

# *The Preacher Versus The Teacher*

*By Matthew C. Moen*

**W**ith few exceptions, professional educators consistently misunderstand the Christian Right. They fail to appreciate the shifting nature of its constituency; the personal rivalries and theological fissures in its ranks; the striking reorientation in its language and tactics since 1985; the uniform rise in the political sophistication of its leaders.

The lack of understanding about the Christian Right reflects the reality that educators have things to do other than chronicle the evolution of a conservative social movement, whose followers prefer that their children attend religious schools anyway. It also reflects the distinct arenas that operate within a supposed "global village."

Just as many conservative Christians cannot distinguish between a traditionalist and a deconstructionist in a modern-day English department, many educators cannot state the theological differences between fundamentalists and evangelicals. The secular teacher and the conservative preacher are "ideal types," to be sure, that are not applicable to all in the ranks, and who do interact even when mutual antipathy exists.

Yet, the idea advanced by Alexis De Tocqueville (1848) that Americans are "careful to break up into small and distinct groups in order to taste the pleasures of private life" seems more accurate than ever. The educator reads a book to relax, tunes into PBS for visual entertainment, and considers the contemplative life the good one, in

---

**Matthew C. Moen** is associate professor of political science at the University of Maine. He received his bachelor's degree from Augustana College and his doctorate from the University of Oklahoma. He is author of numerous journal articles and several books, including *The Transformation of the Christian Right (1992)* and *The Christian Right and Congress (1989)*.

***Religious conservatives conjure up the spectre of a monolithic force indoctrinating children in “leftist” causes.***

---

the best tradition of Aristotle; the fundamentalist attends Bible study, watches Bonanza on Pat Robertson’s Family Channel, and considers the spiritual life best, as Jesus teaches. Those occupying each camp consort with like-minded individuals and do not search out information on the other side.

The lack of understanding is a constant source of friction. Educators assume that those with a literal understanding of the Bible cannot have a particularly high intelligence quotient. (How can any thinking person blithely ignore fossils?) They lambast religious conservatives for their “backward looking” attitudes; psychologists and sociologists lead the way, solemnly explaining the behavior and objectives of those associated with the Christian Right in terms of “authoritarian personalities” or “status anxiety” (Adorno et. al., 1950; Lipset and Rabb, 1978).

Social scientists thereby reduce the concerns of fellow human beings to the realm of personality disorders and highly symbolic crusades to assert cultural hegemony. Given that restricted prism of understanding, it is hardly surprising that educators cannot fathom the significance of issues such as prayer in schools and that they fall back on Thomas Jefferson’s metaphor about a “wall of separation” between church and state, whenever serious questions arise about the intersection of religiosity and public policy. Perhaps it is this political scientist’s erroneous observation, based on experiences with students in American Government, but I doubt whether those who cite a “wall of separation” know that the phrase appears nowhere in the Constitution, nor that it is only one possible interpretation of the Establishment Clause.

Religious conservatives exhibit the same lack of understanding. They conjure up the spectre of a monolithic force indoctrinating children in “leftist” causes, beginning with the primary school teacher who encourages children to protect the earth’s environment, continuing with the secondary teacher who offers a contrary vision of American history, and ending with the college professor who

***The lack of genuine understanding between the teacher and the preacher imperils the quality of American public life.***

---

supports women's studies programs or multiculturalism (Schlafly, 1992).

Educators are portrayed as hell bent on disassembling the body politic, substituting their squishy values for bedrock beliefs. Religious conservatives also oversimplify while registering their objections, combining the seventh-grade art teacher in Alaska with the Marxist history professor at an Ivy League university, under the rubric of the "education establishment." That pejorative label dulls the critical faculties and foments hostility among a citizenry that loathes bureaucracy, whether real or imagined.

