

# The Christian Right and the Christian Left— a Political History

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September 23, 2003

There are two distinct brands of Christianity in the U.S. today, which can be called the Christian Right and the Christian Left. These two labels would not be offensive to either, although the term “liberal” instead of leftist would be offensive to many, because they consider themselves to be “conservative” in regard to the Bible. By contrast, some on the right like to be called conservative rather than rightist, but overall, they do not strongly object to the label.

Believers from both of these movements often fellowship together in various settings and agree on many essential doctrines. But it is fair to say that different churches are defined by their politics— you will find churches that are mostly politically rightist, or mostly political leftist, but rarely churches with equal mixtures of both. There is a good reason for this. Politics is often where the rubber meets the road— a place where faith is put into action. Christianity requires believers to be involved in the world, including politics. To have members of a single fellowship working against each other would be quite a stress. We can affirm the good intentions of Christians on the other side of the political arena from afar, but to join them weekly in prayer would require a lot of things to be left unsaid.

Where have these movements come from? Is either really a false Christianity? There is no doubt that many on either side have accused the other of false Christianity. This essay is an attempt to discuss the differences in way that I hope will not be offensive to either.

## 1 Original Roots

The earliest roots of the Christian Right and Christian Left come from two movements in Europe just after the Reformation. The Christian Right can be traced to the Scottish Presbyterian and the English Puritan/Reformed movements, while the the Christian Left can be traced to the English Quaker and German Brethren movements. These groups moved to America in great numbers in the 1700’s. While there were certainly other Christian groups who came to the U.S. early on, notably Anglicans, Lutherans and Roman Catholics, the Presbyterian/Reformed and the Quaker/Brethren movements were marked by definite political philosophies, while the other movements did not generally emphasize politics or strive to form cogent political frameworks. One might say that this was due to an intrinsic

pragmatism— the Anglican, Catholic and Lutheran churches were associated with existing political structures that they did not generally question (the Anglicans supported the English monarchy, the Lutherans supported the continental nobility, and the Roman Catholics supported the political power of the Catholic hierarchy and the associated Catholic nobility) while the Presbyterians and Brethren definitely saw themselves as “separated” from the old political world and in the business of starting a new order. Certainly within the Anglican, Lutheran and Catholic churches there were attempts to formulate cogent political philosophies of “principled monarchism,” but these did not take root in America, especially after the War of Independence— no one could say he supported monarchy! Therefore, in America, members of these churches tended to gravitate toward one or the other of the two political philosophies of the Presbyterians or the Quakers.

One could go back a little further and say that these two movements arose from two earlier movements, namely, Calvin and Luther’s Reformed movement on the one side and the Anabaptists on the other side. The two movements certainly have those origins— John Knox, who founded the Presbyterian church of Scotland, was trained in Geneva, and the German Brethren were clearly influenced by the Anabaptists. The later movements clearly steered away from some of the teachings and excesses of the earlier movements, however. The original Anabaptists advocated armed revolution, not unlike communists, culminating in their armed takeover of the city of Münster. When this collapsed, the movement was thoroughly discredited in Europe, and Anabaptists were everywhere feared and persecuted. Simon Menno came along after this, preaching complete pacifism. Nearly all Anabaptists became “Mennonites” in continental Europe, embracing pacifism. Calvin, on the other hand, basically supported monarchy and tended to be a pragmatist like the Anglicans in regard to governmental systems. At the same time, he supported a system in Geneva that seemed to veer toward totalitarianism, punishing “thought-crimes” and allowing little freedom of speech. Luther, also, favored monarchy and allowed for little religious freedom, e.g. his famous letter advocating the expulsion of the Jews (contrary to popular belief, he expressly said that they must not be killed, but he did favor confiscating their land and goods and expelling them.) It was the Scottish Samuel Rutherford who defined the ideas of universal human rights which took precedence over the rights of kings in his book *Lex Rex*, which was the first cogent, Reformed political philosophy. Therefore, it would be no more appropriate to say that the Christian Right would like to go back to Calvin’s Geneva than it would be to say that the Christian Left would like to go back to the Anabaptists’ Münster.

Some of the original tendencies of the two original movements did and do tend to spill over into their descendants, however. The Anabaptists tended to be anti-historical and anti-scholarship, favoring “Spirit-led” theology. They viewed all prior church history as hopelessly corrupted, and therefore put little value in reading the “classics.” They also tended to prefer the “spirit” over the “letter” of the Bible. In a famous extreme, one group actually burned their Bibles in order to escape the “dead letter” and to be led by the Spirit alone. The Reformed church, by contrast, put great value in the scholarship of the earlier church, e.g. St. Augustine, even while insisting that those “classics” had no authority, and that only the Bible was authoritative in the church. They valued the “letter” of the Bible tremendously, and insisted that the proper way to interpret the Bible was not primarily through the “spirit” but by extensive scholarship to determine the original meanings of the words.

It would, of course, be an exaggeration to say that the modern Christian Left does

not value the letter of the Bible and that the Right does not believe in being Spirit-led. Nevertheless, we will see that the approach to the Bible has tended to be very different in the two groups.

It is important here to make a clarification in regard to the term “Reformed.” Originally, all of the “Reformed” churches had that name because of their common origin in the Reformation, and in particular, in the teachings of Calvin and Luther. In continental Europe, however, all of the Reformed churches tended to gravitate toward one of two political positions: either a pragmatist/monarchist position like that of the Lutheran church, or a pacifist/separatist position like that of the Mennonites. Therefore one has the German Reformed, Hungarian Reformed, Dutch Reformed, and Swiss Reformed churches which became quasi-hierarchical State churches endorsing the monarchies in their countries, like the Anglican church, and on the other hand, the German Brethren churches which in many cases were called Reformed Brethren, or simply Reformed churches, which largely embraced the political philosophy of the Mennonites, even though they had Calvinist theology. The Scottish Presbyterian and Puritan Reformed political philosophy, which so greatly influenced the American churches, seems not to have made the slightest impact on the continental European churches even up to this day.

