Chapter 1

Introduction

This is a book about the character and capacity of the Christian Right at the end of the twentieth century. Its successful mobilization has been decades in the making, has been the result of astute planning by movement leaders and the commitment of tens of thousands of adherents, who draw strength largely from sources outside the formal halls of power. The Christian Right remains among the most powerful, active forces in U.S. politics today, partly because the movement delivers votes to the Republican Party. But the Christian Right is much more than an electoral faction.

It is a political movement rooted in a rich evangelical subculture, one that offers participants both the means and the motivation to try to take dominion over secular society. The means include a phenomenal number of religious broadcast stations, publishing houses, churches, and grassroots lobbies. The motivation is to preach the Gospel and to save souls, but also, with equal urgency, to remake contemporary moral culture in the image of Christian Scripture. On the front lines of our persisting battle over what kind of society we are and will become, the Christian Right wages political conflict not just through the ballot box but also through the movement's very own cultural institutions.

One of these is Focus on the Family, the syndicated radio ministry headed by child psychologist Dr. James Dobson. In January 1990 Dobson's Focus on the Family published a special issue of its *Citizen* magazine, proclaiming that the 1990s would become "the Civil War Decade." Dobson made this announcement at a time when the political lens in the United States was shifting toward a near exclusive focus on domestic policy matters. The end of the United States' obsession with communism coincided with the growth and entrenchment of the Christian Right as a permanent fixture within the policymaking arena. Starting in the late 1980s, the move-

ment began to direct its energies toward state and local politics and not just toward the affairs of Congress.

Comparing our times to the turbulent decade leading up to the Civil War over slavery, Dr. Dobson's *Citizen* magazine identified brewing controversies over homosexual rights, abortion, and public education as the terrain on which Christians would be called to "serve as foot soldiers" in what Focus described as a new Civil War of values. *Citizen* heralded a second wave of Christian Right activism, not headed by big names like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, but led by a fresh crop of energetic leaders active mostly at the local level. The big, centralized organizations such as Concerned Women for America and the National Right to Life Committee would still provide training and leadership, but the new wave of activism would encourage the growth of grassroots talent.[1]

The new breed of activists would not carry the stigma of the 1980s preacher scandals, nor would they be dependent on the prerogatives of established national organizations. Instead, they would face new challenges, some of which were outlined by Thomas Atwood who wrote, also in 1990, for the Heritage Foundation's influential *Policy Review* magazine. At the time, Atwood was a Virginia Republican Party activist who had helped organize Pat Robertson's 1988 presidential race and who had since grown sharply critical of the Christian Right's tendency to ignore "basic rules of politics, such as respect for opposing views, an emphasis on coalition-building and compromise, and careful rhetoric." Instead, Atwood wrote, by overestimating their own strength, conservative evangelicals "often came across as authoritarian, intolerant, and boastful, even to natural constituents." Atwood urged fellow evangelical Christians to tone down their inflammatory and apocalyptic rhetoric; to stop calling for "spiritual warfare" against everyone and everything they opposed; and to start building alliances, particularly with black evangelicals and political moderates sympathetic toward one or more pieces of the Christian Right's agenda.[2]

Several years later, though, the Christian Right's warfare rhetoric was no less strident. A writer for the conservative magazine *Christianity Today* singled out James Dobson and Focus on the Family as leading promoters of a warfare mentality among fellow evangelicals. The writer suggested that it was unchristian and counterproductive to the family values agenda[3] to mix political advocacy with metaphors of violence.[4] Dobson responded in a guest editorial for *Christianity Today* with a lengthy defense of his "spiritual warfare" rhetoric. Not only is it traditional for Christians to sing such hymns as "Onward Christian Soldiers," Dobson wrote, but the warfare terminology is an accurate description of the conflict in which Christian Right activists are engaged. "The heated dispute over values in Western nations is simply a continuation of the age-old struggle between the principles of righteousness and the kingdom of darkness," Dobson noted. "Thus when we

oppose hardcore and violent pornography, the killing of unborn babies, the provision of immoral advice to teenagers, the threat of euthanasia, and so on, we are engaged in a battle—not primarily with our philosophical opponents—but against Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:9).5

In justifying his own rhetoric, Dobson reveals the essence of the Christian Right's collective mindset. The strength and longevity of the Christian Right, which is the subject of this book, is best understood as a series of efforts by a religiously inspired political force to make the rest of society conform to its ideas of correct belief and behavior. More than a conflict over this or that policy matter, the movement is about protecting guarded notions of what it means to be a good family member and a good citizen in God's Kingdom. For believers, it is about winning an eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil—if not this year, then maybe the next; if not through the ballot box, then by other means.

