

Rebuilding the City upon the Hill

A History of the Christian Right: 1960-2012

Corné Meerkerk

3368300

MA Thesis, American Studies Program, Utrecht University

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Thesis advisor: Dr. J.H.H. van den Berk

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Introduction

During his candidacy and presidency, Jimmy Carter never made a secret of his faith. His beliefs were not solely confined to his private life. He once said, “I had a different way of governing,” influenced by his religious convictions.¹ For him, the presidency was a means of serving God through his policies.² Such openness about faith and religion had not always been customary in American politics. Most of Carter’s predecessors were not open about their beliefs, nor was it expected from them. However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, conservative Christians became more active politically, which also contributed to a renewed interest in religion and politics. The Christian conservative wing attracted a lot of attention and came to be known as the Christian Right. Although many evangelicals could identify with Carter’s faith, his politics failed to keep them engaged. In 1980, many of the Christians who had voted for *Johnny Who?* in 1976, now threw their support behind the Republican Ronald Reagan, whose courtship with the Christian Right suggested they would have access to the highest levels of government.

Reagan’s victories in 1980 and 1984 have partly been attributed to the support he received from Christian conservatives. Indeed, for a while their leadership had access to the White House, and friend and foe alike asserted that conservative Christians were politically powerful, even if this was often exaggerated. Nevertheless, even in the heydays of the movement, scholars began speculating about its future. They questioned its actual political successes and argued that the movement would soon disappear. Indeed, after the Reagan administrations, it seemed the movement had lost its momentum. Then, in 2000,

¹ D. Jason Berggren, “‘I Had a Different Way of Governing’: The Living Faith of President Carter,” *Journal of Church and State* 47.1 (2005), 43.

² Berggren, “Living Faith,” 44-45.

George W. Bush - a very conservative and Christian Republican - was elected to the presidency. It seemed that evangelical politics was not quite dead after all. After two terms with Bush Jr. at the helm, the country turned to a liberal candidate, who promised hope and change. Few were the questions about his faith and personal relationship with God. Where was the Christian Right?

This paper will focus on the Christian Right in a contemporary context. Its central question is: Forty years after the Christian Right was first noticed, does there still exist a coherent Christian conservative movement with representative organizations or leaders? Several sub questions serve as waypoints to guide the discussion. The first chapter looks at the historical context in which the movement appeared and in what ways it has developed since it first began. Because the third chapter uses president Obama's healthcare reform plan as a case study to analyze the current status of the Christian Right, the second chapter provides a brief overview of the history of the American welfare state and the political ideologies that have driven it. The third chapter analyzes conservative opposition against Obama's plans, trying to find specifically Christian elements that may provide evidence towards concluding whether the Christian Right still exists.

Terminology

Throughout the paper, several terms will be used that should be properly defined to avoid confusion. Like other authors, this paper may sometimes refer to the Christian Right's supporters as *evangelicals*. Others prefer the more pejorative *fundamentalists*. A central concept is the evangelical / fundamentalist dichotomy. The term *evangelical* is used in different ways and does not have a set meaning. In this paper, its definition will be a rather narrow one. *Evangelical* denotes those people who believe in the authority of the Bible, emphasize a personal conversion experience, and believe in their responsibility to organize

society according to those principles. Since this description is still too broad for use in this context, the focus will primarily be on evangelicals associated with organizations like the National Association of Evangelicals and politically active organizations like *Moral Majority*, *Concerned Women for America* and affiliated with such platforms as *Christianity Today*, *The Christian Post*, and the *Evangelical Outpost*.

Fundamentalists in this context refers to those who believe in the necessary separation from society or any organization that endorses “questionable doctrinal beliefs or moral practices.” Fundamentalists are often evangelical, but evangelicals are not necessarily fundamentalist. Both definitions in this section are based on those from Wheaton College’s Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals.³ However, even with defined terminology, it is important to remember that the Christian Right has also received support from Catholics and other denominations, although authors like Hill and Owen, Geerling, and Cromartie⁴ agree that its most significant base of support lies among evangelical Christians. This does not mean, however, that all evangelicals have thrown their support behind the movement.

Academic discussion

Since the recognition of a political Christian Right in the late 1970s, much has been written about it. As early as 1982, religious historians Samuel S. Hill and Dennis E. Owen wrote about what they called the “New Religious Political Right”, or NRPR⁵. The authors

³ “Defining Evangelicalism.” *Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals*. <http://isae.wheaton.edu/defining-evangelicalism/> (accessed February 14, 2012).

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of these authors, see pp. 4-8.

⁵ Different authors use different names for the movement, although they all mean the same thing. This paper will use *Christian Right*, but other authors have used terms like *(New) Religious (Political) Right* and *(New) Christian (Political) Right*.

use the term for a collection of organizations with a set of relatively clearly defined and corresponding objectives. According to them, the NRPR endeavored to organize American society based on Biblical values that were little understood by the majority of the population. The movement particularly attracted “Fundamentalists” and the “not-so-very-religious” who nonetheless identified with its political ideas. Throughout their work, Hill and Owen’s opposition to this movement glimmers through and they rave against its “spirit of intolerance and domination.” Interestingly, they claim evangelicals did not support the movement and organizations like the *Moral Majority*. This discrepancy might be due to a difference in terminology. Hill and Owen see the Christian Right mostly as a fundamentalist reaction against progressive developments in American society.⁶

The British sociologist Steve Bruce argued that Christian conservatism always existed and changed little, but that public awareness of its viewpoints was raised during the eighties. New technology facilitated evangelicals with means of reaching large audiences with their message. At the same time, liberal and secular values encroached upon the “social space” in which fundamentalists had previously been allowed to practice their own beliefs, which led to “boundary disputes.”⁷ Bruce gives a thorough overview of the Christian Right’s ideology and political success during the early 1980s. As is clear from the title of his work, and further explained in his final chapter, he did not think the movement would survive beyond his decade.

Bas Geerling also provided an interpretation of the movement, arguing that religion initially played a role in the private sphere, but that Christians became more active in response to the moral decline they saw in society. The movement’s rise to national

⁶ Samuel S. Hill and Dennis E. Owen, *The New Religious Political Right in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982).

⁷ Steve Bruce, *The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 170.

prominence should be seen in its historical context – i.e. the resurgence of conservatism and the growing influence of televangelists. According to Geerling, the political and cultural climate was favorable, facilitating its success. He argues that the supporters were motivated by a theology of millennialism, and became particularly active to fix society's wrongs because they feared God's impending doom over the nation. Geerling questions the political success of the movement.⁸

The *Ethics and Public Policy Center* published a collection of essays about the Christian Right. Its contributors also question the successes of the movement. They note that Ronald Reagan's rhetoric was very appealing to the evangelicals, but that his policies could not but disappoint them. According to them, the movement focused on a specific set of issues, on which they challenged a hostile and indifferent culture. By the 1990s, they argue, its momentum had slowed and internal divisions threatened its survivability.⁹

In her detailed history of the American Right, Lisa McGirr puts the emergence of the Christian Right in the context of the development of the political right wing. She argues that the roots for evangelical political activism lie in the 1960s and 1970s with increasing tolerance of alternative lifestyles and the legalization of abortion. These events caused a reawakening among American Christians that subsequently led to increasing political activism.¹⁰

Most of the books about Christian conservatism are studies of its emergence and the successes and failures of the 1980s. Little to none has been written about its development into the nineties and early twenty-first century. However, some books about

⁸ Bas Geerling, "The New Religious Right," in *Utrechtse Historische Cahiers* (Utrecht: Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1993).

⁹ Michael Cromartie ed. *No Longer Exiles* (Washington: Ethics and Policy Center, 1993).

¹⁰ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 217-61.

broader conservatism do also deal with the Christian Right. McGirr devotes a chapter to the movement, and it also features in some other works. Randall Balmer, a professor of American religious history, has written a study about the influence and importance of religion in the presidency. He argues that a candidate's faith first became an issue when the Catholic Kennedy ran for the White House, but remained important also in subsequent elections. Balmer also mentions the rise of the Christian Right and what influence it had on the elections of the late seventies and eighties. He analyzes Clinton and Bush Jr.'s candidacy and presidency, noting that the Christian Right survived beyond the Reagan years although it did not have as much access to political leadership during the Clinton years. He argues that the Religious Right has had "precious little" to show for all its political clout. Indeed, he concludes, "Religion always functions best from the margins of society and not in the councils of power."¹¹

History professor David Farber published a work tracing conservative ideology from the past to the present, focusing on politicians and grassroots mobilizers who carried the banner of modern conservatism. Farber devotes at least three chapters to heroes of the Christian Right, Phyllis Schlafly, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush. He focuses mainly on the broader conservative ideology, only occasionally referring to distinctively Christian issues. Like Balmer, Farber argues that Bush Jr. was a president belonging to the Christian Right, but after his second term left the movement – and indeed modern conservatism – "without sure directions or answers that the long conservative ascendancy had bequeathed to the American people."¹²

¹¹ Randall Balmer, *God in the White House: A History* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 166-67.

¹² David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 259.

This discussion shows that several of the works focusing exclusively on the Christian Right argue that the movement failed and disappeared when Reagan or Bush Sr. left office. Other authors, like McGirr, Balmer, and Faber, place the movement in the larger context of modern conservatism, arguing that it did not merely die in the nineties but indeed revived when George W. Bush was elected. This paper joins the second group of authors, trying to ascertain whether there still exists a Christian Right today.

Methodology

To achieve its purpose of researching the political (ideological) development of evangelicals, this paper will primarily be a discussion of primary and secondary sources. Academic works by McGirr, Bruce, and Cromartie will provide a good starting point in establishing the roots and early development of the Christian Right. Other historical overviews will be used to guide the research chronologically.

The third chapter is a case study to analyze the current status of the American Christian Right. When president Obama came into office in early 2009, he immediately began working on what was supposed to be one of the hallmarks of his presidency: health reform. His proposals received much criticism, especially from the conservative flank. This case study attempts to find a distinctively Christian conservative voice among the opposition. The first chapter analyzes the emergence of the Christian Right in the second half of the twentieth century and what sets it apart from the conservative Right – the third chapter tries to find evidence of these same distinctive arguments in the current debate.

For God and Country

A history of the Christian Right.

In 1925, Christian fundamentalism was challenged by modernists who opposed a recently introduced bill forbidding the teaching of evolution in public schools in Tennessee. John Thomas Scopes volunteered to break the law intentionally, and was subsequently arrested. Civil liberties organizations rallied behind Scopes and helped build his case against the state. The trial became a huge media event and received a lot of attention during that summer. William Jennings Bryan represented the prosecution and went on the stand to affirm traditional Biblical truths such as the literal interpretation of the story of creation, Jonah being swallowed by a fish, and other stories. Christians cheered Bryan for standing up for their principles, but the liberal press made him a mockery. Scopes was convicted, but the modernists still claimed victory. This case had, in their opinion, clearly shown the irrationality of fundamentalism. Nevertheless, churches like the Southern Baptist Convention continued to grow. In turn, this led to the founding of church-related organizations and schools, thus providing a relatively sheltered sub-culture for fundamentalists.¹³ Some authors have argued that this trial made evangelical and fundamentalist Christians feel marginalized. They retreated from active political engagement and practiced their faith in private.¹⁴

The Scopes trial is an example of a conservative defense against progressive changes in society. The early twentieth century saw important social changes, upending traditional norms. Women gained ever more rights and asserted their equality with men. In several places, homosexual culture became more visible as it became more widely

¹³ Mary Beth Norton et al., *A People & a Nation*, 9th edition (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), 667-8.

¹⁴ Randall Balmer, *God in the White House: A History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 80.

accepted, if still illegal. Such developments sparked defensive action from conservatives, as in the Scopes trial. During the 1960s, a new right-wing conservative movement emerged. This new conservatism was not necessarily based on Christian values. However, evangelicals also found their way back into politics and eventually became part of the broader conservative movement. There were certain key issues that distinguished the evangelicals from the rest of the Right. This narrower movement came to be known as the Christian Right.

To understand the re-emergence of a new Christian conservative political movement during the 1960s and 1970s, it is important to understand the historical environment out of which this movement emerged. The central question in this chapter is, What is the Christian Right? To formulate a satisfactory answer, the following questions need also be answered: How can the rise of the Christian Right be explained in the historical context of its emergence? How does it relate to the rise of the New Right?

Decades of change

The 1960s was a decade of change. Norton et al. describe it as “tumultuous.”¹⁵ Several defining issues upset the status quo in American society. In 1960, John F. Kennedy became the first Catholic ever to win the presidential elections. Even though anti-Catholic sentiment was not as vehement as it had been during the nineteenth century, many Protestants were uneasy about a Catholic in the White House. They mobilized in an effort to keep Kennedy from becoming president. Randall Balmer notes that “in a twist of irony,” Kennedy’s outreach to Martin Luther King’s wife during his imprisonment may indeed

¹⁵ Mary Beth Norton et al., *A People & a Nation* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), 824.

have given him the support from Black Baptists needed to win the election.¹⁶ As a candidate, he stressed the importance of the separation of church and state, trying to make theological differences between Catholics and Protestants less relevant for the presidency.¹⁷ Kennedy's presidency could not lessen – but rather contributed to a general sense of unease and turmoil. The U.S. and the Soviet Union only just avoided a nuclear war over the Cuban missile crisis and the failed Bay of Pigs invasion.