At the same time, the “Anabaptist” movement should not be confused with the “Baptist” churches. While both rejected infant baptism, the modern Baptist movement originated in the English Reformed Puritan churches and largely grew out of the conversion of American Presbyterians, and it has mostly shared the Reformed political philosophy. Therefore, one had the following axes in the U.S.:

**Left: Mennonite– Brethren – Quaker**

**Right: Reformed– Presbyterian – Baptist**

As we will see, these axes do not exactly hold today. For one thing, many members of “mainline” Reformed, Presbyterian and Baptist churches today see themselves as leftist, not rightist. In the late 1800’s, a great number in these churches shifted to the Christian Left at a time when this world view was strongly on the rise in the U.S. Nevertheless, I will use the terms “Reformed” and “Presbyterian” here as a shorthand for the world view going back to the original thinking of these churches.

Neither of these movements would have used the terms “Left” and “Right” in the early days. As we will see, those terms came from continental European politics and did not enter the American lexicon until the middle of the 1900’s. In the early years, one would have used the terms “pacifist” or “abolitionist,” etc., in regard to the single issues which dominated the politics of the day. In the late 1800’s, the terms “progressive” or “populist” became common for what we today would call the Christian Left.

## 2 Political Philosophies

What were and are the differences between these groups? As stated above, while there have been many groups, Christian and otherwise, that have called themselves leftist or rightist, the most cogent Christian political philosophies have been articulated within the two traditions listed above, the Presbyterian/Reformed and Quaker/Mennonite churches. Many people, indeed, do not fit neatly into either camp. Yet over the years, these two

traditions have exerted enormous influence over popular political movements in the U.S. For instance, Francis Schaeffer, who may be called the father of the evangelical pro-life movement in the U.S., came from a conservative Presbyterian background. Tony Campolo, one of the premier spokesmen for the Christian Left today, comes from a Brethren background.

These movements themselves have evolved and clarified their thinking over the years, so that in defining their philosophies, I am not so much giving a picture of either movement in the year 1700, but rather integrating the direction of thought in each school over the past three hundred years. To be specific, for the Christian Right I take as representatives Francis Schaeffer (in particular, the *Christian Manifesto*) and Greg Bahnsen (in particular, *By This Standard*.) Greg Bahnsen is considered controversial by many people, including many rightists, but mostly because of his particular view of what laws of the Old Testament may be considered sacrificial vs. moral. Most rightists would not feel uncomfortable with his writings from an overall perspective. On the leftist side, Jacques Ellul and Ron Sider are the two writers who have expressed the most systematic views.

The first, most obvious difference, is in regard to pacifism. The Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren embraced pacifism, while the Presbyterian/Reformed and Baptist churches embraced a theory of a “just war.”

This difference implies a difference in approaches to the Bible. The Old Testament clearly commands Israel to take up the sword and fight wars. In the Quaker-Mennonite view, the Old Testament order was clearly abrogated in the New Testament. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, in this view, is a platform for overturning the old way, and Jesus’ statements, “do not oppose an evil man” but instead “turn the other cheek” and “do not judge” are taken as absolute, inviolable commands.

The Reformed view, on the other hand, takes note of Jesus’ statements at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, that He had not come to abolish “a jot or a tittle” of the Law. The Sermon the Mount, in this view, is an expansion of the old law, not a new law. Evidence for this view is seen in Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 13, in which Paul says that government justly bears “the power of the sword.” The pacifists rejoinder is that Paul was merely saying that God uses governments for His own good purposes, not that He endorses them as Christian enterprises.

The Reformed view of the unity of the New and Old Testaments usually goes under the name of “covenantalism,” although there are several different varieties of covenantalism. In general, the following connections are made: the Church is the new Israel, and the “moral law” of the Old Testament applies universally while the “sacrificial law” has been fulfilled in Christ. Which laws fall into which category is the subject of much debate. The Ten Commandments are commonly taken as the expression of the “moral” law (this position is codified in the Westminster Confession written by Presbyterians and English Puritans in 1536), but some would like to remove the Sabbath law and make that a “sacrificial” law. At times, the equation of Israel and the church in covenantalism has been taken to mean that Christians should wipe out pagan enemies (e.g. a manifest destiny which involved wiping out the Indians in North America or native Irish in Ireland), but that can hardly be called an implication of covenantalism— while such ideas may have been popular at times, no major Reformed Bible teacher ever taught that position “officially.” Instead, Reformed teachers have noted that even Israel was forbidden to wipe out nations other than a specific set of seven nations in Palestine. This is taken as a one-time judgment of God, and not a precedent

for later believers.

It is tempting to look at these differences in terms of the people who originally held them. The Scots were a warlike people who valued heroism, while the German farmers who tended to become Mennonites were more passive. Things do not break down quite so easily, however. The German Anabaptists also led a war to take over Münster, and many later German farmers became Nazis. The English Quakers and the English Reformed Puritans come from the same country, yet with very different views. Perhaps a more valid distinction is that in Scotland, the Presbyterians had a real chance at self governance, while the German Brethren and Mennonites never did. On the continent, there was never a possibility of the people deciding whether a war was just— the kings and nobles had all the power, and they alone decided when a war would be fought. In Scotland, the distance between the nobles and the people was not as great, even before the Reformation, and after the Reformation the nobles asked the Christian leaders to utterly reform the society, including the rules for war and the rules for government. The sweeping changes in the society of Scotland by John Knox and his reformers are well documented.

