

The issue of life is one of the main key “values” of the Religious Right. The leaders of the RR claim to be “pro-life” and support “pro-life” candidates⁴. Yet this definition of life is quite limited in its execution. When the RR refers to being pro-life they are almost exclusively referring to abortion or euthanasia. Many members of the RR refuse to vote for a candidate if he/she support abortion, regardless of his/her other views.⁵ The RR is adamantly opposed to abortion in any situation. This stems from their beliefs that life begins at conception, and that any attempt to end the life of a fetus results in murder. This anti-abortion ideology is shown in the Christian Coalitions support for the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act and their efforts to have the RU 486 pill taken off of the shelves.⁶

The concept of life is also seen in end-of-life issues. Along with the RR’s adamant opposition of euthanasia, the RR took a leading role in the fight to save Terri Schiavo’s life. The Schiavo case involved a woman who had not experienced any brain activity since 1990 (15 years), but was being kept alive by a feeding tube. Schiavo’s husband was convinced that at this point Terri would have wanted to have the feeding tube pulled. On the other hand, Terri Schiavo’s parents were opposed to this idea, and wanted to take custody of her so that they could keep her alive. (Tampa Bay Online, 2005). From here the RR took an active role in bringing attention to this case, including getting Florida Governor Jeb Bush and the US Congress involved in the case. Senate Majority leader Bill Frist (a former doctor) even stood in front of the Senate and

⁴ The term “pro-life” is deceiving, as their focus on life is limited to certain instances. Often the idea of “innocent life” is emphasized, where the RR places a priority of innocent life over “guilty” life, which is how many are able to justify support for both war and capital punishment. This will be discussed in greater depth later in this paper. A more accurate term for the RR’s value of “life” would be anti-abortion and anti-euthanasia.

⁵ Dr. Jerry Falwell, leader and founder of the Moral Majority, almost said this directly on the Sean Hannity show on February 12, 2005 in a debate with Jim Wallis, though the actual quote is unavailable. Falwell accused Wallis of not being an Evangelical, and said that no Evangelical would be able to vote for a political candidate that supported abortion. (Hannity, 2005)

⁶ Both of these examples can be seen in their priorities for the 109th congress in the Appendix.

diagnosed her based on a video clip (Babington, 2005). The RR rallied around this cause, using much of their anti-abortion base to influence Washington politicians to intervene and “save” Schiavo’s life.

Family

Much of the rhetoric of the Religious Right includes that of being “pro-family” or having “family values”. Many RR organizations have “family” being their focus, with names like the Family Values Coalition, Focus on the Family, or the American Family Association. Again, in looking at the Christian Coalition’s priorities, we see a pattern of family, and it also sheds light into what they mean by family. A key priority of the Christian Coalition is the passage of a “Marriage Protection amendment” that would define marriage has being between only a man and a woman (2005b). Another aspect of the RR’s “family” priorities is shown in the Christian Coalition’s support for abstinence-only education and their refusal to support the distribution of certain methods of birth control (2005b).

To the Religious Right, family means a married man and woman, often with children. If a group of people do not fit into this definition, then they are “anti-family”. The RR uses a small number of verses in the Bible to justify an extreme hatred for homosexuality⁷. They believe that homosexuality is an abomination and that those living in this “sin” will eventually go to hell. The RR has built up a hatred of homosexuality and used it to mobilize a base of voters that help influence national politics. On the front page of the Moral Majority Coalition website they celebrate their victories in thirteen different states where state constitutional amendments were

⁷ This small number of verses includes approximately three verses in the Old Testament and three verses in the New Testament for a total of six verses.

passed defining marriage between a man and a woman (2005).⁸ These amendments not only allowed states to make same-sex marriage legal, it also mobilized conservative voters in swing states in order to make a difference in the national Presidential elections. This was cited as one probably cause for Bush's victory in Ohio.

Along with the RR's opposition to gay marriage and gay rights, they also hold a strong opposition for anything related to sexual activity. This is seen in their unwillingness to fund any sexual education other than abstinence. The RR places a high priority on abstinence-only education, and is strongly opposed to any distribution of birth control methods – specifically condoms. Interestingly, they do not see a connection (or they do not see it as a priority) between a reduction in abortions and the distribution and acceptance of birth control.