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The 1990s have yielded mixed results in the Christian Right's Civil War for family values. There have been few unmitigated victories, but neither have the movement's many setbacks proven fatal. In 1994, the leading Christian Right organizations helped elect a Republican Congressional majority for the first time in four decades. That victory, however, translated into few immediate legislative gains, and by 1996 the reelection of President Clinton relegated the likes of House Speaker Newt Gingrich to diminishing influence. For the Christian Right, Republican Party politics has proven time and again to be a double-edged sword.

For the movement, it has been imperative to court power within one of the established parties; otherwise nothing of legislative substance can be accomplished. For the Republican Party, the Christian Right represents a uniquely large and reliable voting bloc, one that cannot be ignored lest the Republicans forfeit majority party status. Electoral politics is about numbers. Yet the numbers game, in a system controlled by two ideologically similar parties, tends to push each side to moderate its rhetoric and agenda. The winner is whichever party appears the least objectionable to the fraction of eligible votes willing to participate. Therein lies the conundrum for the Christian Right–Republican Party alliance. On some issues and in some races at the local and state levels, the party cannot win without the movement, which conducts useful voter mobilization campaigns. At the national level, however, the movement has become a public relations liability. Voting majorities in presidential and many Congressional races reject the movement's agenda, especially on abortion.

In 1996, the party tried to paper over its rocky relationship with the movement. During the primaries some movement leaders favored Senator

Robert Dole as the best hope for defeating Clinton. But Dole epitomized the professional politician's tendency to hedge on controversial issues such as abortion. As a result, Patrick Buchanan repeated his 1992 performance as a standard-bearer for the grassroots activist Right. Buchanan's strong showings in the primaries helped to galvanize the party's prolifers, who organized to ensure their dominance among delegates to the Republican Party convention in San Diego. There the prolife delegate majority forced Dole to abandon talk of removing the antiabortion plank in the party platform, and thus the Christian Right declared victory on that score. For mass-media consumption, the movement was denied representation in the lineup of televised convention speakers. But Dole's selection of prolife running mate Jack Kemp was, in part, an appeal to evangelical voters.

In the end, Republican jockeying over abortion probably had a negligible effect on the 1996 election. The general electorate was neither enthusiastic about nor particularly dissatisfied with the incumbent Clinton administration. Dole's lackluster campaign gave conservative Christians nothing to cheer about, but most of them voted Republican anyway. One postelection survey showed that, against the backdrop of generally low voter turnout, about 29% of those who did vote in 1996 were self-identified born-again Christians who frequently attend church.[6] Another exit poll indicated that white, self-identified constituents of the Christian Right represented 17% of all voters. Among this 17% bloc, 65% voted for Dole and 26% for Clinton,[7] meaning that Dole would have fared far worse without loyal Christian Right voters. Ralph Reed was widely quoted in the press, to the effect that a Republican Congress would not have been reelected for the first time in sixty-eight years without the Christian Right bloc. "Conservative evangelicals were the firewall that prevented a Bob Dole defeat from mushrooming into a meltdown all the way down the ballot," Reed said, in a heated reminder to Republicans who survived the 1996 Democratic victory.

Other Christian Right leaders were less eager than Reed to put a happy spin on the 1996 election results. Reed's own boss Pat Robertson took to the microphones of his *700 Club* TV show and called 1996 "the second consecutive time where a Republican candidate for president lost the election because he muted the social issues in favor of money issues."[8] In an interview with the *New York Times*, Robertson warned that in the year 2000 the Christian Right would play a more proactive role in selecting a Republican nominee. "We're not going to sit by as good soldiers and take whatever is given us," Robertson said. "We were not consulted on this campaign. We were peripheral."[9]

Just how peripheral the Christian Right is to the political process is a matter of one's perspective. Pat Robertson, James Dobson, and his associate Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council all lamented their "periph-

eral" status even while the Republican Party had no choice but to cater to its most conservative, antiabortion wing. Much of this book is about how people within the Christian Right view themselves as outsiders even as they wield political strength disproportionate to their numbers. The perception among evangelicals that they are underdogs, ignored if not abused by the establishment, is part of a mindset that keeps activists from becoming complacent. In order to explain the enduring influence of the Christian Right, this book looks from various angles at the ways in which social movement actors define their own roles on the political stage—and how they then act accordingly.