This leads us to another major difference in the two philosophies. The Reformed view saw the kingdom of God as very much “this worldly” – in other words, Christians have a role in government, and governments can be explicitly “Christian,” while the Mennonite view saw the kingdom of God as very much separate and cut off from the rest of the world. The modern Amish, who are all Mennonites, (although not all Mennonites are Amish!) are an example of an extreme form of this view, in which the Church cuts itself off entirely from the rest of the world. To put it another way, the Mennonite-Quaker view was essentially anti-authoritarian— civil authorities are evils that, at best, are to be tolerated for pragmatic reasons— while the Reformed view saw civil authority as a good thing. Jacques Ellul, a modern Christian leftist, has explicitly taught the view that all governmental authority is from the devil, while Francis Schaeffer and other Reformed Christians have clearly taught that Romans 13 implies that governmental authority is ordained by God.

One might ask how these views can be reconciled with the modern stereotypes of rightists wanting “small government” and leftists wanting “big government.” It would seem that the Left, coming from the view that governments are illegitimate activities done only by non-Christians, would favor “small government” and the Right would favor the opposite. While there is probably not any leftist who would say he is in favor of “big government” in principle, one can see a connection. In the Reformed view, the Christian can control the government, and therefore the question of how much power government may have becomes an issue of self-restraint. Making government bigger equals making yourself more powerful, which is not a Christian goal. By contrast, if government is essentially an alien, enemy force, then all one can do is go to that force and ask for favors. There is no limit on the number of favors one can ask. In fact, the more one get can that alien power to do, the better. There is no ultimate value in limiting governmental power, because if that alien power restrains itself and does not do what is good, then some other illegitimate, alien power (e.g. big business, or organized crime) will move in instead. Making government powerful is seen as a pragmatic way of keeping other powerful, evil forces in check.

Again, history has had an influence in the development of these ideas. For the early Presbyterian and Reformed thinkers in the U.S., the story of Cromwell was the prime example of the evils of unchecked power. In the 1600’s, the king of England dissolved Parliament

and attempted to stamp out the Puritan movement. The Scottish Presbyterians supported the English Puritans (which loosely included members of three groups: English Presbyterians, Quakers, and pious Anglicans) and eventually put Cromwell, a military man from an “Independent” church similar to the Quakers, in charge of the government. Cromwell executed the king, and soon began to persecute Presbyterians and to rule as a dictator. When Cromwell died, the English put a king back on the throne, and the Puritan movement was thoroughly discredited (both the Reformed and the Quaker varieties of Puritans, even though the Quakers and Presbyterians ended up opposing Cromwell). Large numbers of Puritans began to emigrate to America at that point, feeling that England was beyond hope, especially when the later kings began to attempt to force Scotland and North Ireland to convert to the Anglican church. From most accounts, Cromwell was originally a “good” man, who became corrupted by the absolute power he was given. The lesson learned was that no good man, whether king or church leader, should be given unlimited power.

By contrast, the German Mennonites and Brethren moved directly to America without an intermediate experience in helping to lead a government. Their only experience with Christian government was Münster, in which the downfall came primarily from an outside attack by an overwhelming force, not from the corruption of the leaders themselves.

A third difference between the two philosophies is their views on the goodness of man and the wrath of God. The Reformed view sees all men as completely sinful and deserving of God’s wrath. There is no problem with the existence of Hell because God is completely just in condemning sinful people to such a punishment. The Quaker-Mennonite view, on the other hand, acknowledges that people do evil, but sees all people as reformable, with some good in them even now. In a sense, the evil deeds of men are not the “real” person, but rather the consequences of an evil society. The existence of Hell is problematic in this view. How can a good God condemn people to Hell forever? This problem has led some to embrace “liberal theology,” which rejects the idea of Hell altogether (and therefore also the passages of the Bible which teach about Hell), while for others, Hell is taken as real but not essentially a result of wrath. Instead, it is seen as a place of “separation” from God, or “annihilation”—in a sense, the best God can do for someone who does not want to be near Him. God’s wrath is taken as always against deeds and not against people themselves.

This difference leads to different views of the Cross. The Reformed view sees in the Cross the outpouring of God’s wrath on Jesus which justly could have fallen on sinful people. This “judicial” view of the Cross, taught in Paul’s letter to the Romans, rests on the assumption that people are sinful enough to deserve real wrath, and it implies that “salvation” is primarily the escape from God’s judgment by way of Christ’s substitutionary death.

In the view of the Christian Left, the Cross is primarily the supreme example of God, as Christ, giving up His authority and allowing Himself to be destroyed. This view is supported, for instance, in the Gospel and Letters of John. Salvation is seen essentially as the formation of a relationship with God, leading to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which leads us to follow Christ’s example of service and self-abnegation.

Of course, the Bible teaches that God demonstrated both His wrath and His self-giving love in the Cross, and “conservative” Christians of both leftist and rightist varieties have always acknowledged this. God as the Father pours out His anger (a common view, that Jesus died to satisfy the wrath of *Satan*, is heretical), and God the Son lays down His life and willingly suffers for others. We are both saved from God’s wrath and saved to a new

relationship with Him. Lest one think that Paul and John taught different doctrines, John's book of Revelation clearly teaches that Jesus Himself will ride the white horse and execute wrath in the Final Judgment, while Paul frequently emphasizes the servanthood of Christ, e.g. in his letter to the Philippians. This balance between God's wrath and His love is one of the great tensions of Christianity.