Finally, religious conservatives claim that the Bible contains all of the answers to life's questions, a proposition that intrinsically justifies a lack of inquiry, and that renders its advocates unable to grasp the desire to push the boundaries of human knowledge. St. Thomas Aquinas, the medieval philosopher who worked to reconcile revelation and reason, would abhor the combination of blissful ignorance and ideology.

The lack of genuine understanding between the teacher and the preacher imperils the quality of American public life, because neither party will soon vacate the public square, despite firm predictions of the "fall of the Christian Right" (Bruce, 1988; D'Antonio, 1990). The mutual ignorance of the other side breeds a level of suspicion that, to borrow a phrase, proceeds beyond "our poor power to add or detract."

A step in the right direction, though, is to illuminate the existing state of affairs. This essay clarifies the development of the Christian Right over time, identifying the real (and imagined) challenges that it presents to educators. I purposely sketch the big picture, since a voluminous literature containing the details is available. Although Christian-Right supporters may judge this effort to be giving away "trade secrets" in a competitive environment, and educators may judge it an attack upon "us" rather than "them," the intent is to expose each side to the other area of the global village.

***The preacher judged the teacher ill-equipped to perform the role requiring that moral statements accompany clinical explanations.***

---

**Who's Right and Who's Wrong?**

The Christian Right has a lineage traceable throughout the 20th century (Wilcox, 1992). Its most recent permutation arose in the late-1970s in response to a variety of developments. One long-term factor was the blossoming of the rights movement of the 1960s, which began with civil rights for African Americans and gradually extended to women's rights and gay rights (Morgan, 1984).

Many welcomed those crusades as progress against racism, sexism, and cultural oppression; Christian-Right leaders viewed them as attacks upon traditional values and as positive proof of moral degeneracy.

The Supreme Court's decisions banning school prayer (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962) and legalizing school busing (*Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 1971) and abortion (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973) also played a part, but not in the immediate way suggested by journalists.

The Christian-Right organizations coalesced too many years after those decisions for such direct causation. The decisions merely fostered discontent. The school prayer and abortion decisions signaled moral decay, while the school busing decision made it more difficult for white religious conservatives to avoid school desegregation.

The other long-term factor at work was the growth of the federal government. It pressured the traditional family structure through a higher tax burden, and fostered government assumption of tasks historically performed by the family. Examples abound, with the most obvious being programs for the elderly and the unwed mother.

Another very sensitive issue, which exploded in public schools around the nation, was sex education. The preacher judged the teacher ill-equipped to perform that role, which required that moral statements accompany clinical explanations. This area remains a battleground today, with struggles over the distribution of condoms in schools, and the introduction of "value-free" school curricula. The

***President Carter dispatched an emissary to repair relations with fundamentalist leaders, but his overture was too little, too late.***

---

most salient fight has occurred in New York City, where the curriculum included books that taught primary school-children about gay lifestyles through titles such as *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*. (If you are unaware of the incendiary effect of the "lifestyles" language on religious conservatives, you are due for consciousness-raising).

The specific events that triggered the rise of the Christian Right were the decision of the Federal Communications Commission to consider restrictions on religious broadcasting and the effort of the Internal Revenue Service to revoke the tax-exempt status of private, religious schools practicing racial discrimination. Both of those issues arose during the Carter administration, which was already a disappointment to religious conservatives because of the President Carter's opposition to prayer in public schools, aid to parochial schools, and abortion restrictions.

The FCC and IRS controversies surfaced in 1977-1978, and the major organizations of the early Christian Right (Moral Majority, Christian Voice, and the Religious Roundtable) formed within the space of several months, beginning in December 1978.

Even with a "born-again" Baptist at the helm, the Carter administration failed to anticipate the rise of the Christian Right and the resurrection of previously dormant issues, such as school prayer and tuition tax credits. Once he sensed the depth of the unrest, President Carter dispatched an emissary to repair relations with fundamentalist leaders, but his overture in an election year was too little, too late (Vecsey, 1980).