This book traces the recent political history of the Christian Right. But while looking at this movement's ideology and its most successful organizational vehicles, one inevitably concludes that politics reaches far beyond the polling station. When political activists think of themselves as peripheral—even if they are not—what sustains their long-term commitment is nothing short of faith: in each other, in a worldview or lifestyle set apart from the dominant culture, and in a collective power to reshape society. While this book is a case study of the Christian Right, it is also an exploration of some of the ways in which politics and culture converge.

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Over the past two decades, social movements scholarship has proliferated. Today it is one of the most vital fields within the social sciences because the extent and nature of social change is, naturally, determined by the ways in which specific groups of people act in concert. Amid the many insightful theories and empirical case studies of social movements, my own approach is aligned with a theoretical perspective that emphasizes three sets of factors. These are (1) the political opportunities afforded by both long-term trends and short-term features of the prevailing political–economic system; (2) the effectiveness of all the organizations and informal networks through which social movements mobilize and sustain activism; and (3) the ways in which groups interpret the meaning of their grievances and their possibilities for action, all toward the end of continually readjusting their strategies. In the jargon of social movements theorists, the shorthand names for these three sets of factors are *political opportunities*, *mobilizing structures*, and *framing processes*.[10]

Political opportunities refers to the variable ways in which social hierarchies are constructed between one society and the next, as well as to the inevitability of change over time. Political opportunities can include everything from long- and short-term economic trends to policy controversies to realignments within and between the two parties. *Mobilizing structures* are organizations with physical offices and a stated agenda, for example, the

Christian Coalition. Theorists of social movements also include under the rubric of mobilizing structures the many informal networks of friends, coworkers, and parishioners who act collectively. Social movements researchers want to know what kinds of organizational resources a movement has at its disposal. How do organizations inform their constituents and channel their grievances into action? What forms does the action take? How do outside forces influence the development of movement organizations? Is a movement able to plug into one of the leading parties? Does the movement face legal obstacles such as bans on some forms of protest? All of these questions are relevant to the study of the Christian Right which, compared to other modern social movements in the United States, has been highly successful in building numerous types of organizations, from church networks to religious media outlets to think tanks, law firms, lobbies, and voter education drives. In addressing the questions of how and why the Christian Right has become such an influential social movement, this book focuses to a large extent on movement organizations.

While they pressure policymakers, organizations are also key sites for the *framing processes* of interest to social movements scholars. *Framing* is about how members or supporters of a movement conceptualize the grievances they hope to rectify through strategies they consider feasible. Lacking shared grievances or a sense of efficacy, people are unlikely to organize for action even if the political context is advantageous. *Framing* is a *process* because over time movement participants, through trial and error and shifting responses from opponents, change their ideas about what needs to be done and what can be done.

The concept of framing suggests that people organized in social movements have grievances, and therefore they must be *opposed* to the prevailing political system and/or cultural norms of their society. One leading theorist defines social movements in terms of *insurgent realities* as "collective challenges to mainstream conceptions of how society ought to be organized and how people ought to live."[11] This definition is problematic. If applied to the Christian Right, it captures those parts of the movement's ideology at odds with whatever the social scientist chooses to define as "mainstream." But the conception of social movements as insurgencies or challenges to the status quo precludes one from seeing when, how, and to what extent some movements act as bulwarks against social change. In a previous book, *Roads to Dominion*, I relied on the recent history of the U.S. Right to document and analyze the ways in which right-wing social movements function, often simultaneously, as both opponents and supporters of political elites, and more generally of the reigning system.

In *Roads to Dominion* I asserted that movements of the Right are partially *oppositional* and partially what I called *system-supportive*. To be characteristically "right-wing" is to endorse some government functions and poli-

cies and to oppose others. Typically, the Right favors a strong government role as *enforcer* of order at home and abroad, by means of religiously inspired codes of conduct, police power, and the military. The Right usually opposes the government in its role as *distributor* of wealth, power, and legal rights more equitably throughout society. There are exceptions to these general patterns. But more often than not, the Christian Right, in particular, favors government policies that would enforce traditional norms of sexual behavior and traditional hierarchical relations between men and women, parents and children. The Christian Right opposes action by government agencies that would extend civil rights protections to homosexuals or that would (seemingly) usurp parental rights. Activists in the antiabortion movement know that women have abortions even where they are illegal; the political struggle is about whether government should or should not *enforce* the religious belief that abortion is murder.