The difference in understanding this tension works out into the political world in very real ways. While some pacifists reject even the idea of police, judges and jails, many do endorse these institutions, but with a very different view of them than the Christian Right. In the view of the Christian Left, such institutions primarily serve the purpose of reforming the criminal, and possibly also deterring other criminals. Their work is therefore primarily "redemptive." The Quakers called their prisons in Pennsylvania "penitentiaries" for this reason— they were to be places of reform and penitence. By contrast, the Reformed view sees these institutions as primarily working out wrath— punishment of the guilty out of the demands of justice, regardless of whether they happen to also work to change behavior. In doing so, the judge is taking up the mantle of God, so to speak. This revolts the leftist, because no person has the right to take up that kind of authority in the leftist view. For the Reformed/Rightist, authorities are good, ordained by God to be agents of God's wrath (as taught by Paul in chapter 13 of his letter to the Romans, mentioned above.)

It would be incorrect to say that the Reformed view teaches that everything everyone does is evil. Reformed theology says that people are "totally" depraved (sinful in everything they do) but not "utterly" depraved (as bad as they can be.) In particular, Christians, once they are born again, have the Holy Spirit in their hearts causing them to do good. But this change is never complete— sinful impulses remain even in Christians. The reason why absolute power corrupts absolutely is that all men, even good men, are sinners, in the Reformed view. At the same time, the Reformed view sees some people as truly evil (although God could change them), and therefore sees the Quaker hope of reforming all people, and the hope of ending all wars by appealing to the good nature of one's enemies, as hopeless naivete.

It would also be incorrect to say that the Reformed view teaches men to execute judgment on every sin. The Old Testament is actually a foundation for the idea of limited government— according to the Law of Moses, judges must follow due process (including letting the guilty go free if there is insufficient evidence), and only certain crimes may be punished, not just anything the judge wants. In executing God's wrath, the human judge is not trying to replace the Final Judgment of God, as if every sin could be rooted out here by judges who are themselves sinful, but rather, the human judge punishes what is *obviously* evil, because to do otherwise would amount to tacit approval of the act. If a man were to rape a woman in broad daylight in the marketplace of a town, and the people did nothing about it, it would not be taken as a statement of grace, but rather, as a statement to all women that they are oppressed.

Another important consequence of the difference in regard to human sinfulness is seen in the way the two movements have approached cultural interaction. In the rightist view, just as evil people exist, so also evil cultures exist, since cultures are nothing more than the common practices of people. Although people are judged individually, it is naive to think that parents do not pass their practices on to their children, or that there are no group attributes in addition to individual attributes. The Left does not deny the existence of group

attributes, i.e. cultural norms, but in the view of the Left, cultural attributes are neutral, and no culture is superior to another. In the rightist view, some cultures are more evil than others just as some people are more evil than others, although no one is so evil that they cannot be redeemed, and no one is good enough to not need God's redemption.

This view of the Right is equated with "prejudice" by the Left, while the Right thinks of it as merely realism. The Christian Right would, in principle, reject prejudice in the sense of punishing people for crimes they have not personally committed, i.e. punishing children for the sins of the fathers. In other words, if a culture such as the Gypsies is known for theft, then wariness in dealing with Gypsies is warranted (people should have "freedom of association," which means they do not have to interact with other cultures if they choose not to), but denying Gypsies from equal treatment under the law is not acceptable. This is the theory. In practice, this distinction has often been lost for many members of the Right, and they have approved of unequal treatment of certain groups under the law, as in the Trail of Tears and the Jim Crow laws of the South.

On the other side, the desire of the Left to see goodness in all people has led them sometimes to extreme naivete, for example, the Victorian image of the "noble savage," the pagan who is basically good even though he operates within a pagan world view. In some cases, this desire led to theological liberalism, which says that Christianity has nothing distinctive to teach to pagans, and consequently implies an end to missions. In leftist churches which are not theologically liberal, the desire to uphold the virtue of pagan cultures has still sometimes led to "syncretism," mixing pagan superstitions and practices with Christianity out of the desire not to offend the pagans. Syncretism is usually popular at the time but condemned by later generations as compromise; for example, early missionaries evangelizing the northern European tribes incorporated Germanic sexism and war-glory into Christianity as "chivalry," which now seems so alien to us; in South America, black magic and demon worship were incorporated into Christianity and not strongly condemned by the Catholic church there.

Sometimes leftist naivete regarding other cultures has led to backlash prejudice. The liberal white who believes blacks or Indians are just the same as whites, who then lives among them, often ends up "burnt out" when the other culture does not live up to his or her expectations, exhibiting real evil in ways that whites do not. Rather than accepting that different cultures may need grace in different ways, some liberal Christians end up far more prejudiced than rightists who take these evils in stride as part of their expectations. Another variety of leftist prejudice is "paternalism," in which the liberal views himself as a sort of superior parent of the other culture, assuming that they will naturally want to follow leftist ideas of right and wrong once they are educated properly.

In summarizing any broad movements, one always runs the danger of over-generalizing. Clearly, people exist who would call themselves "leftist" or "rightist" who would disagree with some of my characterizations. Yet despite the exceptions, I think that they are valid in general. The Christian Left tends to reject the idea of a just war and to recoil at the idea of judgments solely for the purpose of standing in the place of God, executing wrath. The Christian Right tends to embrace these things. The Christian Left tends to reject the applicability of the Old Testament Law, while the Right generally embraces it. The Left tends much more to rely on the "Spirit-led" conscience for ethical judgments rather than the letter of the Bible, while the Right sees "each man doing what is right in his own eyes"



as a recipe for chaos. The Right tends to feel prejudice is often simply realism, while the Left tends to reject prejudice at all costs, to the point of sometimes pretending that evils in other cultures are not really evil.

As seen in this survey, the differences do not lie only at the level of single issues, but involve fundamental concepts of theology. What is God like? Can He change His morality, calling something good at one time that He calls evil at another? Does He feel and execute wrath, and does He want us to feel the same way also? What does it mean to be Christlike? Are people basically good?