The 1960s was also a decade of unprecedented public activism. The Civil Rights movement gained momentum and organized sit-ins and freedom rides to end segregation. Tens of thousands of Americans all across the country were organized to challenge Jim Crow laws. Most were non-violent, but in some instances blood was shed. To show support for Kennedy's civil rights bill, hundreds of thousands of supporters marched on Washington in 1963. The Civil Rights movement sought to end segregation through affirmative action from the federal and state governments.¹⁸ The activists forced the president's hand to end segregation and discrimination. Faced with opposition from Southern Democrats in Congress, JFK seemed reluctant to act swiftly. On November 22, 1963, the president was assassinated in Dallas.

That same day, Kennedy's vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson, was sworn in as the new president. Johnson put civil rights at the top of his agenda, and in 1964 the Civil Rights Act was passed, ending all *de jure* discrimination on the basis of color or race. LBJ used and expanded the federal government's power by enforcing racial equality. Many Americans believed the government was overstepping its boundaries. In 1964, Johnson

¹⁶ Balmer, *God*, 43-44.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸ Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Albert E. Knopf, 2011), 221.

was challenged by the conservative Republican Barry Goldwater but won a landslide victory. Not only was LBJ elected back into the Oval Office, the elections also gave him a very liberal congress. Like Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s, Johnson's goal was to improve American society through the federal government. He actively fought poverty and endeavored to let as many Americans as possible share in the common wealth. He envisaged a *Great Society*. Johnson was a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a Restorationist movement emphasizing good works. His *Great Society* plans for greater equality and an expanded welfare system were likely partly based on his religious beliefs.¹⁹

During Kennedy's presidency, tensions over Vietnam had steadily increased. Under LBJ, American involvement was escalated to a full-blown war. Johnson sent hundreds of thousands of troops to the region to fight a war that would ultimately be a failure, and mean the end of his administration. The war further divided a nation that was already becoming increasingly polarized over issues of civil rights, social, and economic policies. In 1968, the president decided that he would not run for re-election.²⁰

The decade also saw more extreme forms of activism. Several African Americans joined Black Power movements that resorted to violence. Best known were the Black Panthers, who killed several police officers and sought to end capitalism. They did not only resort to violence, but also tried to improve ghetto life through food distribution programs. The movement was popular among younger Blacks but alienated the white public because of its violence.²¹

¹⁹ Balmer, *God*, 50-62.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

²¹ Kazin, *Dreamers*, 222-28.

Youth culture also became more visible and politically active during the sixties. A group of conservative students wrote the *Sharon Statement* in 1960, opposing liberal New Deal policies and affirming conservative traditions. The Young Americans for Freedom embraced anticommunism and limited government. In 1962, another group of young Americans wrote the *Port Huron Statement*, directly opposing such conservative views. They believed in a liberal organization of society featured by an interracial democracy, but their views differed from traditional liberal ideology.²² In other places, students organized to protest the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, which gave universities the legal status of parents. Students also sought to end discrimination in their institutions.

Some hoped to turn youth rebellion into a lifestyle. Older generations could not understand the culture and lifestyle of youngsters and were frequently angered by it. Music became a unifying element of youth culture. It grew into a counterculture, propagating looser morals and completely different fashion styles. Particularly upsetting to Christians was the promotion of sex, drugs, and alternative lifestyles. Nevertheless, Kazin notes that many of the ideas considered “ultra-radical in the 1960s,” had become seemingly normal for American society in the twenty-first century.²³

These developments continued into the 1970s. In 1968, Richard Nixon became the next president, after a tumultuous year in which Martin Luther King and JFK’s brother and presidential candidate, Robert F. Kennedy, were assassinated. Nixon vowed to end the costly war in Vietnam and bring calm to a nation in turmoil. His record has been quite confusing to historians, because he continued and expanded several liberal programs while also pushing some conservative issues. Some have suggested that Nixon’s policies were

²² Ibid., 251.

²³ Ibid., 253.

not as much ideological, but more of a pragmatic nature.²⁴ The president did end the war in Vietnam and took a new direction in U.S. relations with China. Nixon and his staff believed that maintaining stability was very important. This belief was challenged by developments in Vietnam and the Middle East.

Nixon was re-elected in 1972 but would not be able to complete his second term. In 1973, vice president Agnew resigned over allegations of bribery. By that time, the investigation into the Watergate scandal was well under way. The president, who had not been directly involved in the actual crime, tried to cover it up and even ordered the CIA to stop the FBI investigation. The president was ordered to release recordings made in the White House, which shocked the nation because of Nixon's obscene and racist language. Nevertheless, several of the convicts in the Watergate case became religious while in the criminal-justice system. Some, like Charles A. Colson, would later even become figures of some importance in the Christian Right.²⁵ Facing impeachment and possible conviction, the president resigned in August 1974. Nixon's new vice president, Gerald Ford, was sworn in as president. Americans' trust of government had been severely impaired by these developments. Ford pardoned Nixon in an attempt to "salve the wounds of a nation and to put Watergate to rest" but could not accomplish much while in office.²⁶ Although the president was not personally involved in the scandal, the legacy of Watergate still loomed over his administration.

Even as the political crisis unfolded, social developments continued to challenge traditional norms and values. The women's movement, which had been growing since the

²⁴ Norton et al, *A People*, 873.

²⁵ Balmer, *God*, 66-67.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 74-77.

1950s, managed to gain several accomplishments during the 1970s. Feminists focused on several key issues, such as abortion and birth control, and discrimination in work and family. Contraceptives became available to unmarried women early in the decade, and the landmark 1973 Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion. Women's organization also fought successfully to end discrimination in many aspects of public life. Another ambitious plan, to get the Equal Rights Amendment ratified, ultimately failed. The ERA was supposed to amend the Constitution to legally end discrimination on the basis of sex. As early as 1972, the Senate voted overwhelmingly in favor of the amendment but it stranded when not enough states ratified it. The ERA faced strong opposition from the right, with Phyllis Schlafly as one of its most vocal opponents. Schlafly opposed the feminist movements by arguing that women's first duty was to the family. God had created men and women different from each other, also giving them different roles to play in life. Thus, she argued, women's primary responsibility was within the home – raising children.²⁷ Countering the Left's argumentation that women were worse off than men because they were expected to stay at home, Schlafly turned the argument on its head, arguing that women were privileged and should not “lower [themselves] to ‘equal rights’ when [they] already have the status of special privilege.”²⁸ She founded the *Eagle Forum* and remained well known in conservative circles for her opposition to feminism, also creating an activist base for modern conservatism.²⁹

Throughout the 1970s, gays and lesbians tried to end discrimination and make their lifestyle more acceptable to the general public. In 1973, the *American Psychiatrist Association* changed its view on homosexuality, no longer labeling it as a mental disease.

²⁷ Farber, *Modern Conservatism*, 120-21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

Several gays and lesbians began to fight more openly for legal equality. In several cities, a distinctive homosexual subculture emerged and homosexuals began to play an increasingly visible role in culture and politics.³⁰

On top of the cultural transformations of the seventies and the increased distrust of government after the Nixon administration, the U.S. economy was in bad shape throughout the decade. Unemployment was high and the unique state of stagflation proved difficult to manage. Nixon, Ford, and Carter all tried to fix the problems, but their and Congress's actions often only made the situation worse. Carter even gave a speech on television urging the public to be aware of their economic limits.

Jimmy Carter had been elected in 1976, promising to bring a new era of political leadership to Washington. He positioned himself as a Washington outsider and promised to restore trust in government by stressing he, as a born-again Christian, was a man of morality.³¹ Carter was very outspoken about his faith and gave evangelicals the hope of restoring some of their values in society. According to religious historian Randall Balmer, who wrote an analysis of the links between religion and the presidency, Carter's supporters included many evangelical Christians who would vote for his opponent Ronald Reagan in the general election of 1980.³²

The New Right

It was from this historical setting that a renewed conservative movement emerged. These citizens became united over several tendencies in politics, most notably the expansion of

³⁰ Kazin, *Dreamers*, 250.

³¹ Balmer, *God*, 88.

³² *Ibid.*, 80.

government in the name of social welfare and the public good. The Right consists of several smaller groups. Historian Lisa McGirr distinguishes libertarians, who are particularly focused on limiting the government's involvement in the economy, and normative conservatives, who oppose the expansion of the federal government because it allegedly causes "a decline in religiosity, morality, individual responsibility, and family authority."³³ Within this broader conservative movement the Christian Right has its place, sharing most of the views of normative conservatives but emphasizing a number of issues that distinguish it from the broader movement. The Christian Right became increasingly visible during the 1970s, but its ascendancy to national political prominence should be understood in the context of the rise of the New Right during the sixties and seventies.

In *Suburban Warriors* (2001), McGirr discusses the re-emergence of conservatism with a bottom-up approach. She particularly focuses on Orange County, California, as the birthplace of the New Right. She convincingly argues that the local setting and WASP make-up of the county's residents contributed to the formation of a powerful political movement.

Modern conservatism, however, was somewhat older than Orange County's conservatives. In *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism* (2010), David Farber traces some of its defining ideals back to Robert Taft, a Republican senator from Ohio, who actively opposed Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies. Taft argued for economic liberty and the maintenance of traditional institutions.³⁴ In his view, it was the government's responsibility to create and sustain a system where individuals had the freedom "to pursue their economic interests so that they *might* become more prosperous if

³³ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 10.

³⁴ David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010), 12-13.

they were *able* enough to take advantage of free market opportunities.”³⁵ Taft also tried to restrict the power of labor unions, although he did not go so far as to completely abolish the unions. The senator’s conservatism was primarily of an economic nature, and many of these ideas became central in modern conservatism, even more so among libertarians.³⁶

During the 1950s and 1960s, anticommunist sentiment ran high. In Orange County, people began to organize meetings and schools where conservative ideas were discussed. McGirr calls the grassroots movement that began to emerge a “sleeping giant.”³⁷ At the same time, on a national level, conservative ideas also became more widespread. The conservative intellectual William Buckley began publishing articles and in 1955 he started the *National Review* magazine. Buckley tried to prove that conservatism was not only something for intellectuals, but could also be attractive to the mainstream. His ideology was based on “traditional religious beliefs, anticommunism, anti-statism, and freewheeling capitalism.”³⁸ Buckley supported senator Joseph McCarthy’s anticommunism and used liberals’ anti-McCarthyism to formulate his position: “the war at home . . . was between weak-willed, naive liberals and stout, principled conservatives.”³⁹

The central tenet of Buckley’s conservatism was opposition to a powerful federal government. He therefore opposed the civil rights movement because it used the government to enforce desegregation. Barry Goldwater, also supportive of integrated schools, formulated his position like this: “I am not prepared, however, to impose that judgment of mine on the people of Mississippi or South Carolina. . . . [T]he problem of

³⁵ Ibid., 20.

³⁶ Ibid., 38.

³⁷ McGirr, *Warriors*, 54.

³⁸ Farber, *Conservatism*, 40.

³⁹ Ibid., 56.

race relations . . . is best handled by the people directly concerned . . . [and] should not be effected by engines of national power.”⁴⁰

Buckley and Goldwater believed that conservatism was intricately linked with the Christian faith. If separated from those beliefs, conservatism would only be “an empty and even vile thing.”⁴¹ This movement of theirs was not the new Christian Right, but they did give religion an important role in their ideology.

The Goldwater campaign was also an attempt to win the Republican Party for conservatism. Since the 1930s, the GOP had also been generally supportive of New Deal policies and, more recently, government-mandated desegregation.⁴² Even though the Goldwater campaign ultimately was a big failure for the Republicans – Lyndon B. Johnson won with a wider margin than any president ever – the conservative movement had shown its potency. Goldwater had become the Republican nominee, which demonstrated that conservatives could control a major party.⁴³

The election of 1964 also signaled a change in the political make-up of the South. White Southerners were increasingly dissatisfied with the Democratic Party’s support for civil rights. Conservatives campaigned hard to convince the South that they were really conservative in their heart. Significantly, of the only six states that Goldwater won in the general election, five were in the Deep South.⁴⁴ Although the election officially was a failure for conservatives, it left California and the country at large with a strong and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 91.

⁴¹ Ibid., 69.

⁴² Ibid., 110.

⁴³ McGirr, *Warriors*, 143.