Richard Land, the President of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, has this to say about the life and family values of the RR:

It would take a whole lot more than the leadership of the NAE to divert the evangelical and Catholic base from the core issues. As long as there's a baby being killed every 20 seconds, as long as the courts are trying to force action on gay marriage that two-thirds of the American people don't want, the base will insist that these issues receive great emphasis. (Cottle, 2005)

As Land asserts, the RR is unwilling to even look at other issues outside of “family” or “life”. But some would say that it even goes further than this. Conservative columnist Cal Thomas (who used to work for the Moral Majority) has this to say: “It goes to the gut...It goes to the emotions, to feelings. It produces a visceral reaction.” (Cottle, 2005). The RR has capitalized on emotional issues like killing babies and sexual “sin” to mobilize their base.

Tony Campolo, a sociologist at Eastern University in Pennsylvania, quotes Eric Hoffer's 1951 book, *True Believer*: “Mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a god, but never

⁸ And these amendments passed by a large margin: Arkansas (75 percent), Georgia (77 percent), Kentucky (75 percent), Louisiana (78 percent), Michigan (59%), Mississippi (86%), Missouri (72%), Montana (66 percent), North Dakota (73 percent), Ohio (62 percent), Oklahoma (76 percent), Oregon (57 percent) and Utah (66 percent)

without belief in a devil." Campolo then continues this train of thought with this: "I contend that it's easy to rally people around opposition to gay people. In the minds of many, they have become the devil that must be destroyed if America is to be saved." (Cottle, 2005).

Faith

Being that the Religious Right's base is devout Protestant Christians, it would make sense that one of the key tenants of the RR ideology is based on faith. This is played out in many different ways, though it has been pretty specific in recent months. For one, the use of God in the public sphere is a major tenant of the RR. From using "under God" in the pledge of allegiance to posting the "10 Commandments" in public court houses, these issues have become key priorities to the RR (both are listed as priorities in the Christian Coalition's priorities for the 109th congress: See Appendix). They often speak of the Bill of the Rights being misinterpreted in terms of the "separation between church and state", and they believe that there is not reason to keep them from using specific Christian ideas in everyday government life.

The concept of faith is also seen in the debate over Creationism and Evolution. The RR is a strong proponent of teaching creationism in public schools. They assert that evolution is an unproven theory and that Creationism (or "Intelligent Design") has just as much value to be taught in a science classroom as evolution does. The problem with this is that the vast majority of scientists hold evolution as something significantly greater than a theory, while the theory of creationism or intelligent design does have the same supporting evidence as evolution. The RR has even gone as far to say that science books that teach evolution should have stickers on them that say that evolution is a theory, not a fact, as it interferes with their belief in creationism (CNN, 2005).⁹

⁹ Of course, it must be noted that evolution *is* a theory and not fact, but it is a theory that is generally accepted by the scientific academia.

Another issue of faith is related to the RR's support for Israel in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The support for Israel is often seen as a Biblical mandate. The RR's interpretation of the Bible leads them to believe that Israel will have a significant role in the "end times", and that in order for "Armageddon" to occur Israel must be completely restored to its rightful owner – the Jews. This has caused the Religious Right to throw their support behind Israel, and is partly responsible for the billions of aid (more than the U.S. gives to any other nation) that the United States gives to Israel each year.

The final issue related to faith and the Religious Right is the idea of dominionism. This is the idea that the Christians should dominate and control the political process. This idea is summarized perfectly by Pat Robertson, one of the leaders of the RR:

When I said during my presidential bid that I would only bring Christians and Jews into the government, I hit a firestorm. 'What do you mean?' the media challenged me. 'You're not going to bring atheists into the government? How dare you maintain that those who believe in the Judeo Christian values are better qualified to govern America than Hindus and Muslims?' My simple answer is, 'Yes, they are.' (Robertson, 218).

Chip Berlet describes it like this:

Reconstructionism is a theology that argues that only Christian men should rule civil society. It has a softer related theology called dominionism. ... 'Dominionism' in general threatens the Church/State separation so vital to our democracy as a pluralist society. Groups such as the Christian Coalition really have adopted many of the tenets of Dominionism, and some key Christian right leaders are close to Reconstructionism, which thinks that the U.S. Constitution is a sub-document overruled by Old Testament Biblical Laws. (Sourcewatch, 2005).

The ideas of dominionism and reconstructionism can be seen in recent months. The leaders of the Religious Right want power in Washington. They believe that they helped elect President Bush, and now they want results. They want Christian leaders to be in control.