### **3 The Rise and Fall of the Movements**

As mentioned above, members of both groups moved to North America in great numbers over a period of about a hundred years starting at the end of the 1600's, following the fiasco of the Puritan revolution and Cromwell. In their own ways, each group was highly idealistic. Each had two major stated goals: to evangelize the Indians and to set up a "city on a hill" in the New World, a distinctly Christian society free of the compromised religion of Europe.

On the Reformed side, there were two distinctly different groups, the Scottish Presbyterians and the English Reformed Puritans. (Most Scottish Presbyterians who came to America had lived in Northern Ireland prior to coming to America. Although many of them intermarried with Irish converts and French and English Protestant immigrants to Northern Ireland, almost all people of "Irish" decent in America before the year 1850 were actually of Scottish decent, leading to the term "Scotch-Irish.") While the Presbyterians and the Reformed Puritans shared much of the same theology, they did not mix very well as people groups. The English Puritans arrived earlier, in New England, and mostly stayed there. When the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians arrived there, they were mostly viewed by the New Englanders as foreign and somewhat uncouth. The Scottish, for their part, were more interested in pressing inland and settling new territories. Therefore the Presbyterians migrated into Pennsylvania, and from there into Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and eventually in the 1800's to the rest of the South and West. As they migrated, many of them converted to being Baptists. The Presbyterian church, with its insistence on seminary training for its pastors, simply did not produce enough pastors to fill the pulpits of enough churches to keep up with the tremendous population growth and territorial expansion. The Baptist church, by contrast, while also holding to Reformed theology, quickly adopted a program of lay evangelists and pastors, allowing "battlefield commissions" to a great number of new leaders on the frontier.

The Brethren, Quakers, and Mennonites mostly settled in Pennsylvania, or William Penn's Woods. William Penn was a Quaker who recruited widely from the European continent, especially Germany, with the intent of creating a Christian society based on Quaker principles. These settlers mainly stayed in Pennsylvania, gradually expanding westward into Ohio and Indiana; in the 1800's many of them moved to places like Kansas and Iowa in the West with the explicit purpose of influencing the laws in newly created states regarding slavery.

The other two main religious groups, Anglicans and Catholics, tended to stay on the East Coast. Their political philosophy tended to make them want to keep closely connected

to Europe and the religious hierarchies there. Even after the Revolution, Anglicans stayed well connected to the English state church and felt much more affinity for English culture than for the frontier.

In the 1700's, the Great Awakening began in New England through the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield, which led to great revitalization of the Reformed churches— though also to a definite split between “liberal” and “conservative” theologians and churches for the first time. At the same time, revival also swept into the Anglican churches via the preaching of Wesley and Asbury. The revival within the Anglican church led to the formation of the Methodist church, essentially an Anglican church but with Wesley's emphasis on Method— in particular, revivals and calls to personal conversion. Like the Baptist church, the Methodist church also allowed lay preachers, which allowed it also to expand quickly on the frontier.

Though similar in many ways, the revival movements of Wesley and Asbury on one side, and Edwards and Whitfield on the other side, had very different theology. These two revival movements led for the first time also to a definite split between the “Calvinist” and “Arminian” churches.

Eventually, the Wesleyan revival movement expanded beyond the Methodist churches into the Baptist churches. Overall, this revivalist movement (which has continued to this day via the work of Charles Finney and D.L. Moody in the 1800's and Billy Sunday and Billy Graham in the 1900's) has tended to avoid politics, emphasizing personal conversion instead, but at times has veered strongly into politics on single issues, sometimes on the Left and sometimes on the Right. Not having a political philosophy of its own (many in this movement have held to the view that Jesus would come back in their lifetimes, making politics on this earth mere “polishing the brass on the Titanic”), this group has tended to be influenced one way or another by the Christian Left and the Christian Right at different times.

The sharp difference between the Christian Right and Christian Left became evident in the French and Indian war. The Quakers, who ran Pennsylvania, had adopted a policy of trust and pacifism toward the Indians. On one hand, they insisted on honest purchases of land from the Indians, and on the other hand, they refused to build an army or forts to protect the people. When the French influenced the Indians to break the peace and to attack the settlers in Pennsylvania, they were completely unprepared. The atrocities committed by the Indians (rape and disfigurement of women, terrorism, torture of prisoners, defiling the dead, and massacres of whole towns) were previously unknown to the settlers and led to the hatred of Indians (“the only good Indian is a dead Indian”) that would last for the next 150 years. Prior to that, most American Christians had harbored hopes of evangelizing and befriending the Indians; afterwards, even Christian Indians were deemed dangerous and untrustworthy. Even the Declaration of Independence codifies this hatred of the Indians. The Indians, for their part, justly felt robbed of lands taken illegally by squatters, and initially, many or most of the colonists recognized these claims and banned squatting on Indian lands. The *style* of the Indians' warfare was so odious to the settlers, however, that all other considerations were lost. Many felt that the atrocities by the Indians justified any means against them, including using some of the Indians' tactics against themselves, such as massacres of whole villages and scalping.

The Quakers and pacifists were seen as hopelessly naive, and the Quaker leadership was

voted out in Pennsylvania, never to return to power. The Left had been discredited, and would remain so for the next 100 years. The Scotch-Irish settlers quickly formed armies and attacked the Indians, defeating them with the aid of the British armies.

The Revolution, 50 years later, provided another just war for the Christian Right. The king of England called it the “Presbyterian War” because the armies of the U.S. consisted mainly of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, with whom the kings of England had fought since the 1600’s; in fact, the reason they were in America was because they had been persecuted in Scotland and Ireland. The stimulus of the Revolution for many of the colonists was the report that the king was sending a bishop to America to establish a state Anglican church; when he had sent a bishop to Northern Ireland to establish the Anglican church there, Presbyterians had been severely persecuted and had lost basic rights including the right to be married or the right to hold office unless they converted to Anglicanism.