⁴⁴ Farber, *Conservatism*, 116.

organized movement that would help Ronald Reagan win the California gubernatorial election of 1966 and the presidential election of 1980.⁴⁵

Even though Goldwater's momentous defeat proved that liberal culture and politics were still dominant in American society, conservatism had shown its muscle and its ideals became more and more widespread. In Orange County, and throughout the country, conservatives united against liberalism. They believed in the "organic order" of American society: "harmonious, beneficent, and self-regulating." Liberal ideas upset this order threatening capitalism and "family, morality, and religion," which particularly suffered under the liberal encouragement of "permissiveness and secularism."⁴⁶

These liberal encouragements of permissiveness and secularism are the very cultural changes that were described earlier, showing that the rise of conservatism was a response to these historical developments. Feminism, gay liberation, and youth counterculture, among others, challenged the traditional norms and values, and even had several successes because of government involvement. Conservatives attributed this increased influence of the government to New Deal liberalism and therefore began to oppose *big government*. This opposition also sought to end the welfare programs of FDR's New Deal, Truman's Fair Deal, and LBJ's Great Society because they only expanded government influence. Conservatives adopted the Jeffersonian idea of individualism, where every citizen has the opportunity to make it for themselves and where a minimalist government only exists to facilitate an environment in which this is possible. Together, citizens would constitute an organic community.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁶ McGirr, *Warriors*, 151.

The Christian Right

Many authors have written about the Christian Right, and acknowledge that it is very difficult to define it exactly and to give an accurate account of its history. Most also agree that its actual political successes are not as significant as is often supposed. Historians have taken different approaches to discuss the emergence of the Christian Right. Bruce has approached the movement purely with a sociological approach. Hill, Owen, and Cromartie single out certain prominent persons and organizations and give an in-depth discussion of the movement's core values. All approaches are useful to provide a proper discussion of the Christian Right's emergence.

As was mentioned above, conservative leaders like William Buckley connected their conservative ideology to the Christian faith. Those conservatives were not alone in bringing religion back into the public sphere. Since the Scopes trial of 1925, evangelical Christians had retreated from being actively involved in society as Christians. The practice of their religion had become something for the private sphere only.⁴⁷ Increasingly, however, the faithful began to be worried about the direction America was taking. They believed that the United States was founded on Christian values, which were going to the dogs as the government passed progressive legislation. Communism was perceived by many – conservatives or not – as the greatest threat to the U.S. at the time. This ideology proposed an organization of society that was radically different from the ideals of democracy and individualism so central to the American tradition. Christian conservatives also singled out Communism, because they believed it was primarily aimed at destroying America's Christian foundation. Recent developments like the abolition of school prayer

⁴⁷ Bas Geerling, *The New Religious Right: Politiek active christen-fundamentalisten in de Verenigde Staten in de jaren tachtig: een interpretatie* (Utrecht: Utrecht Historische Cahiers, 1993), 25.

and Bible readings in public schools were regarded as proof that Communism was slowly working its way into American society.⁴⁸

At the same time, religion became increasingly visible. Televangelists could reach an audience of millions spreading their message, which was often more fundamentalist than mainstream.⁴⁹ Not only did they preach the gospel, they also commented on developments in society. Increasingly, evangelicals began to realize that keeping their religion confined to their private lives did not help society, but that they should actively seek to return America to its original Christian values by promoting their evangelical values.

Enter Jimmy Carter. The former governor of Georgia openly professed to be born again, and dared assert that his faith would also have an influence on his policies. He challenged the immorality of the Watergate years and effectively promoted himself as America's savior.⁵⁰ Evangelical Christians voted for him, hoping he would also turn back the clock on liberal legislation. Carter, however, was a president of compromise and failed to deliver on ethical issues. According to Balmer, many of Carter's evangelical supporters would vote for Reagan in the 1980 elections, even though the latter was much less open about his faith.⁵¹

The Christian Right's supporters are mostly to be found among evangelical Christians. *Evangelicals* are Christians who emphasize a set of core beliefs, such as "conversionism" (being born again), a high regard of the validity of the Bible (inerrancy), the centrality of Jesus Christ as the only means to redemption, and a commitment to

⁴⁸ Ibid., 10. Also see Bruce, *Rise and Fall*, 33.

⁴⁹ Geerling, *Right*, 3.

⁵⁰ Balmer, *God*, 80 and 88.

⁵¹ Ibid., 80.

activism, most visibly as evangelism.⁵² It is important, however, to note that all evangelicals are not supporters of the Christian Right, and that all supporters of the movement are not evangelicals. The movement also received support from fundamentalists and more liberal Christians.⁵³

Especially in its early years, the Christian Right very much revolved around a number of organizations. One that is always mentioned is the *Moral Majority*, founded in 1979 by televangelist and host of *The Old Time Gospel Hour*, Jerry Falwell. Hill and Owen even suggest it was the core of the movement: “[A]s Jerry Falwell and Moral Majority, Inc., go, so goes the NRPR [National Religious Political Right].”⁵⁴ The organization used mailing lists to reach hundreds of thousands evangelicals all over the country to encourage them to support candidates and become politically active over certain issues. Other organizations included *Christian Voice* and *The Religious Roundtable*. The influence of televangelists is debatable. Although Falwell founded *Moral Majority*, Hill and Owen note that his television ministry was only marginally related to the political movement. Other famous evangelicals like Billy Graham, and Jim Bakker of *PTL* only sporadically commented on political issues or, as in the case of Graham, were never related to the movement. It never received explicit endorsements from any church or denomination nor were important colleges like Wheaton and Fuller Seminary related to it.⁵⁵ This is reason for the authors to question the success of the movement, since it failed to get on board many of the influential voices in evangelical circles. On the other hand, the

⁵² Larry Eskridge, “Defining the Term [Evangelicalism],” *Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals*. 2011. <http://isae.wheaton.edu/defining-evangelicalism/defining-the-term-in-contemporary-times/> (accessed April 27, 2012) and R. Booth Fowler, “The Failure,” in *No Longer Exiles*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Washington: Ethics and Policy Center, 1993), 58.

⁵³ Fowler, “Failure”, 60.

⁵⁴ Hill and Owen, *Religious/Political Right*, 144.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 141-3.

reason might be purely pragmatic. Under U.S. law, many non-political organizations are prohibited from making political endorsements. Another reason might be that openly associating with a political movement could alienate supporters or viewers who shared theological views, but could not identify with the Christian conservative political ideology.

The Christian Right focuses on a number of particular issues. This is because it has an ideology about America and the world at large that is based on a certain interpretation of the Bible. One central belief is that they hold the only truth, and American society should therefore be organized according to their views. This is also what offends other people, because it makes the Christian Right deaf to other people's views, and essentially posits its own as an authoritarian ideology.⁵⁶ What this means is that it wants all other worldviews to make place for the Christian one, because that is only true ideology.

The Christian Right's ideology is not necessarily comprehensive. It focuses on a limited number of issues and has become part of modern conservatism, which gives it a more encompassing ideology. Central issues include opposition to abortion and equal rights for women and the legalization of a homosexual lifestyle, support for the so-called traditional family unit and the re-institution school prayer and scripture readings and changes in the tax code to make Christian schooling cheaper. In some of these cases, government expansion is necessary to achieve these goals. Bruce formulated this paradox as follows: "[E]ither less government or a more conservative government."⁵⁷ When supporting mainline conservative issues, the Christian Right often gives them a Biblical twist.

It appears rather difficult to pinpoint the actual political successes of the Christian Right. As Bruce's title suggests, the movement had already collapsed a decade after it first

⁵⁶ Ibid., 34-50.

⁵⁷ Bruce, *New Christian Right*, 81-2.

emerged. Other authors, like Geerling, agree that its actual successes are few and that its influence has been exaggerated, both by supporters and opponents. *Moral Majority* became less influential towards the end of 1980s and was dismantled by Falwell in 1989. Fowler calls it the “most infamous example” of the Christian Right’s failure. He also notes that its newsletter, the *Moral Majority Report*, had long bemoaned its lack of influence with the Reagan administration.⁵⁸ Reagan had enjoyed the support of the Christian Right and even held regular meetings with leaders like Falwell. George Marsden writes that the president was “a master of symbolic politics of nostalgia.” Although Reagan courted the movement, his policies fell short of its rhetoric and lacked substance.⁵⁹ The Christian Right also did not actually elect any real Christian conservative representatives or senators to Congress.

On the other hand, even if actual policies fell short of the Christian Right’s hopes, one can also argue it has been successful in other terms. The movement certainly gained political influence and managed to put its issues on the political agenda. It also revived the debate on moral issues and provided a strong countermovement to progressives.⁶⁰ The successful STOP-ERA campaign, led by Phyllis Schlafly, could also be partially attributed to the Christian Right, although it was played out before the foundation of *Moral Majority*.

Most of the scholars discussed above agree that the Christian Right’s momentum had slowed by the early 1990s. Nevertheless, evangelicals had become politically active again and had managed to organize themselves into a movement that could exert some influence in Washington and at the state and local levels. Although it started as a non-

⁵⁸ Fowler, “Failure”, 61.

⁵⁹ George Marsden, “An Overview”, in *No Longer Exiles*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Washington: Ethics and Policy Center, 1993), 11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

partisan movement, the Christian Right quickly became embedded in the GOP, most likely because it had become the party of modern conservatism. If the Christian Right as a coherent unit is not as prominent as it once was, it still exists within the Republican Party.

Into the Millennium

George H.W. Bush succeeded Ronald Reagan in 1989. Bush Sr. also received support from the Christian Right, although they were hesitant about him because he was an Episcopalian. According to Balmer, the relationship between the Christian Right and Bush was never one of “genuine ardor.” Indeed, he mentions that evangelicals were complaining about the Bush administration “systematically excluding” evangelical Christians from staff positions. Apparently, the president was aware of the importance of keeping the Christian Right among his supporters, so he tried to improve the relationship by inviting evangelical political leaders and televangelists to the White House. Bush enjoyed high approval ratings after the Gulf War and the fall of the Soviet Union, but lost in the 1992 elections to Bill Clinton. Balmer also notes that the fall of communism gave a serious dent to conservatism, which had been based on, and sustained by, anticommunist sentiment.⁶¹

Democratic nominee Bill Clinton did not run as a liberal, but was of course not a conservative either. Clinton had also been raised a Christian. At age nine, he professed his faith, was baptized, and became a member of the Southern Baptist Convention. Clinton knew how to speak the language of evangelicalism and frequently campaigned in Black churches. This may well have given him some evangelical votes. However, prominent Christian Right figures like Jerry Falwell mounted an offense against him, because they foresaw an end to a decade of access to the White House. After the Senate failed to remove

⁶¹ Balmer, *God*, 124-30.

Clinton from office in 1999, Paul Weyrich, another leader of the Christian Right, lamented that the movement's values found little support among the American public.⁶²

George W. Bush, first elected in the elections of 2000, was yet another president who was very up-front about his faith. Bush could also tell about a born-again experience, and stressed the importance of a personal relationship with his savior. He was a conservative, although he had not been schooled in it. According to Farber, Bush's political ideology was "forged in his disgust with the left-wing, sixties campus political culture he endured as an undergraduate at Yale University." His values were not based on free-market theories and anticommunism, but on the revealed word of God, the Bible. Bush enjoyed the support of a strong conservative movement and made several of their issues important throughout his presidency. Although the post-9/11 War on Terrorism and the economic downturn would overshadow his legacy, throughout his presidency he fought for one of the Christian Right's most important issues: pro-life legislation. The costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan divided the nation and made Bush very unpopular. According to Farber, it also left "the conservative political movement . . . in disarray."⁶³

In 2008, Barack H. Obama ran as a progressive. He used Bush's failures to avert the global recession as proof of the failure of conservative economic policies. Obama did not need the support of the Christian Right, yet on several occasions he also talked about his faith.⁶⁴ Here is yet another legacy of the Christian Right, according to Balmer: presidential candidates needed to speak about their religious beliefs because it could win them votes.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., 134-42.

⁶³ Farber, *Conservatism*, 209-15.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 216.

⁶⁵ Balmer, *God*, 155.

Conclusions

The decades after the Second World War saw several important developments in American society. It was a period of activism resulting in new legislation on civil rights and ethical questions. Many of these developments worried evangelical Christians, even though faith was a private matter for them. They believed America was departing from its traditional values – which they believed to be based on Biblical values – and, under the influence of several prominent evangelicals, began to organize a political movement. The new Christian Right saw the expansion of government as a threat to the traditional American values and could thus easily identify with the new and modern conservative movement, which also emphasized the need for a small government and a return to traditional values. The Christian Right singled out several issues of importance and managed to re-invigorate public awareness and debate and through this placed these issues on the political agenda. During the Reagan administration, the Christian Right had regular access to the White House, although its actual successes were limited. With the end of the Reagan years and the dismantling of several core institutions, the Christian Right ceased to be a strong coherent movement during the 1990s. With George W. Bush, a conservative of Christian Right-caliber was elected to the White House and he actively worked on the issues that are so important for evangelicals.