These are just a few examples. The point is that the Christian Right is not, contrary to the epithets used by many of the movement's critics, a "radical" force intent on a thorough overhaul of society. This is a social movement focused fairly narrowly on questions of proper family structure and "moral," that is, sexual behavior. Since the 1980s, when leaders of the Christian Right worked with the Reagan administration to support anticommunist paramilitary groups around the globe, there has been little movement focus on international affairs. (Some Christian Right groups, in the late 1990s, have protested the United States' rapprochement with China for its violations of religious liberty.) With the important exception of Patrick Buchanan, leaders of the Christian Right have had little to say about the increasing globalization of the capitalist economy, nor about the growing disparities between rich and poor. Unlike movements of the Right, a truly radical social movement is one that works to eradicate inequality and injustice. More often than not, the Right treats poverty not as a matter of systemic injustice but as a result of the bad luck and/or bad behavior of individuals and groups who lack proper values.

Were the Christian Right to achieve its wish list of policy goals, things would certainly be different. For starters, abortion would be illegal. Homosexuals would be, if not invisible, then certainly unprotected from all types of discrimination. Children would pray in the schools, which would be run privately or by local school districts, with no government-mandated curricula. The entertainment media would voluntarily eliminate profanity from the airwaves and movie scripts. The range of ideas and images accessible in bookstores, libraries, magazines, and art exhibits would be sharply curtailed.

The agenda of the Christian Right is severe but it is not radical. It is about halting or rolling back social change, not about forging ahead. Moreover, many of the Christian Right's preoccupations are in sync with

what outside observers might call the "mainstream." Who in society is fully comfortable with the rapid pace of social and technological changes, with high rates of divorce and illiteracy, with not knowing one's neighbors or knowing what the future will bring?

The "Ozzie and Harriet" type of family was never as prevalent in real life as it was on television in the 1950s.[12] But the family values theme resonates as a nostalgic wish for a return to a time that seemed simpler. Rather than accept a new, wider range of family arrangements and gender roles, the Christian Right has entrenched itself for a fight to preserve an idyllic past. What distinguishes people in the Christian Right from the rest of us is their selection of designated culprits to blame for their insecurity about social and familial change. It must be the fault of the feminists, the sex educators, the gay rights marchers, the liberal politicians. These are ready-made targets, and it is expedient to organize against enemies that seem powerful. Pat Robertson and others like him can tell their audiences that they are "peripheral" even while the Republican wing of the political establishment welcomes the votes and enthusiasm of people who act as if they are under siege.

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By framing themselves as underdogs, and by rationalizing their agenda as a defensive response, activists in the Christian Right have built the kind of formidable organizations suited to existing political opportunities. Working effectively within the confines of the two-party electoral system, the movement has made itself central, not peripheral, to the politics and culture of the United States.

In the middle of the 1996 campaign season, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press released a study that found that conservative, white, evangelical Protestants are "the most powerful religious force in politics today," representing 24% of registered voters, up from 19% in 1987.[13] But, the Pew study also found that only about 7% of the public consider themselves members of the "religious right."[14] This data is roughly consistent with a 1994 *New York Times*–CBS News survey that found about 9% of the public identifying themselves as part of the "religious right."[15] No doubt, among the 7–9% who claim an affiliation with the Christian Right, a much smaller percentage is continuously active between election cycles. But what makes the Christian Right such a potent political force is not just the numbers of supporters or hard-core activists. It is the availability of a consistently large segment of the population ready to vote as a bloc around salient profamily issues. The Pew study found that, regardless of denomination, the more committed evangelicals are to their religion, the more likely they are to be politically conservative.[16] Thus, it is

the strength of evangelicalism as a cultural phenomenon that gives the Christian Right an enduring base of political support.

In general, religion offers people emotional sustenance and social ties, thus making them capable of doing activist work. In this book, I use the terms *born-again* and *evangelical* interchangeably, though they have slightly different connotations. The term *born-again* refers to the millions of Americans who say that they have had a conversion experience in which they made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. To be an *evangelical* implies a more profound, ongoing relationship to the faith. Evangelicals may be either conservative or liberal in their politics or theology. In general, evangelicals are Christians, Catholic as well as Protestant, who have had a born-again experience. They believe the Bible is the accurate, inspired word of God, and they also believe that the only way to salvation is through belief in Christ's divinity and resurrection. Evangelicals believe they are required to share their faith with nonbelievers in an effort to win new converts to Christ.[17] The evangelical tradition of proselytizing makes it especially compatible with political activism. Evangelicals are encouraged to put aside their shyness when approaching newcomers with controversial ideas, and the missionary mindset encourages an attitude of tenacity in waiting for the fruits of one's labor to pay off.