It is safe to say that the U.S. Constitution, which codifies the idea of limited government and separation of powers, was through and through an expression of the political views of the Christian Right. There were actually very few Presbyterians involved in the writing of the Constitution. But there is no question that the appearance of a deliberately self-limited government was a unique event in history. It was not necessary for Presbyterians to be there in great numbers because the Reformed political view of limited government had become the universal political language in America. “Lex Rex,” the idea that the law is above the king, was assumed by all, even if they had never read the works of Samuel Rutherford.

Besides Samuel Rutherford, the writings of John Locke defined the political world view of the Christian Right at the time of the writing of the Constitution. His philosophy, which included the ideas of personal human rights, free trade, and separation of powers, fit naturally with the ideas of the Christian Right, and his writings were embraced by Jonathan Edwards and other Reformed thinkers—free trade, personal rights, and separation of powers all tended to limit the power of government while defining the role of a legitimate government. Locke’s views on free trade, which were eventually expanded by Adam Smith, became the basis of capitalism and have remained part of the philosophy of the Christian Right to this day. Locke’s influence is so great that one is tempted to trace the origin of the Right entirely to him instead of to Reformed Scotland. But Locke had limited influence in England, his home country. It was in America, populated by displaced Reformed Puritans and Scotch-Irish, where his views came to fruition. His views on free will and God’s sovereignty also fit naturally with Calvinism.

It was not long after the Revolution that the Christian Right was to have its first tests. The first test was in regard to the Indians. The hatred and fear of the Indians which still persisted from the French and Indian War, coupled with the selfish desire for the land of the Indians, led to the passing of a federal law in the early 1800’s requiring all Indians to move west of the Mississippi. In particular, this affected the Cherokee Indians in Georgia, who had largely become Christian and had adopted European culture. Many Christians spoke out in favor of the Indians and defended their interests, and eventually the case came before the Supreme Court, which ruled the law a breach of treaty and unconstitutional. The President’s famous words were, effectively, “The Supreme Court has ruled. Now let it enforce the ruling.” Since only the President has executive power under the Constitution, the President felt free to ignore the ruling, and the Supreme Court was powerless to do anything. The expatriation of the Indians proceeded, in the famous “Trail of Tears.” Thousands of Indians died as they

were forced to march over a thousand miles. The once-Christian Cherokee nation had every reason to turn its back on a religion that did not honor its treaties. Hundreds of years of evangelism of the Indians were swept away by this bitter memory.

It is easy to condemn the Americans involved in this incident, which was essentially a land grab based on treaty breaking based on prejudice. Without excusing them, one can gain perhaps understand the mindset of the people by thinking of the present-day “Megan’s laws.” In recent years, there has been a great outrage from people who found that sex offenders released from prison lived in their neighborhoods. Laws have been rushed through the statehouses in our day which arguably trample on ex-convicts’ legal rights, for the purpose of protecting the innocent. If a person who was well known to have uncontrollable criminal tendencies lived next to you, how would you feel? Similar reactions have been seen in Europe in regard to Gypsies, who are widely believed to teach their children how to deceive and steal. The memory of the French and Indian War was still vivid, and there is no doubt that some Indian tribes were indeed despicably violent (one of the biggest problems was the fact that the settlers mostly did not distinguish between different Indian tribes, some of which were violent and some of which were not.) The breaking of a treaty, which the Bible condemns, was justified in the settlers’ minds by the fact that the Indians had broken the treaty first. Often if a single Indian committed a murder, this was viewed as evidence that the Indians were again on the warpath.

Many Christians protested this injustice, but the fact remains that the President had the sympathy of much of the country. In particular, the President had the support of many of the Christian Right, including the Presbyterian church, especially in the South. Although the Presbyterian and Reformed settlers had started in New England and Pennsylvania, within 100 years they had mostly migrated south and west, leading to a new geographical division of the country which persists to this day: the South and West are dominated by the Christian Right, while the Northeast has both mixed character but is mostly dominated by the Left. The essential difference between Right and Left which led to the different attitudes toward the Indians came from their different attitudes about the sinfulness of man. As discussed above, a characteristic of the Christian Right to this day is its sense of being realistic about the sinfulness of people and the feeling that the Christian Left is merely naive and engaging in wishful thinking in trying to reform criminals and criminal cultures by integrating them into majority culture. Since Africans and American Indians were perceived as cultures which trained their children in various crimes, many people felt that they could never be integrated with the rest of American society.

There is no doubt that the Indians as a whole did not integrate well with American culture and continued to practice various crimes. But this did not justify the legal action against them in the Trail of Tears, and the Christian Right, who insisted on upholding laws, should have known better. The Christian Right still remained dominant in American politics, and anti-Indian feeling remained strong up to the beginning of the 20th century, but its credibility had been severely weakened by the Trail of Tears incident, at least among Christians. In other words, the Christian Right came to be seen as less *Christian* than the Christian Left.

The second major test of the Christian Right was the issue of slavery. Again, the Christian Right began with its position of the realism about the sinfulness of people, and rejected what it viewed as the naive notion that blacks were no more criminal than other people. To this

was coupled its high view of the Bible, which does not forbid slavery, and economic concerns (slaves were profitable in the South, where huge plantations were common), to arrive at the toleration, though not necessarily endorsement, of slavery. In contrast, total abolition of slavery became the central issue of the Christian Left, so that they came to be called abolitionists. The sentimental view of the Christian Left was expressed eloquently in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a book which actually contains far more Christian evangelism than political argument, including deep themes on the issue of suffering in general, and as such, reads well even today.