Welfare and the United States

Necessary safety net or nanny state?

Even though the American economy is capitalistic and individualism is a well-known myth about U.S. culture, the United States is also a welfare state, in which the government redistributes services, goods, and money to those citizens that are not as well off as others. The only way the government is able to this is through taxation. The role and size of government has been at the center of many political discussions since even before the Revolution. Even though welfare programs have been described as European inventions and therefore un-American, and its supporters have been accused of being Socialists or Communists, the American welfare state has grown tremendously during the twentieth, and early twenty-first century.⁶⁶ In this chapter, a brief overview of the welfare state will be provided, followed by an analysis of opposition to such programs over time. The central question answered in this chapter is what the American welfare state looks like, how it came into being, and what public attitudes have generally been towards it.

The welfare state: A definition

Before providing an overview of its definition or analyzing critiques against it, it is necessary to define what is meant by the *welfare state* in this paper. All government assistance programs go by names other than something with *welfare*, complicating the task of providing an adequate definition.

⁶⁶ Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1-9.

The word *welfare* refers to the “condition of doing or being well; good fortune, happiness, or well-being . . . ; thriving or successful progress in life, prosperity.”⁶⁷ As it turns out, money is a key requirement for living a prosperous life, and to have money, one needs a job. Money is also necessary to raise children and sustain a family, and if one is in need of medical help. Throughout human history, there have always been the *haves* and *have-nots*: some are better off than others. One way of dealing with this problem is to let the less fortunate remain in their position. Fortunately, as long as there has been poverty, other people have stepped in to help others by sharing their wealth.

In most western societies, the state has set up programs to help the less fortunate among its subjects as well as provide general assistance programs for everyone. Many are restricted by certain requirements. One must be unemployed to receive a welfare check or have children to be eligible for child support. The Food Stamps Program (officially the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and Medicaid are examples of means-tested programs: they are only available to people whose income is below a certain level.

An early European blueprint for the welfare state was the British Beveridge Report of 1942, which stated that the government should protect individuals from poverty and against the “interruption or destruction of earning power.”⁶⁸ The *welfare state* can thus be defined as a collection of programs run by a state government to provide at least a minimum level of prosperity for each of its citizens and to give all of its subjects access to services and goods that it considers necessary, such as health insurance.

⁶⁷ “Welfare,” *Oxford English Dictionary*. Accessed May 9, 2012
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/226968?rskey=M94Rxt&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

⁶⁸ Wallace C. Peterson, *Transfer Spending, Taxes, and the American Welfare State* (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 2.

The welfare state: How it works

Wallace Peterson has analyzed the workings of America's welfare state. The redistribution of money has become one of the major activities of the government. As already mentioned, taxes are an important source of money for the state, but it also has a lot of borrowing power, enabling it to get money from lenders within and outside the country.⁶⁹ The government can then redistribute this to individuals or organizations. There are two important ways in which money is transferred – either directly as cash, or indirectly, as an in-kind benefit (e.g. food stamps). In most cases, the government does not need anything in return.⁷⁰ Peterson chooses to call all of this *transfer*, since the state only acts as an instrument: it collects money through taxing and borrowing, and then transfers it to other participants in the economy.⁷¹

Analyzing the money streams coming in and going out, Peterson concludes that the American welfare state can be seen as a three-tiered system: one for the rich, one for the middle class, and one for the poor. A popular misconception is that the welfare states takes money from the rich and gives it to the poor. The author proves this is incorrect by showing that most of the money is transferred to the middle class, followed by the poor and the rich.⁷²

Social Security (officially Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance) is one of the best-known welfare programs in the United States. Its main group of recipients is the retired, but it also provides benefits in many other cases. Two other well-known programs are Medicare and Medicaid, providing a national social insurance program and benefits

⁶⁹ Peterson, *Transfer Spending*, xiv.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 47.

for, respectively, the elderly and disabled, and low-income families. In addition, the government runs dozens of other programs redistributing money for food assistance, housing, education, unemployment, *et cetera*.

The American welfare state: A history

The claim that the welfare state in America is a European invention is not exactly true, since it came into being in the American context. S. Jay Kleinberg has analyzed the origins of social policies in the United States, and concluded that widows' pensions, first introduced during the early twentieth century, are the real precursors of the modern welfare state. The number of widows had remained mostly stable during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but legislators became more concerned about their plight. The loss of the main breadwinner often meant the widow and her children had to work in order to sustain the household. Industrialization had opened new opportunities for women and children to work outside the home, making them less dependent on the traditional role of the male breadwinner. At the same time, working outside the home impeded their ability to raise children.

Seeing that an unregulated free market continued to be hard on them, reformers became concerned with widows whose families had been torn apart for the mother to be able to work. A more successful system had to be established, and they began to use the state's power to alleviate the hardships endured by these people. Gradually, states began to introduce programs to help such families financially. What is so important about this, according to Kleinberg, is that this really was "the first large-scale state effort to become involved in the intimate affairs of the family."⁷³ Nevertheless, an even earlier form of

⁷³ S. Jay Kleinberg, "The Economic Origins of the Welfare State: 1870-1939," in *Social and Secure? Politics and Culture of the Welfare State: A Comparative Inquiry*, ed. Hans Bak (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1996), 94-116.

money redistribution to individuals existed, in the form of veteran's pensions. A plan for disabled veterans was established as early as 1792 and further expanded during the nineteenth century. Kleinberg does not include this, probably because this program was limited to a rather specific group of public servants – nevertheless, the program functioned in a similar, top-down fashion, and can also be regarded as a precursor of the modern welfare state.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, labor organizations were founded and grew in membership and influence. They were fighting for better working conditions and higher wages and wanted the government to do something about their problems. Progressive ideas for social reform became more widespread, but it would not be until the 1930s that nationwide social legislation would be adopted. Advocates for labor reform and protection did win some victories for wage protection and unemployment benefits, but failed to get such programs implemented beyond a limited scope.⁷⁴

The Great Depression mobilized many citizens across all classes to demand programs that would ensure financial stability. Union activity soared, but also other groups, like older Americans, began fighting for a government pension. Responding to public opinion, politicians from all political parties adopted a positive stance on welfare policies, but mostly so the Democrats. With Franklin D. Roosevelt as their candidate, they gained strong majorities in 1932 and 1933. With his New Deal program, FDR wanted relief, recovery, and reform. The New Deal would be one of America's most expansive collection of welfare programs, some of which survive to this day. One of the most important expansions of the welfare state was the Social Security Act.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Charles Noble, *Welfare As We Knew It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 52.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 54-78.

With the New Deal, the United States got a welfare state that had taken decades to take shape in Europe. However, compared to other capitalist countries, the American welfare state was still limited. Key elements, such as a social insurance program for all working citizens, was not part of the plans. Faced with opposition from several groups and institutions limiting the possibilities for further reform, FDR could not create a welfare state of European proportions. Indeed, it appears the president himself often put the brakes on other reforms, keeping the country from moving too far to the left.⁷⁶

The New Deal paved the way for further reform and expansions of the welfare state. Many of Roosevelt's programs for relief and recovery were not necessary beyond the Great Depression, but it had also created new institutions and programs that were upheld. Later administrations have built upon the New Deal's foundation, making its programs more expansive, eliminating discriminating parts and adding new measures. Examples of such efforts are Harry S. Truman's Fair Deal, John F. Kennedy's New Frontier, and Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. In each of these cases, the president's proposals were never fully realized because of opposition in Congress and society.⁷⁷

When Ronald Reagan entered the White House in 1981, the dominance of modern social liberalism ended. Reagan was determined to bring about a shift in the national consensus concerning the welfare state and decrease the role of the federal government in the economy. He promised to lower government spending and taxes, and decrease government control. All this was part of Reagan's plan to bring about economic recovery and make the welfare state smaller. After analyzing the statistics of Reagan's economic policies, Wallace Peterson concludes that the administration only shrank "the borders of the welfare state", not affecting its core. Contrary to what he promised, government

⁷⁶ Ibid., 54-78.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 100-101.

spending actually increased over this period. Other cuts caused the welfare state to be aimed even more at the middle class. Reagan's policies did change the composition of the welfare state, but its most notable effect was the reformation of the tax system. The burden of taxation was transferred from businesses to individuals, leading to greater income inequality.⁷⁸

Under George H.W. Bush, taxes were increased, and welfare spending grew as the result of a mild recession. Unlike Bush, who did not propose any major reforms for welfare, his successor, Bill Clinton, signed new legislation reforming some parts of the welfare system. He also proposed an ambitious health care reform package, which was defeated in Congress. For the first time, a president proposed legislation that would require some form of universal health insurance. Faced with opposition from both parties, Clinton's plan stranded. Although George W. Bush's legacy has come to be determined by his handling of the War on Terrorism, he also pushed through some welfare reform. The Bush administration lowered taxes and introduced faith-based welfare initiatives. Bush Jr. did not actively seek to change the core of the welfare state.⁷⁹

In 2008, Barack Obama was elected president while the world was sliding into a new recession. Obama, a liberal Democrat, promised an ambitious recovery program that would revitalize the economy through reforms. One of the key proposals of the president's campaign was a health care reform bill, dubbed the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Plan*. Because this proposal is the subject of the case study in the next chapter, it will be discussed in detail later.

⁷⁸ Peterson, *Transfer Spending*, 95-131.

⁷⁹ Farber, *Modern Conservatism*, 237-40.

Ideology

Before turning to an analysis of American opposition to the welfare state, it is necessary to look at the rationale of its proponents. Opponents have often accused welfare state supporters of being socialists, but it will be demonstrated that this is not true. Looking at the development of the welfare state, it becomes clear that it was expanded most when Democrats were in power. Often, though not always, these reforms were spearheaded by liberals. But *liberal* or *liberalism* is a concept that needs further explanation before moving on.

Many Americans believe that their country stands in a long liberal tradition. Harvard professor Louis Hartz argued that the American political tradition is liberal because the U.S. never had a feudal system.⁸⁰ The absence of such a static social order contributed to a political atmosphere of consensus – even when political conflict occasionally upset the political climate.⁸¹ According to the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., this consensus allowed a liberal like FDR to claim he was a conservative, and a conservative like Herbert Hoover to say he was liberal. Nevertheless, different – and sometimes conflicting – political ideologies exist, even as most agree on the fundamentals of American politics.⁸²

Different people have different ideas about what exactly American liberalism means. If Hartz argues that every American is a liberal, and if other authors claim Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society was a liberal idea, then certainly *liberal* cannot mean the same thing in these two cases if president Johnson faced opposition from legislators and a

⁸⁰ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (Harvest, 1992).

⁸¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "Liberalism in America: A Note to Europeans," *The Politics of Hope* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1962), 63-64.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 65.

significant part of the population. In Hartz's case, liberalism in the American political tradition and American society at large means that Americans were truly free.

Unrestrained by a feudal history, all citizens – according to the author, but contradicted by the hard reality of slavery and racial discrimination – were equal and had equal freedoms, including a freedom from government. The political history of the United States was almost a *tabula rasa*, and the American spirit for advancement and social progress explains its liberal character. However, Hartz's interpretation of freedom would not allow the allocation of much power and responsibility from the hands of the individual to the government, because it would make the citizen less free.

A useful narrower definition is provided by political scientist William Gerber, who defines liberalism “as the belief that individuals and institutions, including governments, should so act – or refrain from acting – as to liberate as many individuals as possible from as many shackles as possible, without overturning basic social machinery.”⁸³ Schlesinger gives some further specifications, arguing that the attitude towards the role of the state and civil freedoms are not defining principles. He argues that liberals utilize human intelligence to bring about social and economic progress, whereas conservatives oppose such deliberate reforms because they upset the distribution of wealth and power, unless sufficient and persuasive intellectual evidence suggests reform is necessary.⁸⁴

The New Deal has been characterized as a liberal program, but others have refuted this. Among others, historian Richard Hofstadter argues that FDR and his New Deal did not stand in the tradition of the liberal reformers who went before him – the Progressives – although there were some similarities. Like the Progressives, Roosevelt's administration used the state's power to distribute wealth and meet citizens' economic needs.

⁸³ William Gerber, *American Liberalism* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 35.

⁸⁴ Schlesinger Jr., *Hope*, 66-67.

Nevertheless, there are stark differences compared to previous reform movements. For the first time, the reform party was at the helm of the country during a time of depression. FDR took office in the midst of a dire economic recession and was responsible for solving its problems. Whereas the Progressives had acted on their ideological convictions, New Deal reformers acted out of necessity. Indeed, Hofstadter argues that Roosevelt's economic policies lacked any consistent rationality, but was mostly of a pragmatic nature: a response to circumstances, and not a carefully thought-out comprehensive plan for reform. Thus, the New Deal really was an "attitude", and not a "philosophy".⁸⁵

That a significant part of New Deal policies would survive beyond the Great Depression was not foreseen or intended. But the New Deal's legacy is not limited to the programs that survive; it also changed the nature of American liberalism by establishing a pragmatic approach to liberal ideas. Whereas early liberals were very idealistic – even utopian, thinkers influenced by the pragmatics of the New Deal reshaped the ideology, eliminating many of its utopian ideas, thereby making it more realistic.⁸⁶ Examples of such persons include the influential liberal theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, John Maynard Keynes, who argued that government power should be used to steer economic markets.