Since the late 1970s, the Gallup Poll organization has publicized surveys showing that between one-fifth and about one-third of adult Americans identify themselves as born-again Christians.[18] Gallup's surveys ask people simply: "Would you describe yourself as a `born-again' or evangelical Christian?" In a 1993 sample, 42% said yes,[19] but that response reveals nothing about the degree of commitment people have, let alone how religion correlates with politics.

George Barna, an evangelical who directs his own reputable polling firm, conducts surveys that are a bit more revealing. In a compilation of survey data on religion for his 1996 book *The Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators*, Barna found that two out of three, or 66%, of American adults say that they have made a "personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today," up from 60% in the 1980s. Barna found that smaller numbers of respondents go beyond simply viewing themselves as Christians. Forty-one percent say they are "absolutely committed" to Christianity. About one-quarter say they are "always" mindful of being Christ's representatives.[20] Church attendance rates have fluctuated between 42 and 49% over the past decade. On average, Barna found, about one-third of the public attends church every week; about one-third attends one to three times a month; and about one-third attends rarely or never.[21] Evangelicals interpret these numbers pessimistically, as evidence of low church participation.[22] But at a time when society is supposedly becoming more secular, these figures indicate that church attendance is surprisingly widespread and stable.

Numbers, however, do not begin to tell the story of the changing landscape of evangelicalism. Mark Shibley, a sociologist of religion, was intrigued by data showing that between 1971 and 1990 evangelical churches added more than 6 million new members while the so-called mainline moderate and liberal Protestant churches lost about 2.6 million members. In the western region of the United States, evangelical churches have grown at a rate greater than in the traditional southern Bible Belt.[23] Shibley wondered whether the spread of evangelical churches had to do with migrations of people out of the South. But, he found the migration of southerners to be only one factor when he studied the spread of denominational and nondenominational evangelical churches in the Midwest and on the West Coast. The evangelical churches experiencing the greatest growth are those, such as the Vineyard Christian Fellowship and Calvary Chapel, that began in southern California during the 1970s Jesus movement, and that deviate noticeably from traditional southern evangelical churches. Shibley found that Vineyard, Calvary, and other evangelical churches that are growing and thriving are those that best adapt to contemporary non–southern culture. Successful evangelical churches are more likely to have worship services with popular rock music and casual dress codes, and ministries catering to youth, singles, newlyweds, and people with specific hobbies. Shibley concludes that successful evangelical churches "are growing because they have found ways to meet the existential needs of modern individuals better than other churches, not because they are `strict'; they grow by becoming more like the culture, not less."[24]

Sociologists of religion want to know why some religious institutions thrive while others flounder. The answer has to do with how well churches adapt to their surrounding culture and how well churches meet people's needs: for spiritual expression, but also for friendship and advice.

This book is about the Christian Right and not about evangelicalism in general. But to understand the endurance of the Christian Right, one must consider the essential role of the evangelical subculture. Shibley found no direct correlation between participation in an evangelical church and participation in conservative politics. Nor is it my contention that evangelicalism leads people invariably to get involved with the Christian Right. I do conclude that a social movement is successful, in part, to the extent that it meets people's personal and social needs. The culture of evangelicalism encourages people to take political action, should they choose to. They are more likely to choose to do so if they know people who are active and if they can take action in ways that are religiously comfortable: for example, by handing out voter guides at church or by calling Congress after hearing something on a Christian radio station.

For most people, political action begins and ends with voting, but I define the realm of the *political* very broadly. To the extent that one's religion

keeps one content with the status quo, that is a political process, too. For the Christian Right, the range of political preoccupations derives from a biblical view of proper social order. The movement targets abortion, gay rights, and sex education in the public schools because these are the concerns raised by the religious milieu of evangelicalism. The movement establishes an agenda to which politicians and the rest of secular society must then respond. The agenda is set by the evangelical subculture, which thrives through an array of institutions that may not, on the surface, seem political. These include Christian broadcasting, literature and music, Promise Keepers rallies, and the practice of homeschooling. In this book, I use a broad brush in dealing with the evangelical cultural milieu, but not by any means because all evangelicals are part of the Christian Right—they are not. I focus on the evangelical subculture because it is like a big ocean in which the Christian Right's activist fish swim—and spawn.

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When one speaks publicly about the Christian Right, there are two kinds of questions that usually come up, and this book purports to answer neither. The first goes something like this: "Aren't people in the Christian Right psychologically disturbed? Don't they have authoritarian personalities, wanting to control everyone, perhaps because of the way they were raised?" To this question, I always answer that I have met people in the Christian Right with all sorts of personalities. As human beings, most seem reasonable, regardless of my own disagreements with their politics. I reject the idea of explaining political ideology and activism through some form of psychoanalysis. I assume that people join social movements because they share with fellow members a collective set of goals, be they political or religious, and because the organized activities within that movement provide people with some sense of satisfaction. Otherwise, they would go do something else. In this book, I do not speculate on the individual psychological reasons why individuals are drawn to the Christian Right.