Christian Values

Obviously the Religious Right portrays their “values” and ideologies as Christian values. But what does this mean? And is this a valid claim? While the RR has developed a monopoly on the rhetoric of values and morals¹⁰, this does not necessarily mean that they actually have a monopoly on all Christian values and morals. Jim Wallis says it like this:

I welcome the discussion of “moral values”. ... Of course, the questions are, Which values and whose values? ... Since when did believing in God and having moral values make you pro-war, pro-rich, and pro-Republican? And since when did promoting and pursuing a progressive social agenda with a concern for economic security, health care, and educational opportunity mean you had to put faith in God aside? (Wallis, xix-xx)

The values of Christians in the United States (and around the world) cover much more ground than the Religious Right is willing to admit. The RR is not willing to address these issues. Tom Minnery, Vice President of Focus on The Family even characterizes the RR’s values like this: “[Concern for global warming] does not at all characterize the kind of issues that evangelicals are noted for being involved in. Marriage, family, judicial reform, and the various pro-life issues-- those are the kinds of things that characterize evangelicals.”¹¹ (Cottle, 2005).

If the Religious Right were to truly look at Biblical principles, they would find much more there about doing something for the poor, providing healthcare, and avoiding violence. The RR’s support for the war in Iraq is baffling when compared to the RR’s “pro-life” rhetoric. Jerry Falwell, during an interview on CNN, had this to say about the terrorists: “And I’m for the president to chase them all over the world. If it takes 10 years, blow them away in the name of the Lord.” (Allen, 2004). Yet at the same time Falwell continues to discuss the culture of life and taking a strong stand against abortion. A similar pattern is seen in terms of capital

¹⁰ See George Lakoff’s Don’t Think Like an Elephant for a discussion on rhetoric and framing issues. Lakoff discussed the importance on language and framing an issue, and discusses how the Right has become extremely successful at framing the issues while the Left has failed in this area.

¹¹ It is important to note that many Evangelicals are starting to change their tone on Global Warming, as has been seen in the recent Evangelical Climate Initiative.

punishment. George Bush, the number one evangelical in the country and a strong supporter of the death penalty, presided over more executions while the governor of Texas than any other governor over the same period. The obvious disconnect is not seen by these Religious Right leaders, as it interferes with their political agenda.

There is a proposed reason that the Religious Right is unwilling to discuss these other issues. It is the issue of responsibility. This is related to Weber's classic theory of the Protestant Ethic, where Protestant religion creates an ethic of individual responsibility that establishes a work ethic that promotes and supports capitalism. (Weber, 2003) The Evangelical culture encourages individual responsibility, which leads to a political ideology that says that people are responsible for their own actions and the government is not responsible to overcome individuals' poor decisions. They believe that there are consequences for actions, and that issues like poverty or the death penalty come as a consequence of certain actions. In research by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, they found that evangelicals are more inclined than non-evangelicals to blame an individual's failure to thrive on personal shortcomings. "Because systems and programs are viewed as obviating personal responsibility and not changing the hearts of individuals, they are ultimately destructive...Welfare is seen as terribly misguided and sinful, running counter to most things American and, in their understanding, most things Christian. It is far better, according to this [representative interviewee], to 'give them the basics of God and teach them about Jesus. That's going to bring them a whole lot more out of poverty than it is to give them a welfare check.'" (2001). The Left's response to poverty is seen by the RR as enabling those that are making poor decisions. They place a higher priority on converting these people than rescuing them from poverty. Interestingly, in the Gospels, we see Jesus do the opposite.¹²

¹² In the Gospels Jesus always healed first, taught second. He would provide for their needs (most of the time a physical need) and then tell them to sin no more.

Another justification for the RR's lack of emphasis on helping the poor is one of priorities.

Tom McClusky, acting vice president for government affairs at the Family Research Council, says it like this:

"What is at the core of being Catholic is the life issue, and that's something the pope has never strayed from," he said. "While other issues are important -- such as helping the poor, the death penalty, views on war -- these are things that aren't tenets of the Catholic Church." (Cooperman, 2006).

Paul Hetrick, a spokesman for Focus on the Family, says it even more pointedly:

"It's not a question of the poor not being important or that meeting their needs is not important. But whether or not a baby is killed in the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy, that is less important than help for the poor? We would respectfully disagree with that." (Weisman, 2005).