Choosing liberalism

Several more or less liberal presidents occupied the White House during the twentieth century, so the question remains why Americans accepted rising taxes and a bigger federal government. Historian H.W. Brands analyzed American liberalism from after the Second World War to its "death", which he effectually locates at the end of the Cold War. Brands sees a parallel between domestic and foreign policy. With the Cold War, Americans relied

⁸⁵ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), 278-323.

⁸⁶ Schlesinger Jr., *Hope*, 69-70.

on their government to protect them from external threats. They readily accepted national security policies that increased the size of government and its influence in their lives. This could explain their readiness to also accept government expansion and reform in the domestic realm. When the Cold War ended, public opinion on government intervention also swung back, and more moderate Democrats and Republicans were elected.⁸⁷

Like Hofstadter, Brands characterizes American liberalism more as circumstantial opportunism than as acting out of a strong conviction and ideology. However, it is not just liberals that are pragmatic, conservatives act in a very similar manner. As has already been discussed earlier, conservative presidents like Reagan and Bush Jr. accepted liberal policies already put in place, and even improved and further entrenched them.

It is plausible that Americans accepted the federal government's growing influence in domestic affairs because they also accepted it in foreign affairs. Nevertheless, alternative theories could supplement Brands's. Another reason why Americans finally allowed their government to solve society's problems might be that they realized that individualism and the free market had simply failed to provide adequate solutions. Slavery, and later racial discrimination, had to be ended by the government, the right to vote, better working conditions, a minimum wage, and many other provisions for citizens all were finally enacted and enforced by the government. Thus, the acceptance of more state power since the 1930s also indicates that Americans have a greater trust in government and have come to acknowledge that maybe the state is not their enemy.

Kazin often stresses the importance of the underlying ideology that drives Leftists and fuels their activism. However, ideals are not always fully attainable in the reality of a democracy. Consensus has to be found somehow, otherwise democracy itself comes under

⁸⁷ H.W. Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

threat.⁸⁸ Brands and Hofstadter focus more on the pragmatic reality of liberalism in politics, where liberals eventually have to reach some kind of consensus with elected officials subscribing to other ideologies. Ideology and pragmatism do not necessarily exclude each other, but pragmatism might prove more durable in the political arena than raw ideology.

Challenging the nanny state

From its conception, the American welfare state has been challenged. As was described earlier, especially programs intended to expand the welfare state, such as Johnson's Great Society, faced a lot of opposition. One of the central challenges has been that it fundamentally clashes with the principles behind the American state. Almost every expansion of the welfare state also meant an increase in government spending – often requiring an increase in taxes. Oftentimes, it is said that Americans oppose the welfare state because it is a European invention, or because they prefer a small government. In his empiric study analyzing American opposition to the welfare state, Yale professor Martin Gilens concludes that those are not actually the main reasons for opposition. Indeed, he argues that support for the welfare state is actually high and that the “public consistently expresses a desire for more government effort, and higher levels of spending, for almost every aspect of [it].”⁸⁹

Convincingly, he argues that Americans oppose the idea of *welfare*, but actually show a lot of support for the individual programs. This seems to indicate they are aware of the positive consequences of social programs, while also wanting to maintain the image of

⁸⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Democratic Distemper,” *The Public Interest* 41 (Fall 1975): 36-37.

⁸⁹ Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago University Press, 1999), 1-2.

a tough, individualistic identity.⁹⁰ Gilens analyzed public perception of the welfare state and ultimately concludes that much opposition is essentially race-motivated. He blames the media for distorting the reality by focusing on the undeserving poor and disproportionately using Blacks in their stories in pictures, thus creating the – factually incorrect – idea that colored Americans intentionally steal from social programs. Blacks are perceived as lazy, and especially people who have never depended on welfare see it as a sort of permanent condition, rather than a means of helping people get back on their feet.⁹¹

The reason why the media misrepresent African Americans as undeserving recipients of government assistance is because journalists are influenced by persistent racial stereotypes. Gilens observes a vicious circle: journalists are biased by stereotypes and create biased materials, these media products further entrench the stereotypes, which in turn leads other journalists to also highlight the race issue, *et cetera*.⁹² Gilens's observations are interesting and startling. In the next chapter, current opposition to president Obama's welfare reform will be analyzed, and in the final conclusion Gilens's arguments will be revisited to see if they hold up in the current debates.

Conclusion

The American welfare state came into being as a response to a number of social problems. Early examples of social programs are veterans' and widows' pensions. The Great Depression brought president Roosevelt to the White House, who proposed a series of ambitious programs designed to get the country back to work and revive the economy. He

⁹⁰ Ibid., chapters 1 and 2, pp 11-59.

⁹¹ Ibid., 81-82.

⁹² Ibid., chapters 5 and 6, pp 102-53.

called his collection of government-run programs the New Deal. Although most were no longer necessary after the economy recovered, some programs survived. Later Democratic presidents proposed changes and expansions, but Republicans also sustained the welfare state, and in some cases even enlarged it. Even though libertarian thinkers might oppose the growth of federal government that came hand-in-hand with the expansion of social programs, they have not been able to successfully keep the public from supporting it.

The welfare state developed rapidly with Democratic presidents, but usually did not evolve as quickly with their Republic counterparts in office. With the end of the Cold War, it appears that liberalism also lost support. Nevertheless, the ascendancy of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2009 might indicate a renewed interest in social liberalism. In the next chapter, his major health reform proposal will serve as a case study to analyze the modern Christian Right.

ObamaCare

The Christian Right and the Obama administration's proposal for health reform.

“I think [health insurance] should be a right. . . . For my mother to die of cancer at the age of 53, and having to spend the last months of her life in a hospital room arguing with insurance companies, because they are saying that this may be a pre-existing condition and they don't have to pay her treatment; there is something fundamentally wrong about that.”⁹³

As a candidate, Barack Obama frequently referred to people like his mother, who did not have access to healthcare because they were uninsured. Obama made healthcare reform one of the priorities for his first term in office. With over 50 million Americans lacking healthcare insurance and a struggling economy, he promised to reform the system to make it less wasteful and fairer by increasing government control of insurance companies and providing a public option for low-income, uninsured Americans. During the election campaign of 2008, healthcare was one of the topics that were discussed frequently. Most Democratic candidates agreed that healthcare should be reformed and that something should be done to make it accessible for more Americans, but Republicans attacked the plan, calling it socialist and liberal, accusing it of increasing government interference and increasing costs.

This chapter presents Obama's healthcare plan and the attacks leveled against it as a means of discovering whether the Christian Right is still – or again – a political force to be reckoned with. The goal of this analysis is to see whether there are any organizations

⁹³ Barack H. Obama, “C-SPAN: Second 2008 Presidential Debate (Full Video),” *YouTube*. October 8, 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkBqLBSu-o4> (accessed May 29, 2012).

that represent distinctly Christian conservative positions, distinguishing themselves from the broader conservative right.

Change we can believe in

As 2008 progressed, it became increasingly clear that the U.S. economy was quickly tumbling into a recession, with the global economy following on its heels. President George W. Bush's main concern since 2002 had been the War on Terrorism, and even though he tried to stay the downward direction of the economy, he acted too late. The end of his second term in office was fast approaching, and the contest for the presidency was well underway. In both the Democratic and Republican races, the financial crisis played an important role. Candidates from both parties presented their solutions to create jobs, curb government spending, reduce the deficit, eliminate wasteful spending, reform government departments, *et cetera*.⁹⁴

Healthcare reform was another key issue in this campaign. It had become clear that spending on Medicare and Medicaid would exceed revenues within a decade, making the programs unsustainable in their current form.⁹⁵ Something had to be done: reforming the program and making it less costly, raising taxes to cover the increasing costs, or a combination. Most of the Democratic candidates favored the latter option, while the Republicans looked for solutions that would make the programs sustainable without having to raise taxes.

As the primary season progressed, the field of available candidates for both parties narrowed. Finally, after the party conventions, John McCain with Sarah Palin represented

⁹⁴ Cf. "Candidates on the Issues," *New York Times*. <http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/issues/index.html> (accessed June 11, 2012).

⁹⁵ "America's Seniors and Health Insurance Reform: Protecting Coverage and Strengthening Medicare," *HealthReform.gov*. <http://healthreform.gov/reports/seniors/index.html> (accessed May 31, 2012).

the GOP, and Barack Obama with Joe Biden was on the Democratic ticket. For the first time, an African American had a good chance of becoming the president of the United States. In the months leading up to the presidential elections on November 4, 2008, the two candidates further laid out their plans for economic recovery and reform. The presidential nominees crossed swords in three debates, organized by the media. They explained their plans and ideas on how to fix the economy, foreign affairs, climate change, and healthcare. In the second debate, broadcast on October 8, 2008, debate moderator Tom Brokaw asked the candidates whether they believed healthcare is a privilege, responsibility, or a right for Americans. John McCain answers that he thinks it is a responsibility. People and businesses are responsible for getting healthcare insurance and government is responsible only to the extent that it facilitates obtaining insurance. McCain promised to give everyone a five thousand dollar tax break, which could then be used to buy insurance, even across state lines. Obama, on the other hand, said he considered access to healthcare a right, and therefore all big businesses should insure their employees and parents should insure their children. He even proposed a fine for companies and people who would not comply. Obama further intended to reduce the number of uninsured by providing them with a public option, a government-run insurance plan for low-income families and individuals.⁹⁶

Barack Obama's promise of change in America found greater support among voters than McCain's message. On November 4, he defeated McCain by a wide margin of almost ten million votes in the popular vote. In January 2009 he was inaugurated as the forty-fourth president of the United States. That same month, his team began to work on a

⁹⁶ "The Issues: Health Care," *CNN*. <http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/issues/issues.healthcare.html> (accessed June 11, 2012). Cf. "The Second Presidential Debate," *New York Times*, October 7, 2008. <http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/debates/second-presidential-debate.html> (accessed June 11, 2012).

plan to overhaul the healthcare system and deliver on the promises he had made in the campaign.

Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

Early in 2009, the Obama administration began working on a healthcare reform bill that would regulate the market, make health insurance a right and not a commodity, and reduce the cost of expensive government programs. The insurance market was very deregulated, which had led to rather unfair practices in the eyes of the White House Democrats. Several companies had repeatedly increased their premiums and reported record profits, even as the national economy was in recession and GDP had decreased. Insurance companies paid record bonuses to their CEOs, even as thousands of uninsured decided not to buy insurance because the premiums were so high. The administration's reform bill would place additional oversight on companies to make sure premiums were fair.⁹⁷

The bill also intended to eliminate coverage caps and the pre-existing condition requirements used by many companies. Many insurance companies limited the dollar value of lifetime or annual coverage, thus making it impossible for low-income families to pay treatment for severe and long-term diseases or disabilities. Another discriminatory feature of the healthcare system was that many companies refused to insure people, including children, with a pre-existing condition, which even included such minor diseases as hay fever and bronchitis. Millions of Americans had lost their insurance after being diagnosed with severe diseases like cancer. To Obama and his team, such selfish, profit-

⁹⁷ "Insurance Companies Prosper, Families Suffer: Our Broken Healthcare System," *HealthReform.gov*. <http://healthreform.gov/reports/insuranceprospers/index.html> (accessed May 31, 2012).

oriented practices were unacceptable, and would be forbidden under the new healthcare laws.⁹⁸

As an African American, President Obama must have been aware of the many problems among minorities, where unemployment and poverty rates often are higher. For African Americans and Hispanics, the proportion of uninsured is much higher than among whites, while they are also more likely to suffer from medical conditions.⁹⁹ The government's report says that reform is necessary, although there are no specific details as to how the disparities are to be eliminated.

One of the most controversial features of the law is the insurance mandate. This is a requirement for employers to insure their employees, and also includes an individual mandate, meaning that every individual must be insured. Such mandates have been in place in several states, but never on the federal level. Then-president Clinton included mandates in his reform plan, as did his wife in her healthcare reform plan, which she propagated during the 2008 campaign. Although this part of the proposal faced opposition among the population, it made its way into the final bill.

On September 17, 2009, the healthcare reform bill was proposed under the name "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act" (PPACA). After months of deliberations and amendments, the act was finally passed and signed into law by the president on March 23, 2010. The new laws did not all come into effect immediately. The new changes will take effect over a couple of years. Some parts of the law have been challenged in court. Several cases involve the mandates, which by at least one federal court have been declared unconstitutional, even as others have upheld it. In May 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court

⁹⁸ "Coverage Denied: How the Current Health Insurance System Leaves MILLIONS Behind," *HealthReform.gov*. http://healthreform.gov/reports/denied_coverage/index.html (accessed May 31, 2012).