Nor do I deal with the second frequently asked question about the Christian Right: "Where do they get their money?" This is an important question because it is directly relevant to the success of any social movement. I mention, in passing, the budgets of various organizations. Well-heeled outfits such as the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, and Promise Keepers wield influence consistent with their large coffers. But it is not because of *particular* large donors that these organizations are successful. The question "Where do they get their money?" implies that if we somehow learn which corporate foundation or wealthy individual gives *X* amount of money to groups *Y* and *Z*, that such information will explain the success of groups *Y* and *Z*. I do not share this view. I assume that

wealthy individuals and corporations—the names and faces are interchangeable—will donate to politically like-minded groups. It is no great surprise that rich people finance institutions that will preserve the status quo. Yet the centrist watchdog groups opposed to the Christian Right play a game of "exposing" the names of the Right's rich donors as if that somehow explains the success of a social movement. It does not. Groups such as People for the American Way, the Planned Parenthood Federation, and similar outfits are also sustained by large donors. This is why the centrist opponents of the Christian Right do not critique the existing political–economic system, but instead try to portray their right-wing enemies as subversive threats to "democracy." In point of fact, the centrists and the conservatives agree in their overall endorsement of the capitalist economy and state. They differ principally on social policy.

Where the Christian Right differs both from centrist lobbies such as People for the American Way and Planned Parenthood, and from elite right-wing institutions such as the Heritage Foundation, is in the role of large numbers of rank-and-file donors. Typically, centrist and liberal critics do not like to highlight the fact that Christian Right organizations enjoy genuinely large constituencies. For its financial well-being, the Christian Right relies on modest donations from hundreds of thousands of people. Typically, the amount of money required to receive a movement publication, and be counted as a member of an organization, is in the neighborhood of $20 to $30 a year. This is true for the Christian Coalition, Concerned Women for America, Focus on the Family, the National Right to Life Committee, and many other groups. Apart from the Christian Coalition's inflated claims that it has nearly two million members, it is true that several hundred thousand people subscribe to the Coalition's bimonthly magazine. Beyond a minimum of $20 a year, no doubt many of these same Coalition members respond to additional direct mail appeals throughout the year. I have been on the membership rosters of many Christian Right organizations, at a cost of several hundred dollars per year—a modest amount from a middle-class person with a commitment to a cause. Who funds the Christian Right? Mostly the money comes from hundreds of thousands of average people who pay dues, buy subscriptions, and respond to fundraising letters.

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Before previewing the chapters that follow, I wish to make an additional caveat. When one writes in the present tense, as I do in this book, one risks the possibility of early obsolescence. The names of organizations and social movement leaders change quicker than an author would like. Yet what is most salient about the Christian Right is its longevity and adapt-

ability. While I was writing this book, Ralph Reed announced his plan to resign as executive director of the Christian Coalition and start his own consulting firm. No doubt, other personalities named in this book will also change jobs. This book names numerous activists and organizations because they are the lifeblood of a social movement.

As I wrote in my first book, *Spiritual Warfare*, published in 1989, religious broadcasting has been the single most important ingredient in the rise of the Christian Right. Since the years immediately after World War II, the industry has grown up in tandem with the spread of politically engaged evangelicalism. In Chapter 2, I highlight the evolution of Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network and Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family, the two giants in television and radio, respectively. Robertson and Dobson are preachers, shrewd businessmen, good performers, and political catalysts, all at the same time. I attribute the success of their programs to a careful blend of personal and political content. With religious broadcasting in general, it is the scope and variety of the programming that makes the medium a useful political asset. When people are inspired and entertained, also become receptive to political messages.

In previous writings, I have focused solely on the news and public affairs content of religious broadcasting. In this book, I devote a chapter to what might more properly be thought of as entertainment media. Extending my point that inspiration and enjoyment facilitate political awareness and action, in Chapter 3 I address the political undercurrents found in popular evangelical fiction, magazines, and music. My point is not that one's consumption of cultural products forms one's ideology in any kind of inevitable way. However, I do think that moral precepts and images embedded in cultural artifacts help to reinforce one's political tendencies. If we want to know why people in the Christian Right think as they do, we need to look at the ideas that circulate in the population of the Christian Right.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal explicitly with politics. Readers well versed in the history of the Christian Right may choose to skip the first half of Chapter 4, which is a summary of the movement's development through the end of the 1980s. Also, in Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss different aspects of the Christian Coalition. First, in Chapter 4, I show how the organization has justified some of its tactics by deploying the notion that Christians are "persecuted" by secular society. This theme has been useful, too, in the establishment of a number of Christian Right legal firms, which I deal with also in Chapter 4. In the future, we can expect that the movement will fight its policy battles in the courts as well as through elections.