Journalists were also caught flat-footed. They wrote just two articles about the Christian-Right in the year that it came together, as measured by citations in the *The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, compared to 68 the following year (Moen, 1989). Those responsible for "breaking news" missed one of the major religious and political stories of the past quarter-century, perhaps because of their collective distance from the conservative Christian subculture.

Prominent public officials missed the boat in a different way.

***Some scholars missed the genuine outrage that existed, and too easily dismissed the reverberations echoing about the body politic.***

---

Patricia Harris, Secretary of Health and Human Services during the Carter administration, skipped over the messy details of law, personality, culture, and theology to compare Jerry Falwell to Ayatollah Khomeini (“Christian Right Equated with Iran’s Mullahs,” 1980).

Scholars also misunderstood these events. Hadden and Swann (1981) paved the way for much subsequent scholarship and public discussion, by adding the phrase “televangelism” to the nation’s vocabulary. They argued that the Christian Right was built from the “top down” by clever television evangelists. Their reasoning provided a convincing explanation to people far removed from the fundamentalist subculture: whiz-bang technology explained the rise of the bumpkins, in an era where modernization and secularization were gradually eradicating religious belief.

The scholars who followed that cue completely missed the genuine outrage that existed, and too easily dismissed the reverberations echoing about the body politic. They identified Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts, and Jim Bakker as master manipulators, not pausing to consider whether their television audiences were not so much an empire as an edifice. It is little wonder that they and so many others were astonished by the “resurgence” of the Christian Right in the 1992 election. It is easy to draw the wrong conclusion when one starts with the wrong premise.

### **Up, Over, Around, and Through**

Since its rise in the late-1970s, the Christian Right has evolved and changed. It has passed through two distinct phases, and is in the midst of a third (Moen, 1992). A brief synopsis of those phases is warranted, so as to inform the discussion of the challenge the Christian Right currently presents. Table 1 provides a reference point for what follows, listing the movement’s formal organizations.

The first period of activism lasted from the inception of the Christian-Right organizations in 1978 through 1984. It is properly

---

---

labeled the *expansionist period*. During that time, the Christian Right grew to seven national organizations, whose membership rose almost monotonically.

The distinguishing characteristics of this period were: a high public profile, evidenced by countless news stories and opinion polls on organizations like Moral Majority; a clique of prominent fundamentalist leaders who arranged and rearranged organizations in kaleidoscopic fashion to foster a perception that an unrivaled political force now existed; a concerted effort to achieve substantive victories on Capitol Hill, cresting in the 98th Congress (1983-1984), with passage of "equal access" legislation that allowed voluntary

***During this phase of the movement, President Reagan provided constant rhetorical support, but limited legislative assistance.***

---

items were considered on the Senate floor in 1983-1984, for the first time in more than a decade, but each one failed to secure the two-thirds vote needed for passage.

The combination of winning attention and losing legislative struggles knocked items off the agenda and caused the Christian Right to atrophy following President Reagan's reelection in 1984.

The second period of activism lasted during 1985-1986, and may be properly described as the *transition period*. Its major feature was retrenchment.

The National Christian Action Coalition, American Coalition for Traditional Values, and Freedom Council all disbanded; the Religious Roundtable and Christian Voice were allowed to atrophy; Moral Majority was collapsed into the newly formed Liberty Federation, for the express purpose of giving Reverend Falwell a graceful exit from politics. He started shifting funds from his political operations to his religious ministry in 1985, collapsed Moral Majority into the new group in 1986, and announced his retirement from an active political role in 1987.

When Reverend Falwell announced that he was going "back to the pulpit, back to preaching, back to winning souls," many fundamentalists followed (Miller, 1987). The loss of its titular leader reduced the Christian Right's influence on the political agenda for a time, which was reinforced by the closure of its lobbying operations on Capitol Hill. The changes did not mark the end of the Christian Right, however, but the beginning of a new phase of activism more focused on low-profile grassroots work. The Christian Right emerged a more potent political force.