⁹⁹ "Health Disparities: A Case for Closing the Gap," *HealthReform.gov*. <http://healthreform.gov/reports/healthdisparities/index.html> (accessed May 31, 2012).

heard arguments for three days regarding the constitutionality of the Act. If the Court rules several of the Act's provisions as unconstitutional, it would severely impede the goals that the Obama administration envisioned.¹⁰⁰

A new progressivism?

By friend and foe alike, Barack Obama was hailed or reviled as a new progressive, eager to use his powers as president of the United States to move the country in a new liberal direction, aiming to undo the old-fashioned conservative ideas of his predecessors and produce change. As a candidate, Obama tried to appeal to the political center and his wide-margin victory certainly suggests a significant part of the population could identify with his ideals. Writing in 2009, Pulitzer Prize winning commentator Jon Meacham suggested that Obama would inaugurate a new era of American political practice, so that decades later people would speak of a "before Obama" and an "after Obama." However, he also notes that this might be too idealistic. Like so many politicians before him, the president might be forced to abandon some of his ideals and replace them with more pragmatic solutions. Many regard Obama as an ideological purist, but the realities of Washington politics could prove too unforgiving for his liberal convictions.¹⁰¹

Meacham compared Obama to Reagan, who was also forced to reach across the aisle and broker deals with his political opponents. However frustrating this might have been for his conservative base, Reagan possessed the remarkable ability to spin such actions and concessions as actual victories for the conservative cause, thus keeping his supporters connected. Meacham suggests that Obama might prove to be very similar to

¹⁰⁰ Bill Maers, "Supreme Court Divided Over Health Care Mandate," *CNN*, March 27, 2012. <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/27/justice/scotus-health-care/index.html> (accessed June 11, 2012).

¹⁰¹ Jon Meacham, "Prologue: The Age of Obama," *A Long Time Coming*, ed. Evan Thomas (Philadelphia: PublicAffairs, 2009), vii-xv.

Reagan in this respect. In the political arena, it will be difficult to be a hardline liberal, but with his proven rhetorical qualities he could still prevent disillusionment among his supporters while reaching out to centrist and even right-wing politicians.¹⁰²

At least during the first two years of his first term as president, Obama was blessed with a solid base of political support. After eight years of Bush Jr., the electorate had decidedly voted for the Democrats, giving them a strong majority in both houses of Congress. With the congressional mid-term elections of 2010, apparent disillusionment with the Democrats' successes returned control of the House to the Republicans and gave them more seats in the Senate – though still a minority.

Although Democrats do not all share Barack Obama's political ideals, the Democratic majorities certainly made it possible to implement his policies with few concessions. In the case of the PPACA, the Democratic majority was able to pass the legislation with the help of two Independents; no Republicans voted in favor of the Act.¹⁰³

The healthcare reform proposals certainly reflect some ideological ideas although there are also pragmatic elements. The fact remains that politicians across the spectrum conceded that healthcare reform was necessary. Skyrocketing costs threatened the sustainability of several programs and statistics proved the disparities between ethnic groups existed. The way in which Obama proposes to fix these issues, however, shows a distinct ideological framework. The president's seeks to expand the federal government's involvement in, and control of, the health insurance market. New requirements and regulations for insurance companies are intended to fix these issues. New taxes would

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ "U.S. Senate Roll Call Votes 111th Congress – 1st Session – On Passage of the Bill (H.R. 3590 as Amended)," *United States Senate*, December 24, 2009. http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=111&session=1&vote=00396 (accessed June 11, 2012).

make programs sustainable. A government mandate makes health insurance mandatory for all citizens, obviously designed to eliminate disparities between age groups, ethnicities, and income classes. Such a use of government power clearly falls within the boundaries of the definition of liberalism set forth in the previous chapter. Liberalism was defined there “as the belief that individuals and institutions, including governments, should so act – or refrain from acting – as to liberate as many individuals as possible from as many shackles as possible, without overturning basic social machinery.” This central idea – using government power to bring about healthcare equality – illustrates the liberal nature of president Obama’s health reform plans. As will be shown later, this is also one of the central points with which the opposition took issue – almost all opposition to the plans center on the claim that this is a “government take-over” of healthcare.

On other issues, Obama has also taken a markedly different position than his conservative predecessor. The president has been making a case for same-sex partnerships and has also expressed taken a more progressive position on issues like abortion, euthanasia, women’s rights, and the economy. Immediately after taking office in January of 2009, the president set out to revert some of the policies passed under Bush Jr. This further alienated his political opponents and led to many stalemates in Congress, causing commentators and writers to call the 111th and 112th Congresses “do-nothing Congresses”, comparing them to the infamous 48th Congress of 1947.¹⁰⁴ On issues considered important by the Christians, the administration has taken a decidedly different stance than George W. Bush. This has created a general sense of disappointment with, and alienation from the president. John Piper, an evangelical Baptist minister from Minneapolis, expressed his

¹⁰⁴ Dana Milbank, “Our Do-Almost-Nothing Congress,” *The Washington Post*, May 2, 2012. http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-big-talk-no-action-congress/2012/05/02/gIQAtOu7uT_story.html (accessed June 11, 2012).

concern about the president's decision to authorize abortion, also writing that "some of us wept for joy at your inauguration."¹⁰⁵

Themes of opposition

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is by no means a popular piece of legislation. Although many Americans recognized the need for reform, popular support for the Act has only run low, ever since its inception. Many democratic representatives and senators were grilled by their constituents on why they supported the measures, and thousands of opinion pieces have been published about the reform bill. Because so many of its provisions are only now taking effect, the Act has been on the public's mind since it was first proposed in 2009, and will likely remain a divisive issue unless its opponents are reconciled, or (parts of) the law repealed. Among conservatives, the PPACA is very unpopular, and several recurrent themes emerge from the sources. Because the goal of this chapter is to say something about the modern Christian Right, the sources discussed below were selected especially because they fall within the category.

One issue raised by almost all opponents of the Act is its constitutionality. This is obviously not a specifically Christian argument, but the fact that it is brought up by Christian organizations and think tanks shows that the movement belongs to a broader conservative movement and shares many of its ideas. Alan Keyes, a Roman Catholic Black conservative scholar and presidential candidate, argues that the Obama take-over of healthcare represents a certain form of slavery. Since the Act includes mandates, the individual's ability to choose is taken from him, and he is obliged to act in a certain

¹⁰⁵ John Piper, "No Mr. President. Killing Is Killing No Matter What We Call It," *Desiring God*, May 13, 2009. <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/no-mr-president-killing-is-killing-no-matter-what-we-call-it> (accessed June 11, 2012).

manner – i.e. maintain a certain condition of health – as dictated by the government.¹⁰⁶ In a podcast about the Act – often referred to as “ObamaCare” by its opponents – Keyes argues that it is evidence of Obama’s totalitarian tendencies. The government’s meddling with healthcare is in his view similar to the Communism of the Soviet Union. Since Communism failed, ObamaCare is doomed to fail as well. Access to medical services would be restricted by “political-, party-, and bureaucratic gatekeepers” and liberty would be threatened by the abolition of choice.¹⁰⁷

It is interesting to see how personal liberty also becomes part of the religious rhetoric. Of course, liberty is one of the “inalienable rights” with which all men are “endowed by their Creator.” For Christian conservatives, any limitation placed on this liberty is seen as a departure from God’s own plan for mankind, as well as a departure from what the founders intended. Indeed, the idea that the Constitution establishes a Christian nation, and that the intention of the founders was to base the United States on explicitly Christian values is quite prevalent among the American population. A survey conducted in 2007 showed that such a belief is shared by more than half of the population, with support for this idea running especially high among evangelicals and Republicans.¹⁰⁸ Not all leading organizations share such a view, or do not refer to it. The conservative *Heritage Foundation* published a *Guide to the Constitution*, containing detailed analyses of the Constitution and its amendments, as well as a number of essays on general principles and the document’s history. Explaining the background of the supreme law of

¹⁰⁶ Alan Keyes, “Health Care – What the Revolt to Freedom Requires,” *Alan Keyes Is Loyal to Liberty*. August 25, 2009. <http://loyaltoliberty.com/?p=94> (accessed June 7, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Alan Keyes, “Stop Obama’s Totalitarian Health System Takeover,” *Alan Keyes Is Loyal to Liberty*. August 3, 2009. <http://www.podbean.com/podcast-detail?pid=41386> (accessed June 7, 2012).

¹⁰⁸ Andrea Stone, “Most Think Founders Wanted Christian USA,” *USA Today*, September 13, 2007. http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-11-amendment_N.htm (accessed June 11, 2012).

the land, the authors limit themselves to analyzing the laws from a legal and historical perspective, not even once referring to the Bible or Christian theology.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps a more distinctively conservative Christian position against the PPACA is the disappointment that it requires insurance plans to cover contraceptives and abortifacients (drugs that induce abortion). As was discussed in the first chapter, the strong anti-abortion position distinguished the Christian Right from broader conservatism. Today, it remains an issue of great importance for Christian conservatives. According to them, the Bible clearly shows that life begins at conception. Obviously, such an assumption leads to the conclusion that abortion means the ending of a human life – murder. Under the PPACA, premiums paid by Christian conservatives could also be used to cover contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs, which is why it caused a stir.

Several organizations and think tanks write about this controversial issue. The *Family Research Council* (FRC) writes in a press release that this mandate “violates the consciences of millions.”¹¹⁰ In many other articles and opinion pieces on its website it rejects Obama’s reform because it funds abortions. The *Christian Coalition* also reported that the PPACA funds abortions, and calls on its supporters to take action to “repeal ObamaCare today.”¹¹¹ In his podcast, Alan Keyes also touches upon the subject, arguing that billions of dollars that were supposed to “preserve health” are used instead to

¹⁰⁹ “The Heritage Guide to the Constitution,” *The Heritage Foundation*. <http://www.heritage.org/constitution/> (accessed June 11, 2012).

¹¹⁰ “Press Release: FRC Opposes HHS Mandated Coverage of Abortifacients Under ObamaCare,” *Family Research Council*. August 1, 2011. <http://www.frc.org/newsroom/frc-opposes-hhs-mandated-coverage-of-abortifacients-under-obamacare> (accessed June 7, 2012) and “ObamaCare: Home of the \$1 Abortions,” *Family Research Council*. <http://www.frc.org/washingtonupdate/obamacare-home-of-the-1-abortions> (accessed June 7, 2012).

¹¹¹ “Turns Out ObamaCare Funds Abortion After All (Just Like Pro-Lifers Predicted),” *The Christian Coalition of America*. July 14, 2010. http://www.cc.org/blog/turns_out_obamacare_funds_abortion_after_all_just_prolifers_predicted (accessed June 7, 2012).

“produce death.”¹¹² Not surprisingly, the *National Right to Life Committee* also aims to repeal the PPACA and in the process also evict Barack Obama from the White House.¹¹³

Interestingly, the conservative *Heritage Foundation* think tank does not dismiss the administration’s healthcare reform merely *because* it funds abortions and contraceptives. It does, however, focus on the unconstitutional nature of these provisions. It takes issue with the notion that the government mandates coverage of abortion and contraception, also forcing people to comply with this if they have moral objections. In numerous publications, *Heritage* scholars argue such a mandate violates the first amendment of the constitution. Thus, for *Heritage*, this issue is related to the constitutionality challenge of the PPACA. The government provided a waiver for religious organizations, but because the definition is so narrow, only churches are exempt from funding abortions in such an indirect fashion. Other employers are not so lucky, even if they and all of their employees are moral objectors.¹¹⁴ As expected, the *Family Research Council*¹¹⁵ and the *Christian Coalition*¹¹⁶ discuss the same issue. The latter even reports another measure that would

¹¹² Keyes, “Totalitarian Takeover”, *ibid*.

¹¹³ See *National Right to Life Political Action Committee* <<http://www.nrlpac.org>>. Also see “Key Points on Pro-Abortion Provisions in Obama-Backed Health Care Bills,” *National Right to Life Committee*. November 3, 2009. <http://www.nrlc.org/AHC/TalkingPointsAbortionHealthCare.pdf> (accessed June 7, 2012).

¹¹⁴ Chuck Donovan, “HHS’s New Health Guidelines Trample on Conscience,” *The Heritage Foundation*. August 2, 2011. <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/08/hhss-new-health-guidelines-trample-on-conscience> (accessed June 7, 2012) and “Obamacare Anti-Conscience Mandate: An Assault on the Constitution,” *The Heritage Foundation*. February 17, 2012. <http://www.heritage.org/research/factsheets/2012/02/obamacare-anti-conscience-mandate-an-assault-on-the-constitution> (accessed June 7, 2012).