These groups would assert that it is important to do things like take care of the poor, but that they simply do not have the time to deal with it. They would say that preventing the "killing of babies" is more important than dealing with poverty. Unfortunately this argument breaks down when looking at the policies that the RR groups are supporting. Jim Wallis says this:

Such conservative religious leaders "have agreed to support cutting food stamps for poor people if Republicans support them on judicial nominees," he said. "They are trading the lives of poor people for their agenda. They're being, and this is the worst insult, unbiblical."

Rod Sider has also discussed this at great length, specifically in his book Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger. Sider argues that poverty needs to be dealt with both at the micro (Church) and the macro (government) levels (Sider, 1997). Glen Stassen, a ethics professor at Fuller Seminary, has even gone as far to say that conservative economic policies have led to a greater number of abortions:

Economic policy and abortion are not separate issues; they form one moral imperative. Rhetoric is hollow, mere tinkling brass, without health care, health insurance, jobs, child care, and a living wage. Pro-life in deed, not merely in word, means we need policies that provide jobs and health insurance and support for prospective mothers. (Stassen, 2004)

Not only do the economic policies of the RR appear to be at odds with Biblical principles towards the poor, they also could be impact another key tenet of the RR – life issues. Yet they continue to press ahead with policies that do little for the “least of these.”

While the RR groups claim to care about the poor, their political support that they give to specific policy shows something quite different. This was seen in great detail when the major Religious Right groups supported the Bush Administration’s budget, justified in different ways by the leadership of the RR. Dr. Dobson “praised what he calls ‘pro-family tax cuts’” (Weisman, 2005). Janice Crouse, a senior fellow at the Christian group Concerned Women for America, stated that “religious conservatives ‘know that the government is not really capable of love. ... You look to the government for justice, and you look to the church and individuals for mercy’” (Weisman, 2005). Tony Perkins, of the Family Research Council, stated it like this: “There is a [biblical] mandate to take care of the poor. There is no dispute of that fact,” he said. “But it does not say government should do it. That’s a shifting of responsibility” (Weisman, 2005). The Rev. Richard Cizik, a vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals, said it simply: “‘Frankly, I don’t hear a lot of conversation among evangelicals’ about budget cuts in anti-poverty programs” (Weisman, 2005).

Recently President Bush spoke at the commencement ceremonies at Calvin College, a small Christian college in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Surprisingly to some, there was resistance. Approximately a third of the faculty wrote and signed a letter protesting the policies and values of the President, saying that Bush’s values and policies do not align with Christian values:

As Christians we are called to be peacemakers and to initiate war only as a last resort. We believe your administration has launched an unjust and unjustified war in Iraq.

As Christians we are called to lift up the hungry and impoverished. We believe your administration has taken actions that favor the wealthy of our society and burden the poor.

As Christians we are called to actions characterized by love, gentleness, and concern for the most vulnerable among us. We believe your administration has fostered intolerance and divisiveness and has often failed to listen to those with whom it disagrees.

As Christians we are called to be caretakers of God's good creation. We believe your environmental policies have harmed creation and have not promoted long-term stewardship of our natural environment. (Chronicle of Higher Ed, 2005).

It is clear that the Religious Right does not hold a monopoly of religious values and morals. And

Amy Sullivan has even more to say:

Opposition to the war in Iraq is a moral issue. The alleviation of poverty is a moral issue. Concern about abortion is a moral value, yes, but you can stay at the level of empty rhetoric about a "culture of life" or you can talk about how to actually reduce abortion rates, which is what most people care about more...

"Religious" does not mean Republican. And "moral" does not mean conservative. (Sullivan, 2004),

The Religious Right has made the country believe that Religious does equal Republican, and that the Republican Party is the party of moral values. But moral values are more than abortion, same-sex marriage, or public displays of the 10 Commandments. Moral values and biblical values also involve caring about the poor. It involves peaceful resolution to conflict. It involves actually doing something reduce abortions. Moral values are important to this nation, but they are much broader than what Jerry Falwell or James Dobson wants you to believe.

Tony Campolo takes a strong stance on what it means to be a Christian:

To be a Christian in today's world is to be opposed to America. Why? America believes in capital punishment, and Jesus says, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' America says, 'Blessed are the rich.' Jesus said, 'Woe unto you who are rich, blessed are the poor.' America says, 'Blessed are the powerful.' Jesus said, 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' (Mason, 2005).