### **Money, Politics, and Back to the People**

The third period of activism started in 1987 and continues to the present. It is properly labeled the *institutionalization period*. Its distinguishing feature is the existence of several organizations that are well-positioned to exert influence for years to come; a secondary

***This did not mark the end of the Christian Right, but the beginning of a new activism focused on low-profile grassroots work.***

---

feature is a reorientation that makes it much more likely to combat educators.

Why is the Christian Right better positioned today than ever before, and more likely to challenge public education? One reason is that its current organizations are on firm financial footing. During the Christian Right's early years, its organizations were funded through direct-mail solicitation; their financial backing rose and fell with response rates.

Christian Right elites learned that it was difficult to sustain interest via solicitation, in part because it required increasingly strident rhetoric in order to motivate people to send money. (One can cry "secular humanist conspiracy" only so many times). Leaders remedied that problem in two different ways. One was to quietly tap the deep pockets of controversial figures, such as Reverend Sun Myung Moon, who gave funds to launch the American Freedom Coalition (Judis, 1989). The other was to erect genuine membership organizations, replete with annual dues, local and national meetings, and specific benefits. That tack was taken by Concerned Women for America. Both approaches provide secure financial footing.

Second, the Christian Right consists of fewer fundamentalists and more evangelicals. Early leaders and followers were mostly fundamentalist (Wilcox, 1986), but they gradually yielded to an evangelical contingent attracted to politics by Pat Robertson's 1988 presidential candidacy (Hertzke, 1993).

Scholars have shown that fundamentalists and evangelicals are suspicious of each other (Wilcox, 1986; Jelen, 1991), with a literal interpretation of the Bible a particular point of cleavage. The replacement of fundamentalists by evangelicals over time decreases the intensity of theological fissures; it also means that those currently associated with the Christian Right are more intellectually oriented (Hoffman and Rigney, 1992).

Third, the Christian Right is operating with a more full political agenda. In the early 1980s, the Christian Right had an abundant

***The Christian Right consists of fewer fundamentalists and more evangelicals. Early members were mostly fundamentalist.***

---

agenda that included opposition to abortion, pornography, and the Equal Rights Amendment, as well as support for prayer in schools and autonomy for religious schools; it was on the cutting edge of other issues too, such as the effect of the tax code on families.

Over the course of the 1980s, the Christian Right's agenda withered, partly because its issues were disposed of (such as the ERA and the school prayer issue, because of enactment of "equal access" legislation), and partly because its leaders subordinated their issues to Reagan administration objectives. Christian-Right leaders ambled into debates over budget cuts, strategic weapons systems, and aid to the Contras—all issues where they had neither credentials nor expertise.

Their role as mouthpieces for the Reagan administration reached absurd heights when Reverend Falwell took a trip to South Africa and announced that the apartheid structure was misunderstood, and that economic sanctions against the regime were ill-conceived (Cowell, 1985; Pear, 1985). The result of justifying the Reagan administration's policies was that Christian-Right leaders stopped cultivating and springing their own issues, causing a once full agenda to wither.

This decline was symbolized by their focus on Oliver North in 1987, who was made the *cause celebre* because there was little else to advance. In the late-1980s, Christian-Right leaders grasped that problem, and began developing new agenda items. Many of those items focus on education: support for school choice and for forms of religious expression; opposition to university speech codes, "dirty" school textbooks, and federal agencies that dispense money to scholars, such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities (these issues are revisited soon).

Fourth, the Christian Right's current leaders frame issues better to attract support for their cause. In the early 1980s, they focused on the rhetoric of morality, spawning organizational titles like *Moral Majority* and the American Coalition for *Traditional Values*. They

***“Moral report cards” were issued to Congress—a key to a low “moral approval rating” was a vote for a Department of Education.***

---

issued “moral report cards” that rated members of Congress (one key to a low “moral approval rating” was a vote in favor of creating a Department of Education); they also offered issues with strong moral overtones, such as abortion, school prayer, and pornography. Jorstad (1981) described the moralism of the early Christian Right, arguing that it was the predominant theme. Over time, the rhetoric of moralism was replaced by the language of liberalism, with its emphasis on equality, freedom, and rights.