¹¹⁵ “Join Nearly 3,000 Pastors in the Fight for Religious Liberty,” *Family Research Council*. <http://www.frc.org/watchmenonthewall/join-nearly-3000-pastors-in-the-fight-for-religious-liberty> (accessed June 7, 2012).

¹¹⁶ Jim Backlin, “Obama: America’s First Dictator?” *The Christian Coalition of America*. February 13, 2012. http://www.cc.org/blog/obama_america%E2%80%99s_first_dictator (accessed June 7, 2012).

force doctors and nurses to perform abortions even if they have moral objections.¹¹⁷ *FRC* and *Christian Coalition* use the abortion issue as another argument against the Act, while for *Heritage* it constitutes a sub argument of the constitutionality issue.

On a related theme, the organizations and opinion makers also suggest that the federal government's regulations and recommendations could influence people's decisions when the end of their life comes near. Since further care would be expensive, government incentives might push people in the direction of euthanasia, which is also condemned by Christian conservatives as a morally wrong practice.¹¹⁸

Interestingly, most of these sources seem to cater to a specific public. From the texts, it is clear that a certain position on the issues is pre-supposed. None of the organizations cited above explain *why* abortion or euthanasia is wrong; they suppose the reader to share the assumption that they *are* morally wrong. This indicates that there must be a certain well-defined group of supporters that these websites aim at. When attacking the PPACA from a pro-life perspective, these organizations and individuals clearly use a Christian perception of morality to argue against Obama's reforms. Most of the other arguments are of a more general nature and challenge the expansion of government and the proposed tax increases.

Different think tanks, organizations, commentators, and news outlets raise many of the same themes. The *Evangelical Outpost* posted an opinion piece against universal healthcare, synthesizing many of the Christian conservative arguments mentioned

¹¹⁷ "Obama Admin Trying to Eliminate Doctor and Nurse Conscience Protections on Abortion," *The Christian Coalition of America*. March 21, 2011. http://www.cc.org/blog/obama_admin_trying_eliminate_doctor_and_nurse_conscience_protections_abortion (accessed June 7, 2012).

¹¹⁸ "Death Panels' Finding Their Way Back Into ObamaCare," *The Christian Coalition of America*. December 28, 2010. http://www.cc.org/blog/quotdeath_panelsquot_finidng_their_way_back_obamacare (accessed June 7, 2012).

above.¹¹⁹ *Christianity Today* published articles of a similar nature, although there the moral and ethical issues are the most important ones, with less emphasis on the legal objections to health reform.¹²⁰ To date, no articles in favor of Obama's reform have been posted on either website.

A multi-million organization, *Focus on the Family* provides Christians with a wealth of online information on family values. Under U.S. law, the organization is not permitted to endorse specific candidates, but it undoubtedly belongs to the Christian conservative right in America. As with the *Evangelical Outpost* and *Christianity Today*, the articles on this website focus primarily on pro-life concerns about the PPACA and the freedom of religion. Being prohibited from making political statements, *Focus on the Family* points out the issues that should be of concern to Christians, and then exhorts them to "pray for a miracle." No accusations are made towards Obama, and repeal of the Act is not explicitly mentioned, but it is nevertheless clear that the organization does not support such reform and would prefer Christians not to support it.¹²¹

A Pew survey conducted in November of 2009 raises some interesting questions. On many of the Christian think tank websites, abortion is mentioned as one of the main reasons for opposition of the PPACA. However, the Pew poll showed that abortion ranks

¹¹⁹ Dustin R. Steeve, "A Conservative Argument From Principle Against Universal Healthcare," *The Evangelical Outpost*. September 23, 2009. <http://evangelicaloutpost.com/archives/2009/09/principle-against-universal-healthcare.html> (accessed June 8, 2012).

¹²⁰ See articles listed under "ObamaCare," *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/search.html?searchall=&query=obamacare&x=0&y=0> (accessed June 8, 2012) and "Healthcare reform," *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/search.html?searchall=&query=healthcare+reform&x=0&y=0> (accessed June 8, 2012).

¹²¹ Jim Daly, "Notre Dame Sues – What Can You Do," *Focus on the Family Online Communities – Finding Home*. May 22, 2012. http://www.focusonlinecommunities.com/blogs/Finding_Home/2012/05/22/notre-dame-sues--what-you-can-do (accessed June 8, 2012) and Jim Daly, "High Cost of Healthcare Reform," *Focus on the Family Online Communities – Finding Home*. August 3, 2009. http://www.focusonlinecommunities.com/blogs/Finding_Home/2009/08/03/high-cost-of-healthcare-reform (accessed June 8, 2012).

very low on the list of reasons why Americans oppose the Act. Only 3% of Americans mentioned it as a main reason, while Pew noted that this percentage among protestant Evangelicals and white Catholics was slightly higher. Yet even for those groups, abortion was only one of several reasons and was ranked lower than concerns over government expansion, higher costs, a fear of losing one's health insurance, and the alleged coverage of illegal immigrants. The first three also appear in the sources discussed above, although the abortion issue appears to be represented disproportionately – at least when compared to public opinion. However, it must be noted that many of those articles were published after the survey was conducted. Unfortunately, to date Pew has not polled on the same issue again, so it is unclear whether these sources have been very successful in raising public awareness of this issue and making abortion a more important reason for opposition.¹²²

The rhetoric of opposition

Another feature to look at in these sources is the kind of rhetoric that is being used. As in any disagreement, the fight can get ugly. When conservatives began to take on Communism and liberals in the sixties and seventies, they often employed a language of fear. New liberal reforms would end the United States as they knew it and set the country on a path of decline, leading to its inevitable destruction. Similarly, Communism was framed as the ultimate enemy, to be avoided or defeated at all costs. Anyone in favor of increased government control was quickly labeled a socialist or a “commie”, and people rallied behind the movements of senator Joseph McCarthy and Barry Goldwater.¹²³

¹²² “Abortion Plays Small Role in Health Reform Opposition: Though Most Oppose Public Funding,” *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, November 19, 2009. <http://www.pewforum.org/Abortion/Abortion-Plays-Small-Role-in-Health-Reform-Opposition.aspx> (accessed June 12, 2012).

¹²³ Cf. chapters 3 and 4 in McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, pp. 111-86.

The arguments brought up by the sources quoted above are of a much more intellectual nature. Instead of quickly labeling and dismissing their opponents, a detailed analysis is provided of the points they take issue with. Elements of the Act are tested for their constitutionality and a properly argued case is presented against the plan. However, the accusative terms can also be found. The Christian Coalition does refer to the president as a dictator, although they explain this accusation by showing how he allegedly tramples the rights and provisions set forth in the Constitution. On a similar note, Alan Keyes also accuses Obama of totalitarianism *à la* Marx, but also offers his views on the administration's treatment of the constitution. In the age of multimedia, it is also easy to find examples of influential people who do not use such a thoughtful, studious manner of persuasion. Rush Limbaugh, the popular and well-known conservative talk-show host, accuses Obama of being a Marxist and denying that capitalism has made America great.¹²⁴ On other pages, his website features images of a medical symbol with the circumscription "United Socialist States of America." He also frequently refers to the Obama administration with the pejorative "regime."¹²⁵

Interestingly, the use of hyperbolic language to emphasize the dangers of the attacks leveled against the traditional American Christian values is nothing new. In a book analyzing the Christian Right's fight to realign the public school system according to their values, Fritz Detwiler writes that *Christian Coalition's* Pat Robertson frequently told "horror stories" on his *700 Club*, emphasizing and exaggerating certain elements of policy

¹²⁴ Rush Limbaugh, "President Obama's Osawatomie Speech was a Marxist Attack on America," *The Rush Limbaugh Show*. December 7, 2011. http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2011/12/07/president_obama_s_osawatomie_speech_was_a_marxist_attack_on_america (accessed June 8, 2012).

¹²⁵ Rush Limbaugh, "What Does the IRS Know About ObamaCare That We Don't?" *The Rush Limbaugh Show*. April 10, 2012. http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2012/04/10/what_does_the_irs_know_about_obamacare_that_we_dont (accessed June 8, 2012).

that he considered a danger to traditional values.¹²⁶ Indeed, he later notes how the *Coalition* followed *Heritage's* advice to train candidates and spokespersons to abandon the use of religious talk and theological absolutes, instead promoting the movement's agenda in "common sense terms."¹²⁷ Certainly, in the examples quoted above, *Heritage* shows itself to be a fine example of this, using argumentation that is not based on theological premises but focusing on legal and common sense issues.

Not all of the rhetoric employed by the PPACA's opponents is of a negative nature. There are also many examples available of much more positive formulations of (Christian) conservative ideology, which implicitly reveals the opposition to Obama's policies. The *Heritage Foundation* published a book titled *Saving the American Dream*. Obviously, the underlying assumption of its authors is that *the American Dream* (never specified) is somehow in jeopardy. *Heritage's* proposals are designed to "save" this dream – whatever their opponents do will likely further endanger it.¹²⁸ The *Family Research Council* uses similar language, stating that it "respects" life, whereas pro-abortionists "terminate" it. *FRC* therefore "defends" traditional values and the "sanctity" of life – framing its political action in a language of contest.¹²⁹ An evangelical political action committee is trying to mobilize Christians to vote in the presidential elections with the goal to "restoring hope and preserving liberty" – in short, to "restore America."¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Fritz Detwiler, *Standing on the Premises of God: The Christian Right's Fight to Redefine America's Public Schools* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 64.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹²⁸ Stuart M. Butler, Alison Acosta Fraser, and William W. Beach (eds.), *Saving the American Dream* (Washington: The Heritage Foundation, 2011).

¹²⁹ "Human Life & Bioethics," *Family Research Council*. <http://www.frc.org/life--bioethics> (accessed June 11, 2012).

¹³⁰ "About Us," *Restore America*. <http://restoreamerica.org/about/> (accessed June 11, 2012).

The Christian and Conservatism

As was explained in the first chapter, the ideology of the Christian Right was for the most part based on a broader form of American conservatism. Indeed, the rise of the Christian Right was seen in connection with the resurgence of conservatism in the decades after the Second World War. As has been shown in this chapter, Christian opponents of the health reform Act still use the same traditionally conservative arguments against expansion of government and increasing taxes. Occasionally, as with Rush Limbaugh, the old anti-Communism language is revived and applied to Obama's policies, but this is not the mainstream opposition to health reform.

On the other hand, conservatism has also given a place to values and opinions based on the Bible, even if all conservatives are not necessarily Christians. Rush Limbaugh, for example, is far from a traditional Christian or evangelical, but also challenges the administration's policies on abortion in relation to health reform, and on other issues such as same-sex marriage.

It appears thus that American conservatism is especially appealing to Christians because of its adoption of several issues that are considered important by many believers. Nevertheless, not all Christians are found in the conservative camp. As Michael Kazin writes in his study of the American Left, early progressives often used to Bible to justify their calls for reform. With the Social Gospel, protestant reformers sought to fix the problems that they saw in American society.¹³¹ Many Christians read the Bible in a different way than evangelicals do, with less emphasis on the so-called "literal interpretation" of Scripture, and with less rigidly theological ideas. For example, abortion is not an issue if one believes life does not begin at conception. Similarly, not everyone

¹³¹ Kazin, *Dreamers*, 75-76.

reads the Constitution as a document based on Christian ideology. State expansion is not by definition something going against religious doctrine. Taken together, these three premises could be used by less rigid Christians to justify their support of liberal reform – including Obama’s Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

The alternative

So is it possible to extract a coherent ideology or pragmatic alternative to Obama’s proposals from the sources discussed above? At the outset, it is important to note that most of the criticisms leveled against the health reform plan are rejections of the *complete Act* because *certain elements* are taken issue with. Assuming that conservatives and Obama-type liberals alike agree that reform is necessary, an alternative can be formulated based on a synthesis of the proposals made by the sources discussed before.

One of the central principles maintained in health reform is the *limitation of government*. The market should work free from government interference to establish the cost of medical services and the price of premiums, according to the workings of supply and demand. Furthermore, insurance companies and medical practitioners should have the freedom to make their own rules, or otherwise it is the responsibility of the states to regulate this – not the federal government. There are some exceptions to this rule – most conservatives agree the federal government should work towards creating a national market for insurances. The second, albeit related, issue is that of *personal choice*. The Constitution limits the powers of the federal government and establishes freedom and liberty for citizens. Americans should be *persuaded* but not *mandated* to buy insurance. When responsibility lies with the individual, no one should be dependent on a third party. Thus, the employer-based system of health insurances should be phased out. A third principal is that public funds should never be used to subsidize *immoral practices*.

According to Christian conservatives, this means that no money should go towards subsidizing abortions or abortifacients, contraceptives, and euthanasia. Furthermore, the first amendment should be interpreted as also safeguarding individuals with objections to any practices that go against their religious convictions. The final principle is *fiscal sustainability*. Medicare and Medicaid would be transformed into means-tested programs, whose output is only determined by revenues.