My intention, in both Chapters 4 and 5, is to show how the movement continually shifts its strategies in response to new political opportunities and obstacles. Chapter 5 is about electoral politics in the 1990s, including the 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns of Patrick Buchanan.

In neither race was the Christian Right the sole source of support for Buchanan. But in both campaigns, and during the intervening years, movement leaders had to figure out how to make themselves indispensable to the Republican Party without, at the same time, compromising to the point of alienating grassroots constituents. Ralph Reed was central in this interplay, with the effect of solidifying Christian Right influence at the 1996 Republican Party convention and beyond. Before Reed left the helm of the Christian Coalition in 1997, he tried to steer the organization toward a new focus on issues of urban poverty, which was consistent with other efforts by Christian Right leaders to network across racial lines. Given that supporters of the Christian Right are driven mostly by concerns about "immorality" and threats to the traditional family, it remains to be seen how far the movement's newfound interest in poor people might go.

Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 are a unit of sorts. They all deal squarely with issues that fall under the *family values* rubric. "Family values" is like a Rorschach inkblot test: one can project onto it just about any notion of what makes a good family. But for the Christian Right, *family values* means some specific things, particularly about relations between parents and children, husbands and wives. In Chapter 6, I discuss the movement's concept of *parental rights*, which is now taking shape in proposed legislation at the state and federal levels. Local battles over public school curricula, which I reserve for Chapter 9, can best be understood as a drive by conservative Christian parents to assert the primacy of their legal rights as parents, in the face of perceived encroachments by the secular state. Purported threats take many forms: from sex education programs to young people's access to "obscene" library books, to the power of social service agencies to intervene on behalf of abused children. The parental rights project is about reestablishing traditional family hierarchy. Similarly, some Christian Right leaders want to add to their social policy agenda an effort to make divorce more cumbersome. Here the movement has a hard row to hoe. Divorce is widespread among the general public, among politicians, and among evangelicals themselves. It is unlikely that the Christian Right will succeed in restoring old stigmas to the practice of divorce. However, internally, within the movement, rhetorical attacks on divorce are part of a discourse about strengthening traditional male and female gender roles. Even while many of the Christian Right's best leaders are women, the evangelical subculture perpetuates the view that wives must be "submissive" to their husbands. This tenet underlies the Christian Right's persistent condemnations of organized feminism. In the long run, though, antifeminism is a losing battle, as I discuss in Chapter 11 in connection with the Promise Keepers men's movement.

Some observers see antiabortion sentiment as a direct outgrowth of the

Christian Right's hostility to feminism. I prefer to see opposition to abortion and to feminism as two separate, though not contradictory, pieces of the family values ideological package. I take it at face value that people oppose abortion because they believe it is a form of murder. If one truly considers abortion to be murder, then it is incumbent upon one to take action accordingly. The antiabortion movement functions as a submovement of the larger Christian Right, though there are many Catholic antiabortion activists who do not find common cause with the Right on other matters. In Chapter 7, I detail the politics of the antiabortion movement: the ways in which it has become both influential within and dependent on electoral politics. I devote much of the chapter to an analysis of how the direct-action wing of the antiabortion movement has evolved since the 1980s, from the onset of Operation Rescue to the development of a small faction that espouses the killing of abortion doctors. I also look at how the antiabortion movement casts women as "victims" of abortion in need of "rescue" through various forms of counseling.

Part of what I call the "antigay agenda" is about counseling gays and lesbians out of their so-called lifestyle. There is nothing innocuous about this seemingly low-key form of antigay organizing; it perpetuates stereotypes and stigma and may cause lasting psychological damage to its clients. It is the soft side of an agenda intended to prevent the extension of civil rights laws to homosexuals. Opponents of gay rights want to preserve the right to discriminate against gay people, particularly in the workplace and in the housing market, but really wherever gay people are publicly present. In recent years, the Christian Right has sponsored a series of anti–gay rights ballot measures in several states. The results at the polls were mixed, but that is now a moot point, as the Supreme Court in 1996 ruled such ballot measures unconstitutional. Since then the focus has shifted to the realm of legal recognition of same-sex marriages. Conflict on this front promises to be protracted. In the mean time, though, Christian Right campaigns against gay rights go hand in hand with the circulation of virulent antigay propaganda. Throughout Chapter 8 I pay attention to the ways in which propaganda about gay people as diseased and excessively powerful gives rise to the notion of homosexuality as a threat to social order.