The most obvious manifestation was organizational titles like the American Freedom Coalition and the Family Research Council, names that were etymologically liberal or else relatively neutral. The more crucial development, however, was the recasting of issues.

Abortion became a civil rights issue that involved “the rights of the unborn” (Operation Rescue even mimicked the tactics of the civil rights movement); school prayer became a matter of children having “the right to pray”; student religious groups in public schools became a matter of “equal access,” or a matter of “religious apartheid” if they were to be excluded; school-textbook content became an issue of “parental rights” to monitor their children’s learning, as well as a “free speech” issue because of the suppression of religious references in textbooks.

Beyond those clever reformulations, Christian-Right leaders lashed out against “discrimination” and “bigotry” in the press, arguing that Pat Robertson (but not Jesse Jackson) was labeled by his religious beliefs in his run for the presidency. The increasing use of the language of liberalism means that the Christian Right is promoting its issues in the terms most Americans are accustomed to hearing; its use of invective places its opponents on the defensive.

Fifth and lastly, the Christian Right is more oriented toward the grassroots. At the outset, Christian-Right leaders focused on Capitol Hill. It was accessible to interest groups as a result of reforms in the 1970s (Rieselbach, 1986); it provided a perfect opportunity for fledgling groups to institutionalize themselves, through involvement in titanic legislative struggles; it was the only sensible option.

***What careless observers saw as  
the “fall of the Christian Right,”  
was really a calculated decision  
to build grassroots structures.***

---

The executive branch was in friendly hands with President Reagan, the judiciary was impervious to rapid change, and state and local avenues provided limited victories. After the “high-water” mark of the 98th Congress (1983-1984), however, Christian-Right leaders soon realized their future lay elsewhere. They needed to staff the bureaucracy, bring test cases before an increasingly conservative judiciary, and infiltrate the Republican Party.

What careless observers described as the “fall of the Christian Right,” was actually a calculated and prudent decision to build grassroots structures. (Those structures were to be quietly erected, in order to avoid the filter of an antagonistic media). All of the groups active in the late-1980s operated from the premise expressed by Pat Robertson’s deputy, Ralph Reed:

We believe that the Christian community in many ways missed the boat in the 1980s by focusing almost entirely on the White House and Congress when most of the issues that concern conservative Catholics and evangelicals are primarily determined in the city councils, school boards, and state legislatures . . . [we will organize] one precinct at a time, one neighborhood at a time, one state at a time. (“Robertson Groups Vows to Fight for Sectarian Sex Ed,” 1990).

The Christian Right’s presence in the Republican Party during the 1992 campaign was the natural result of that strategic reorientation.

At the risk of summarizing the matter too starkly, the early Christian Right consisted mostly of fundamentalists, who advanced an agenda on Capitol Hill that was squarely centered on issues of morality; the contemporary Christian Right consists predominantly of evangelicals, who organize in the grassroots and frame issues in the language of liberalism.

Accompanying those changes is a marked rise in the political sophistication of Christian-Right leaders, owing to the experience gained by a decade of political activism, as well as the replacement of

***The contemporary Christian Right consists predominantly of evangelicals, who frame issues in the language of liberalism.***

---

less politically astute people by those with proven skills and credentials. A sterling example is Gary Bauer, head of the Family Research Council, who used to be President Reagan's domestic policy advisor. His background is a far cry from the largely apolitical fundamentalist minister.

Those who fail to recognize the transformation of the Christian Right, and therefore do not differentiate between its early and later stages, make a serious mistake. They understate the challenge that the Christian Right is capable of presenting; they exhibit the lack of understanding that surfaced when the sexual escapades of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker were reported in 1987. Observers predicting devastation to the Christian Right back then missed the simple fact that those ministers were hardly involved with the movement. The happy, spirit-filled pentecostals who visited Jim Bakker's Heritage U.S.A. amusement park were a different clientele than the determined evangelicals who quietly organized to win the "culture war" (Hunter, 1991).