These fundamental principles of the Christian conservative alternative to Obama's health reform plan can be extracted from the sources that have been discussed. The *Heritage Foundation* published a reform plan for the American economy, titled *Saving the American Dream*. In this booklet it sets forth a conservative plan for reforming the federal government and limiting its size and spending. The plan does not refer to any specifically Christian values, but incorporates the other ones enumerated above.¹³²

The core of the movement

In this chapter, several sources have been analyzed that have published articles or opinion pieces about Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The goal of this was to find out whether the Christian Right still exists today in some form or other, and what organizations represent and safeguard its ideology. Several organizations and individuals have been discussed and also placed in relation to broader, not specifically Christian, conservatism. Several observations have already been made about these in the process, but some more can be made to work towards a final conclusion.

There are several large organizations that represent the ideological positions of the Christian Right. The *Heritage Foundation* does not classify itself as a Christian

¹³² Stuart M. Butler, Alison Acosta Fraser, and William W. Beach (eds.), *Saving the American Dream* (Washington: The Heritage Foundation, 2011).

organization, but Christian conservatives will certainly feel comfortable with its policy positions. *Heritage* says it also fights for traditional values and supports the traditional family structure. In the ObamaCare debate it focused its attacks on the unconstitutional nature of mandates eliminating constitutional protection for religious people who cannot comply with such demands on moral grounds. Its annual report for 2011 reveals that the potential influence is quite significant. Throughout the year, the organization published hundreds of reports and papers, advised politicians, organized lectures and debates, and received almost ten million visitors on their website.¹³³ The organization was founded in 1973 and has since grown to a considerable size. In its own words, it is the “most widely supported think tank in America, with some 700,000 active members.”¹³⁴ This is further proved by the fact that the organization received almost 74 million dollars in contributions in 2011.¹³⁵ *Heritage* policy advisers frequently testify in courts and before Congress, showing it is indeed considered influential.

The *Family Research Council* is another conservative think tank, although it has a narrower focus than *Heritage*, concerning itself mostly with issues relating to the family. *FRC* takes a definitively Christian position on most of these issues. It bases its pro-life ideas on the Bible and advocates a “Judeo-Christian worldview as the basis for a just, free, and stable society.”¹³⁶ *FRC* employs about a dozen research fellows, assisted by about fifty other employees. Like *Focus on the Family*, the *Family Research Council* cannot endorse political parties or candidates. Therefore, it also created a political action committee (PAC)

¹³³ *Saving the American Dream: The Heritage Foundation 2011 Annual Report* (Washington: The Heritage Foundation, 2012), 4. Via http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2012/pdf/thf_2011annrep_web.pdf (accessed June 12, 2012).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³⁶ “Mission Statement,” *Family Research Council*. <http://www.frc.org/mission-statement> (accessed June 12, 2012).

– *FRC Action* – which can financially support candidates and mobilize people. Like *Heritage*, and the *Christian Coalition*, this PAC publishes congressional scorecards to educate voters. *FRC* received about 13 million in donations in 2011, but does not publish any information about the popularity of its resources.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, the millions of donations received suggest its popularity and influence could be significant. On its website, the organization mentions several other lobbying groups it works together with, forming a core group of Christian conservative organizations.¹³⁸

Pat Robertson, a famous televangelist and host of the *700 Club*, founded the *Christian Coalition* in 1989. In 1988, Robertson campaigned for the highest office in the United States but lost from the incumbent vice president, George H.W. Bush. After that, he started the *Coalition*, which quickly grew and became an influential lobbying organization. Indeed, *Fortune* ranked it as the seventh most influential organization in Washington in 1997.¹³⁹ However, soon after, its influence began to decline due to internal problems.¹⁴⁰ Its revenues dropped from 26 million in the mid-nineties to a low of only one million a year recently.¹⁴¹

James C. Dobson founded *Focus on the Family* in 1977. The organization quickly grew to prominence, and raised over 80 million dollars in donations in 2011.¹⁴² In the late

¹³⁷ “Family Research Council Profile,” *Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability*. <http://www.ecfa.org/MemberProfile.aspx?ID=10064> (accessed June 12, 2012).

¹³⁸ “Frequently Asked Questions,” *Family Research Council*. <http://www.frc.org/faqs> (accessed June 12, 2012).

¹³⁹ Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, “Washington’s Power 25,” *Fortune* (December 1997): 144-158.

¹⁴⁰ Lee Bandy, “Christian Coalition Fading Fast: Grass-Roots Religious Group Now Based in S.C. Has Lost Leadership, Influence,” *The South Carolina State*, September 18, 2005. Via *Theocracy Watch* http://www.theocracywatch.org/new_coalition_fading_sept18_05.htm (accessed June 12, 2012).

¹⁴¹ “Christian Coalition in Financial Trouble,” *Newsmax.com*, April 10, 2006. <http://archive.newsmax.com/archives/ic/2006/4/10/115131.shtml> (accessed June 12, 2012).

¹⁴² *Focus on the Family and CitizenLink: 2011 Annual Report* (Focus on the Family, 2011), 7.

1980s, Dobson was rated as one of the most influential leaders of the Christian Right, second only to Billy Graham. With *Focus*, Dobson built a vast media empire through which he could reach millions of Americans. Nevertheless, until well into the nineties, he remained virtually unknown outside the Christian Right. In 1998, he attacked the leadership of the Republican Party and scholars and the media began to see him as a more influential figure than Pat Robertson of the *Christian Coalition*. Quite successfully, *Focus on the Family* began publishing educational materials for schools and the home, which could be used to teach children Christian values.¹⁴³ Today, *Focus* has a vast amount of online and paper resources available on a wide range of topics, providing a Christian perspective on everyday practical matters.

Conclusion

The economic recession highlighted some of the problems of the American healthcare system. High premiums made insurances expensive and the third-party system proved flawed when many Americans lost their health insurance along with their job. In the 2008 presidential election, candidates from both parties proposed reforms to eliminate disparities and create a sustainable program. Winning with wide margins in the presidential and congressional elections, the Democrats regained control of the legislative and executive branches and set out to craft a plan for reform. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was signed into law in 2010. Among conservatives, opposition to the Act ran high. Conservative think tanks like the *Heritage Foundation* focused on the – according to them – unconstitutional provisions, infringing upon the individual’s liberty and disproportionately extending the federal government’s power and authority. As part of

¹⁴³ Detwiler, *Premises*, 68-71.

this argument, some opponents employ the anti-Communist rhetoric used during the Cold War, placing itself in a distinctively Conservative tradition.

In the midst of all this opposition, a rather distinctive voice was heard, denouncing the Act by focusing on some very specific issues. Since the rise of the Christian Right in the seventies and eighties, pro-life issues have been at the center of its ideology, and one of the main reasons they cite for opposing the Act, is because it would allow insurance companies to use revenues from premiums to subsidize abortion-inducing drugs and contraceptives. They also foresaw the possibility of doctors and companies promoting euthanasia instead of treatment because it would be economical.

As has been shown, several organizations cater to this specifically conservative Christian base, and focus on moral issues, even if these people do not consider such issues the most important, as a Pew poll indicated. Nevertheless, the financial success of most of these organizations – probably excluding the decreasing popularity of the *Christian Coalition* – hints at their successes in creating and holding on to a solid base of support. Except for the *Family Research Council*, these organizations have existed since the rise of the Christian Right and continue to be relatively successful to this day. The *Heritage Foundation* is not by definition a conservative Christian think tank, but does also seek support among this group by including their moral objections to health reform.

Conclusion

Ever since the Scopes trial of 1925, it had seemed that religion had retreated to the private sphere. Increasingly, liberal values became the status quo in the United States. At some point, however, evangelicals became so concerned with the course the country was taking that they began to be politically active. They emerged from their hiding places and joined grassroots movements mobilizing people for the conservative Christian cause. The rise to national prominence of the Christian Right should be seen in the context of a resurging conservatism, which in turn can only be understood in its historical context. Concerned with the threat of Communism – abroad and domestic – and afraid that liberal administrations were taking the country off the path intended by the founders, millions of Americans rallied behind the conservative movement. The first chapter discussed the rise of the Christian Right and argued that it singled out a limited number of issues, like abortion and the traditional family, which distinguished it from the broader conservative Right. Although Reagan received a lot of support from the movement and the Christian Right's leaders had frequent access to the White House, the president failed to actively pursue their agenda.

Several authors argued that the movement lost its momentum or had died by the end of the nineties. Indeed, during that decade, not much was heard about it. Some of its organizations did not survive, but the third chapter showed that several organizations survive to this day, and some of them are quite successful. George W. Bush was president of evangelical signature, who actively pursued a conservative Christian political agenda. Barack Obama campaigned on a very different platform, propagating liberal values and promising to revert some of the very policies enacted by his predecessor.

The second chapter provided an overview of the development of America's welfare state. It showed that Democratic presidents proposed its most important expansions, which

predicts that the Christian Right would not be very supportive. Regardless of the opposition many of the proposals have faced, support for welfare state programs is generally high. The chapter also analyzed the ideology behind the welfare state, showing that it originated mainly in liberal political thought. Indeed, New Deal pragmatism in turn revised liberal ideology. Liberalism seemed dead after the Cold War ended, but with Barack Obama in the White House, it might not have been dead at all.

The third chapter discussed the Christian Right's opposition to the Obama administration's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Some of the old anti-Communism language was revived, but influential organizations like the *Heritage Foundation* and *Family Research Council* focus on other issues. The Act's constitutionality is questioned because it clashes with traditionally conservative – even libertarian – values of limited government and individual responsibility. In addition, however, the think tanks have published extensively on pro-life issues, arguing that the Act should be repealed because it provides subsidies for abortions and promotes end-of-life solutions. These issues have always been central in the Christian Right's ideology.

The research showed that there are still a number of large organizations that fit the Christian Right's mold. Millions of dollars in donations find their way each year to the *Family Research Council*, *Focus on the Family*, and the *Christian Coalition*. The *Heritage Foundation* also caters to this public, although it is not of a distinctly Christian signature. This suggests that it remains worthwhile to cater to this public.

It is difficult to determine the successes of these organizations today. Only the *Heritage Foundation* provides statistics, showing it manages to reach many people and has considerable influence among conservative Republican candidates. It is much harder to establish this for the other organizations. Most of them publish score cards for their supporters, trying to influence their supporters. The *Family Research Council* and *Focus*

on the Family focus in particular on family-related issues, but also include articles and research on other topics. *Heritage* is much broader and offers a much more comprehensive ideology for American politics. Then there are some smaller organizations, like the *National Right to Life Committee*, focusing only on pro-life issues.

Although it is clear that there is still a Christian Right, it has not been possible to determine whether there are any individuals that are seen as leaders of the movement. Indeed, based on the sources discussed, it is difficult to assert that the Christian Right is a coherent movement, or whether its organizations only supply information on a number of issues important to a limited group of Christians.

Revisiting racism

The second chapter also included a discussion of Martin Gilens's assertion that opposition to the welfare state is largely racially motivated. The third chapter used many articles as sources to analyze the Christian Right's opposition to Obama's plans, but no evidence of racism emerged from these documents. They did not focus on the undeserving poor, nor did they use Blacks as examples of what is wrong with the PPACA. Their arguments focused exclusively on race-neutral themes.

In 1996, a study was published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, arguing that there is a link between intellect, conservatism, and racism. The authors concluded that racism increases among more intellectual conservatives, hinting at group dominance. Although this paper's research does not suggest that racism influences welfare state opposition, it is worthwhile to further research possible correlations between racism and (Christian) conservatism.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Jim Sidanius, Lawrence Bobo, and Felicia Pratto, "Racism, Conservatism, Affirmative Action, and Intellectual Sophistication: A Matter of Principles Conservatism or Group Dominance?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70.3 (1996): 476-90.

Reflections

Much has been written about the Christian Right, although most of the research focuses on the sixties, seventies, and eighties. Not much has been written about the movement beyond the Reagan years, which is also an area for which further research is suggested. Abundant sources were available about the early years, but it was more difficult to find information about recent developments. A recommendation for future research is to analyze more thoroughly the status of the Christian Right beyond the Reagan years. The *Moral Majority* collapsed, but it would be interesting to see which organizations have taken its place and how they managed to do this.

Another difficulty was locating sources for the case study presented in the third chapter. I have almost exclusively used websites, which makes it difficult to ascertain influence. On the web, thousands of pages are available with arguments opposing the PPACA. I have decided to focus only on national organizations and persons. As with Lisa McGirr's analysis of the Right, research could be conducted on the Christian Right focusing specifically on local organizations and movements. However, also on a national level more could be done to provide a yet fuller picture of the modern Christian Right. Surveys could be conducted to find out which organizations, politicians, or activists are considered important and are looked at for information and opinion making. Limited space and time forced me to restrict my sources, but further analysis could be conducted on books, radio and television programs, speeches, articles, promotional materials, brochures, voter guides, *et cetera*, providing more details about the status and ideology of the Christian Right in the past and present.

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