Although the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) allows slavery, as it does divorce, polygamy, and war, as concessions to human sinfulness, it has numerous laws limiting slavery. Had the Christian Right been consistent in its use of the Bible, obedience to these laws would have prevented most of the abuses documented in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The Bible requires masters to give ample supplies to slaves who are set free, forbids slave catching (in the Bible, slaves can only be legitimately be obtained as captives in a just war or if people sell themselves to escape poverty), forbids breaking up the marriages of slaves, gives slaves the right to take their masters to court for injuries, forbids masters from killing slaves (though corporal punishment is allowed) and forbids returning runaway slaves to their masters against their will. In addition, slavery longer than seven years is called "oppression," and is forbidden for Hebrew slaves. If these laws were obeyed, slavery would not look much like American slavery at all, but more like indentured servanthood, which many European people used as a way to escape poverty. One can even argue that biblical slavery/servanthood can be more compassionate than contractual labor in pure capitalism. As John Steinbeck argued eloquently in *The Grapes of Wrath* a century later, an owner will feed a slave all year long, but an employer who pays a worker hourly feels no obligation to feed the workers when the work is done.

Indeed, at the time of the American Revolution, the economic and legal status of African slaves was not much different from that of European indentured servants. Their situation gradually worsened, however, as the South and the Christian Right moved even further from the Bible's norms, partly in reaction against the pressure of the Christian Left. Contorted arguments were made from the Bible to justify the treatment of African slaves; in particular, many people argued that Africans were descended from Ham, the son of Noah (a highly disputable notion which is nowhere stated in the Bible), that since Canaan the son of Ham was cursed, all descendants of Ham were cursed (which is also not stated in the Bible), and that since they were under a curse, whites were justified in having separate laws for them (although the Old Testament explicitly forbids having different laws for different people, whether native or foreign.)

There were notable exceptions. The Covenanter Presbyterians, one of the most conservative Presbyterian churches, took the Old Testament laws about slaves literally including the law forbidding returning escaped slaves to their masters, and therefore helped in the Underground Railway. The Baptist and Methodist churches, which at that time were mostly conservative, evangelized the Africans and American Indians and generally supported their legal rights. Even those churches could not imagine a complete integration with Africans, however, and therefore set up separate, parallel churches (such as the Missionary Baptist and the African Methodist Episcopal churches) or had separate seating in their churches for blacks.

As is well known, the conflict between the mostly Northern abolitionists and the Southern conservatives led to the Civil War. The Christian Left, though certainly correct in its assessment of the injustice of slavery laws, pursued a remedy by attempting to vastly increase the power of the central, federal government in Washington, using methods that were seen as unconstitutional and illegal by conservatives in the South. In so doing, the Left began its embrace of “big government,” which, as discussed above, does not scare the Left because all government is fundamentally illegitimate, whether big or small, and therefore any good end which can be obtained by pressure on this illegitimate power is acceptable.

By pursuing this ends-justify-the-means approach, the Christian Left gave the Right a moral rallying point. For Christians in the South, the issue of the Civil War was not slavery, but States’ Rights, i.e. whether the U.S. Constitution would be upheld, and ultimately, whether the U.S. would be a country ruled by the letter of the law or by whatever interpretation of the law that people felt was good at the time. For the Left, this insistence on the letter of the Constitution was just a smoke screen, hiding the fact that the Right really did not have compassion on the African slaves and was simply using the law not to avoid change. Therefore both sides felt a high morality to their position and felt justified in the war.

Many modern historians have argued that the Civil War was not really about moral issues at all, but only economics, and some Christians have agreed. This view reflects the modern, Marxist-influenced view that all history is merely economics. It is true that the South had an economic interest in maintaining slavery, and the North had an economic interest in abolishing it. If the economic czars of the day had appealed only to economics, however, no one would have volunteered for the war. One must ask what caused thousands of men to volunteer to fight, at the risk of their lives and the loss of their families. What would make a man voluntarily sign up, knowing that doing so could cause his death, and leave his family exposed for years without income or protection against criminals? The people who signed up for the war were not impoverished men hoping to better their fortunes. They came predominantly from the middle and upper classes. Two things caused this. First, it was a universal European trait to despise a coward and to honor those who were brave in battle. Many men cherished the opportunity to prove themselves in battle, even if the cause were not just. Second, many people on both sides uncompromisingly believed their cause was just. For the North, it was to rescue the oppressed and to punish the rebel against proper authority. For the South, it was to oppose the foreign tyrant who made capricious laws, just as in the Revolution against England.

The defeat of the South ultimately legitimized the morality of the North, so that to this day almost no one questions whether slavery should return or whether the federal government has the right to make a law about anything it wants. Although sentimental hearts might be expected to recoil at the suffering which the war had produced, the abolitionists declared that all the suffering in the South was the just retribution of God’s hand for the sin of slavery. The Christian Right was discredited, and the Christian Left, energized by the glorious victory, began a long series of efforts to use the power of the Federal government to right wrongs in society. This movement, which eventually became known as the “progressive” movement, took up the causes such as labor reform, anti-trust laws, the income tax, women’s suffrage, and Prohibition.