### **Rhetoric Revisited**

The transformed Christian Right presents a much more serious challenge to public education than its earlier counterpart. It is better-funded and more ably led; it is focused on the grassroots, where it is easier to bring effective pressure to bear on public officials (think about the effect of one letter to Capitol Hill, which gets 200 million pieces of mail annually, compared to that person's input into a school-board meeting or party caucus). The Christian Right also has developed new issues to fill the vacuum left by the passing of the Reagan administration and has learned to frame them in ways that maximize their appeal.

School choice probably tops the list of issues that seriously challenge education professionals. (Note the emphasis on "choice," the language of liberalism.) It would usher in sweeping changes in the way that America educates its children. Religious conservatives

***Religious conservatives push  
“choice” as a way of shoving chil-  
dren into private schools, and  
emasculating the effect of NEA.***

---

push it as a way of shoving children into private schools, and emasculating the effect of the National Education Association.

The concept of choice is inherently attractive to Americans, for whom it has become an entitlement (e.g., students should be allowed to avoid dissection while learning biology; careers should be open to all, even if it means dropping physical standards once deemed crucial). The attractiveness of choice combined with the egalitarian notion that everyone should be able to pick the school their children attend (not just the rich) creates an intriguing package.

Then too, school choice is pushed on a trial basis, making it harder to argue against. (What ogre will deprive little children of a chance to do better?) President Clinton may resist that path, but his record of experimentation in Arkansas and his decision to keep his daughter out of the Washington public schools makes him vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy.

Another issue that looms large is the extent of religious expression in the public schools. Religious conservatives have created organizations such as the National Legal Foundation, Christian Legal Society, and one arm of Concerned Women for America, whose specific purpose is to develop test cases (“Doing the Right Thing: Other Legal Aid Groups,” 1990).

These groups challenge the extirpation of religion from public schools—the prohibition against school prayer and the abolition of prayers at commencement and the celebration of religious holidays in wholly secular fashion.

The conservatives believe the future holds promise, however, since the Reagan and Bush administrations remade the federal judiciary and the Supreme Court struck a more accommodationist pose. The case upholding the constitutionality of the Equal Access act showed the Court’s new attitude (*Board of Education of the Westside Community Schools v. Mergens*, 1990). Since Christian-Right elites view religious expression in the schools as a barometer of the culture, they will continue to advance test cases.

A final issue that challenges educators is the content of school

***Since Christian Right elites view expression in the schools as a barometer of the culture, they will continue to advance test cases.***

---

textbooks. This issue has been around for some time, in the form of religious conservatives seeking to ban books with sexual overtones from the public school system. It has new impetus these days, however, as Christian-Right leaders have pressed their own claims of censorship against those who portray historical events in a largely secular context.

“Which is the greater evil,” they ask rhetorically, “to take books off the shelves (that contain sexual imagery), or to put books in the classroom that cast the Pilgrims as happy adventurers, rather than as religious believers escaping persecution?” Which is worse, to ban classics like George Orwell’s *1984* because of its sexual component, as religious conservatives seek, or to remove Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* because of its racist stereotypes, as minority groups seek?

An issue that was once confined is now expanded (Cobb and Elder, 1983). These particular controversies attract the attention of parents, because children bring the books in question into the home. Parents ask what the children are reading and who selects the books. The issue has an impact and immediacy that arcane legislative struggles on Capitol Hill do not.

In a different vein, issues that claimed attention in the past are now *passé*. The issue of prayer in schools was gutted by passage of Equal Access legislation, which Christian-Right leaders came to prefer because a serious Bible study after school seemed like a better idea than an eviscerated voluntary prayer at the start of the day. Tuition tax credits are also moot, killed by a federal budget deficit that does not permit a tax break for parents able to afford private schools for their children.