Yet few Christians in America take these teachings seriously. And the religious leadership (specifically that of the RR) in this country instead acts in opposition to these teachings.

Miroslav Volf, a theologian at Yale, sums it up like this:

Evangelicals who belong to the religious right insist that Jesus is their Lord and Savior, yet many of them hardly ever talk about Jesus, at least not in public. They talk about politics-how to get their people elected to local, state and federal governments so as to advance their religious, moral and political causes. They pour their energy into political battles and have none left for Jesus. If you were to point this out to them, they'd vehemently disagree, telling you that they wage political wars for Jesus and in his name. But Jesus is no longer at the center of their attention. The struggle for power has taken his place. They are political warriors in religious garb, not followers of Jesus (Volf, 2005).

Jim Wallis, citing Abraham Lincoln, discusses what religious leaders should be concerned with:

Abraham Lincoln had it right. Our task should not be to invoke religion and the name of God by claiming God's blessing and endorsement for all our national policies and practices - saying, in effect, that God is on our side. Rather, as Lincoln put it, we should worry earnestly whether we are on God's side (Wallis, xvi).

The Religious Right is using religious and theological rhetoric to justify their policies and practices, instead of shaping their policies and practices around their theology. Charles Marsh, an Evangelical and professor of religion at the University of Virginia, is starting to get concerned:

In the past several years, American evangelicals, and I am one of them, have amassed greater political power than at any time in our history. But at what cost to our witness and the integrity of our message?

...

What will it take for evangelicals in the United States to recognize our mistaken loyalty? We have increasingly isolated ourselves from the shared faith of the global Church, and there is no denying that our Faustian bargain for access and power has undermined the credibility of our moral and evangelistic witness in the world. The Hebrew prophets might call us to repentance, but repentance is a tough demand for a people utterly convinced of their righteousness (Marsh, 2006).

It is fairly clear that the Religious Right's priorities are significantly different that of Church and Biblical principles.

Summary

The data presented shows a loose coalition of organizations that align themselves with religion. These organizations are using religious rhetoric and language, yet have political ideologies and platforms that have little to do with the religious teachings that they claim.

Instead these organizations have an allegiance to conservative political philosophies. Not only does their allegiance lie with these conservative philosophies, but these philosophies are often antagonistic to Biblical teachings. On top of this, these organizations have used their religious rhetoric and connections in order to mobilize voters over a couple of issues (abortion, gay marriage) while ignoring other issues (war, death penalty, poverty, etc.) These organizations have amassed significant political influence and power in the United States, especially on the current Republican Party, and will continue to assert their influence in order to further a conservative political agenda.

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Appendix: Christian Coalition of America's Agenda for the 109th Congress (2005)
(Christian Coalition, 2005)

- Getting votes in the first session of the 109th Congress to confirm President Bush's judicial nominations and confirm any of President Bush's Supreme Court nominees.
- Making permanent President Bush's 2001 federal tax cuts
- Passing the "Child Custody Protection Act" in the House and Senate
- Helping pass President Bush's Social Security reform
- Get a vote on Congressman Chris Smith's "Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act"
- Getting a vote on the Marriage Protection (constitutional) amendment in the United States Senate
- Supporting increases for abstinence-only funding which is now up to about \$170 million.
- Passing Congressman Walter Jones' "Houses of Worship Free Speech Restoration Act."
- Passing Congressman Bartlett's First Amendment Restoration Act, H.R.3801.
- Passing Senator Shelby's/Congressman Aderholt's Constitutional Restora.Act.of 2004.
- Getting a vote on Congressman Henry Brown's "Real and Virtual Child Pornography Ban Constitutional Amendment" in both the House and Senate.
- Passing Congressman Robert Aderholt's "10 Commandments Display Act,"H.R.2045.
- Support Congressman Todd Akin's "Pledge Protection Act" bill.
- Passing Senator Lindsey Graham's and Congressman Joe Wilson's "Holy Sites" resolution.
- Passing Majority Whip Roy Blunt's "Charitable Giving Act of 2003," H.R. 7.
- Passing Senator Sam Brownback's anti-cloning bill in the U.S. Senate.
- Get a vote for Congressman Charles "Chip" Pickering's "Safeguarding Our Religious Liberties Act."
- Helping to pass "Holly's Law" to take the abortion pill, RU 486 off market