What links the disparate issues in the family values package is the idea that secular government is persecuting Christians by siding with immoral enemies, be they abortion doctors, liberal schoolteachers, or gay employees. Because so much of the family values project is cast in terms of defending innocent children, education is a central site of struggle. In recent years, the Christian Right has focused on electing its own partisans to local school boards. There have been many battles over curricula, especially in the area of sex education, and over the content of textbooks. Conflicts in the public schools would be much fiercer, I am convinced, were it not for the thou-

sands of Christian Right families who opt for homeschooling, which I also cover in Chapter 9. Homeschooling is a respected practice within the evangelical subculture, and it is not without merit as a means of teaching children the three R's. But homeschooling is not as "private" as one might think. Homeschool families are very well organized, and though they may not articulate it this way, they understand the ideological importance of shaping and restricting their children's experiences. They assert *parental rights* to, effectively, keep their children from being exposed to objectionable ideas and people.

Again, the protection of young minds is the justification for the Christian Right's periodic campaigns against public art and television content. At the forefront of these efforts is the American Family Association (AFA). Along with the Christian Coalition and other groups, the AFA led the charge in the early 1990s against federal funding for artists labeled "obscene." With the aid of Republican budget-cutters, the Christian Right has successfully fostered the idea that there should be no government role in supporting the arts. But the Christian Right has had less success challenging the content of network television, which is driven by what advertisers will allow—and they will allow whatever keeps the largest numbers of viewers from changing the channel. But for the AFA, it matters little if ABC, CBS, and NBC ever stop airing nighttime shows with sexually suggestive scripts. The prevalence of such "obscenity" keeps the troops on permanent alert.

Efforts to censor art and media reinforce for true believers the sense that they are in irresolvable conflict with secular enemies. This mindset is useful for political organizers but it is difficult to sustain over the long term. In Chapter 10, I suggest that some of the more idiosyncratic elements of evangelical belief and religious activity help sustain the momentum and commitment of people in the Christian Right. Specifically, I address the role of *eschatology* (the study of end-times prophecy), missionary work, and controversial practices that go on inside charismatic churches. My goal is not to highlight seemingly bizarre beliefs and actions in a gratuitous way, although I do take exception to missionary projects aimed at people who already have their own religions. My real interest in the religious practices of conservative Christians is not about doctrine but about how a movement sustains belief in its own righteousness and chances for success. As with my chapter on entertainment media, my point is that a successful social movement is one that gives people a sense of personal satisfaction as well as political efficacy.

Chapter 11 may be read as my most controversial chapter because it is about changes underway within the evangelical subculture on matters of race and gender. I deviate from predictable leftist views of the Right in that I do not think the latter represents, simply, a backlash to progressive change. On matters of race and gender, there are genuine changes under-

way within the Christian Right. I urge progressives to pay attention. Many white evangelical churches are beginning to repent for their own role in perpetuating racism. The Promise Keepers (PK) movement has made a top priority of what it calls *racial reconciliation*. To some extent, this idea takes form in a tokenistic way. PK events feature a carefully stage-managed racial mix among podium speakers even while most of the men in attendance are still white. But PK is just the beginning of a shift in how boundaries are drawn. By erasing the color line, the men of PK reinforce other lines of division, namely, the gender line and the line between "saved," born-again Christians and the "unsaved." About PK, I conclude that it is largely an effort by conservative Christian men to cope with the irrevocable gains of feminism. By reasserting their roles as strong husbands and fathers, they strengthen their belief in inherent male supremacy, but in a new and less aggressive form.

PK is a classic example of a popular evangelical cultural project that also bears watching for its political implications; in this case, the ways in which PK men are accommodating to society's slow but gradual shift toward gender equality. Some critics of PK choose to see it as a smokescreen for an unstated electoral agenda. My view is less cynical, and it is consistent with my point throughout this book.

If we want to understand the longevity of the Christian Right, we need to appreciate both the polarizing and vote-driven nature of our existing two-party politics, as well as the appeal conservative evangelicalism holds for millions of people. During times when the most hotly contested legislative issues are on the back burner, what keeps the movement alive is as much cultural and personal as political. When little is going on in the public arena, people in the Christian Right nevertheless share each other's views on the basics of marriage, childrearing, right and wrong. They sing and pray in church together, and gird themselves for battles to come.

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