Finally, the issue of creationism is dead. It gained notoriety during the 1980s when Ronald Reagan publicly supported teaching creationism alongside evolution (“Religious Right Talks Politics,” 1980); it was manifested in a bill passed in Louisiana that required instruction in “creation-science.” The Supreme Court struck down that bill in *Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987), however, and Christian-Right leaders saw that creationism was among their least popular

***Their political evolution, so to speak, caused Christian Rights leaders to end seeking fights with Darwin outside of church.***

---

causes. Their political evolution, so to speak, caused them to end seeking fights with Darwin outside of church.

**Higher Ed Already Has ‘Choice’—K-12 the Real Focus**

The challenge the preacher presents to the teacher in the 1990s is not uniform across educational levels. The challenge to higher education is infinitesimal. Students demanding a conservative Christian environment during their matriculation will attend an Oral Roberts University or a Liberty University. The truest of the true believers are thus siphoned off.

Those left attending the public universities confront institutional missions that are understandably secular, faculty who are predominantly liberal, especially in the social sciences and humanities, and institutional norms that promote egalitarianism (Wildavsky, 1991). Students at public universities are probably as attuned to the importance of saying the gender-neutral “chairperson,” as they are cognizant of the Golden Rule.

The Christian Right’s challenge is also defused, because many issues that incite controversy at lower levels have less relevance with higher education. School choice already exists in higher education, with students able to attend any institution in the nation that they can get admitted into and afford. Likewise, religious expression is tacitly encouraged by a general climate of free expression. Itinerant preachers proselytize on campuses and Gideons dispense copies of the New Testament. Finally, the content of textbooks is a non-issue. Those focused on that issue concern themselves with impressionable schoolchildren, not college students. Campus libraries and bookstores have treatises promoting every conceivable viewpoint.

The Christian Right challenges higher education, but not in any sustained or successful way. Its leaders complain about the phenomenon of “politically correct” speech, for instance, but that issue is driven more by defenders of the First Amendment, such as the

***The impact on higher ed has been restricted to the spillover effect of bad publicity and the “chilling effect” on proposed projects.***

---

American Civil Liberties Union than by the Christian Right.

Its top leaders also decry the goods produced by scholars from grants bestowed by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Many of the projects coming under fire in recent years, however, such as “Piss Christ” supported by the NEA, were produced by free-lance artists, rather than university employees. The impact on higher education has been largely restricted to the spillover effect of bad publicity and the “chilling effect” on proposed projects (Burd, 1992). Those are real but ephemeral concerns. Moreover, in spite of all the hoopla surrounding the NEA, Congress cut its budget a total of .0003 of 1 percent in 1989, when the controversy surfaced. It reduced a \$144.5 million budget by \$45,000—the amount equal to the two grants that created the most controversy.

Recent developments portend an end to those struggles. The reauthorization of the NEA in 1990 for three years, and the early resignation of Lynne Cheney as head of NEH, decreases the salience of those agencies. Moreover, the Clinton administration is less likely to kowtow to religious conservatives, as the Bush administration did. (Bush fired John Frohnmayer, head of the NEA, as a sop to conservatives during his intraparty struggle with Pat Buchanan).

Christian-Right leaders may well scour the countryside looking for offensive projects in order to whip up the faithful and raise money, but they will be unable to sustain attention even if they find one. People who see a grave threat to higher education from the Christian Right are crying “wolf” in the presence of a bunny.

That is not the case for those involved in primary and secondary education, however, who face a Christian Right that is well-positioned and determined to prevail. The combination of factors cited—a grassroots emphasis, a more sophisticated way to frame issues, better set of leaders, solid financial base, and full political agenda—means a protracted struggle in school districts all across the country.

In 1992, Christian-Right forces effectively organized support for

their invisible “stealth candidates” in school board, city council, and state legislative elections. They won an estimated 40 percent of the 500 races they contested (Mydans, 1992). That figure signals the changes afoot, and provides a perspective on the challenge the Christian Right presents in state and local arenas.

Hard to document, but an important dimension to the struggle is the sense of patience now instilled in Christian Right followers. In the early 1980s, a newly formed political movement burst onto the national scene and demanded immediate and extensive action. Its uneven record of success caused many to drop out. For those who stayed and those who joined the ranks in later years, though, a sense of realism was inculcated about the prospects and pace of change. Those now in the trenches will not retreat from the cultural war.

The struggle between the preacher and the teacher will wax and wane and be unevenly manifested across the country. It will not soon cease, however, because each side is well-equipped and determined to prevail. Bill Billings, of the National Christian Action Coalition, once said that his people were ready to “charge hell with a squirt gun” (Sweeney, 1980). They have since upgraded their weaponry, and are prepared to douse an incendiary “education establishment.”

## References

- Adorno, T., Frenkel-Brunskik, W., Levinson, D., & Sanford, R. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York: Harper.
- Bruce, S. (1988). *The rise and fall of the new Christian Right*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burd, S. (1992, April 22). Chairman of humanities fund has politicized grants process, critics charge. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1.
- Christian Right equated with Iran's Mullahs. (1980, September 24). *Washington Star*, 4.
- Cobb, R. W. & Elder, C.E. (1983). 2d ed. *Participation in American politics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Cowell, A. (1985, August 20). Botha sees South African churchmen and Falwell. *New York Times*, 6.
- D'Antonio, M. (1990, February 4). Fierce in the '80s, fallen in the '90s: The religious right forgets politics. *Los Angeles Times*, M3.
- Doing the right thing: Other legal aid groups. (1990, May). *Church & State*, 11.
- Hadden, J.K. & Swann, C.E. (1981). *Prime time preachers: The rising power of televangelism*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Hertzke, A.D. (1993). *Echoes of discontent: Jesse Jackson, Pat Robertson, and the resurgence of populism*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Hoffman, T.J. & Rigney, D. (1992, September). Is American Catholicism anti-intellectual? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois.

- Hunter, J.D. (1991). *Culture wars*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Jelen, T. (1991). *The political mobilization of religious beliefs*. New York: Praeger.
- Jorstad, E. (1981). *The politics of moralism*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.
- Judis, J.B. (1989, March 27). Rev. Moon's rising political influence. *U.S. News & World Report*, 27.
- Lipset, S.M. & Rabb, E. (1970). *The politics of unreason*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Miller, M. (1987, November 16). Goodbye to all that. *Newsweek*, 10.
- Moen, M.C. (1992). *The transformation of the Christian Right*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- . (1989). *The Christian Right and congress*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Morgan, R.E. (1984). *Disabling America: The 'rights industry' in our time*. New York: Basic Books.
- Mydans, S. (1992, November 21). Quietly, Christian conservatives win hundreds of local elections. *New York Times*, 1.
- Pear, R. (1985, August 22). Falwell denounces Tutu as phony. *New York Times*, 10.
- Religious right talks politics. (1980, September 3). *Guardian*, 4.
- Rieselbach, L. (1986). *Congressional reform*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Robertson goup vows to fight for sectarian sex ed. (1990, June). *Church & State*, 14.
- Schlafly, P. (1992, November 1). Whistleblowing on social engineers. *Washington Times*, B4.
- Sweeney, J. (1980, May 19). Evangelicals seeking to establish political force. *Los Angeles Times*, 1.
- Tocqueville, A. D. (1848). *Democracy in America*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co. (Reprint, 1969).
- Vecsey, G. (1980, January 21). Militant television preachers try to weld fundamentalist Christian's political power. *New York Times*, 21.
- Wilcox, C. (1992). *God's warriors*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . (1986). Evangelicals and fundamentalists in the new Christian Right. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 25, 355-363.
- Wildavsky, A. (1991). *The rise of radical egalitarianism*. Washington: American University Press.