The Christian Right, where it existed at all, gave only marginal opposition to these

efforts; those who stood against the progressive movement were mostly anti-Christians such as Mencken and Dewey. Just as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had inflamed people against slavery, the writings of Charles Dickens and Jacob Riis (*How the Other Half Lives*) inflamed the people to deal with the poverty of the industrial age. Surprisingly, the progressive movement quickly ceased to be strongly concerned about the African slaves freed in the Civil War. In the years immediately after the Civil War, the period known as the Reconstruction, many progressives, who controlled the Republican Party at the time, did attempt to rewrite Southern laws to ensure equality. In the face of ongoing Southern hostility and resistance to these attempts, however, eventually Northern progressives became more concerned about Northern problems, namely, the deterioration of the condition of factory workers and immigrants in the North. At the end of the reconstruction, Southern states all had in place the famous "Jim Crow" laws as well as a secret army of KKK volunteers, which kept blacks in a situation not much different from slavery. Again, it is easy to condemn Jim Crow laws, which violated the biblical principle of equal treatment under the law, and the KKK, which was simply terrorism and vigilantism, which is also condemned by the Old Testament, but in the minds of many Southerners, without these means their society would have collapsed into anarchy. The famous scenes in "Gone With the Wind" in which Scarlet is nearly attacked in an ex-slave settlement, after which the men go on a KKK expedition to clean it out, illustrates the rationale of the Southerners for these things— the need to control crime. Thus in both the Trail of Tears and the Jim Crow laws, the Christian Right also followed what it had condemned in the Left: violating the written law of the land, and the law of the Bible, on the basis of an ends-justify-the-means argument. The progressive movement of the Christian Left did not strongly speak out against these things; they had turned to other battles, the full extent of the terror against blacks in the South was not always known, and perhaps the Left also shared some of the fears of other whites that the blacks could not be completely trusted.

The labor laws, anti-trust laws, and the income tax which were pushed through by the progressive movement gave the federal government essentially total control over every detail of the economy, the right to look into everyone's business, instead of control only over interstate commerce, as had been written in the Constitution. It seems hard to imagine now that Bible-quoting Christians of all types insisted on these changes. To understand them, one must remember the squalor of poverty which existed in Northern cities in utter contrast to the industrial "barons." The power of these magnates was so great that it competed with that of the Federal government, but unlike the government, they felt no need to answer for the suffering of the people. The labor laws, anti-trust laws, and the income tax were all designed to break the power of the rich and to give only a small portion of their wealth to the poor. No one then could have imagined a federal government that took 60% of the income of people; all of the discussion centered around a tax of 1 or 2% of income. The amendment to the Constitution which allowed an income tax did not specify an upper bound, however.

Besides labor reform, the progressive movement also strongly pursued women's suffrage and Prohibition. It is hard for us to imagine now why Christians did not originally give women the right to vote in the United States. Did they not think women were people? To ask that is to betray a lack of understanding of early European and American culture. Men in those days certainly did think of women as people. It simply did not occur to them to give women the vote, however, because of their concept of roles and classes in society. The idea

of “stations in life” was deeply embedded in European culture up until the middle of the 20th century . This view sees all people as equal before God, but given different “stations,” or roles to play out in life. Only a few men of the “upper classes” were called to have a role in politics; not only women but also lower-class men and children were not included in government. Those in the upper stations were not to use this power selfishly; the concept of “noblesse oblige” demanded that they use their gifts for the benefit of those in the lower stations. This system of one hand washing the other is called “patronage” and is common in almost all non-Western cultures in the world today; one might argue that all peoples naturally gravitate toward it if there is not direct opposition to it.

It is worth stepping back to ask whether acceptance of this type of class society is intrinsic to the Christian Right. On one hand, it is clear that the early Reformers such as Calvin and Luther embraced the concept of nobility and classes; the Larger Westminster Catechism, which historically was one of the definitions of Reformed theology, can be interpreted as teaching deference to upper classes. More recently, the secular book, *The Conservative Mind*, which made a tremendous impact in the conservative movement in the 1950’s, listed as a tenet of conservatism the necessity of classes in society. As discussed above, however, the roots of the American Christian Right lie in the Scottish Reformation, not in the English and Continental Reformed movements. The Scotch-Irish Presbyterian immigrants to America were intensely egalitarian and suspicious of anyone setting himself up as an elite. The Presbyterian and Baptist churches on the frontier rejected the class favoritism seen in the churches of the East Coast. The biblical concept of equal treatment under the law took hold in Christian Right in America and eventually led to a strong reaction against the concept of nobility and upper classes. The Right did, however, embrace the right to private property and the consequent inequality of wealth in society, based not on birth but on hard work and risk taking. They also gave great respect to their pastors and elders in the churches and their elected political representatives, but they gave this honor on the basis of merit and democratic vote, not birth, and they resented any such person who put on airs, acting superior to others.

The majority of the Christian Right to this day embrace the idea of male headship in the family and the church, even while they embrace women’s right to vote and equal treatment under the law. Is this an inconsistent holdover from a previous age? They would not see it that way. First, male headship is clearly taught in the Bible as well as equal treatment under the law. In the modern conservative Christian view, male headship is not a legal right, but a voluntary submission by women following the example of Christ who submitted voluntarily to the Father even though equal to Him (this model for submission of women is taught explicitly in the New Testament.)

Of course, this type of distinction was not always so clear historically. The Christian Right was fractured and discredited after the Civil War, and did not assist women’s suffrage, but rather, came around to embracing it later. Those who cared about this issue joined the progressive movement. Notably, the progressive movement which sought to give women the vote also worked hard to keep women *out* of certain dangerous jobs as part of its labor reform, embracing the idea of equality but different roles. Theodore Roosevelt, the standard bearer for the progressives, pushed for expansion of governmental power in labor reform and while also urging from the White House that women stay home and have babies.

It is probably valid to say that women’s suffrage succeeded because of the commitment



of the Christian Left to Prohibition. Women overwhelmingly supported Prohibition, and men who supported Prohibition supported women's suffrage as a means to their end. The strategy worked—soon after women's suffrage, the Constitutional Amendment instituting Prohibition was approved.

In Prohibition, the hermeneutics of the Christian Left are again apparent. The Bible does not forbid alcohol (as it does not strictly forbid slavery) but it has many obviously negative effects, and the Christian Left saw this expansion of governmental power as an acceptable means to a good end. The argument of limited government was not made strongly by Christians in the early 20th century, since the Christian Right had been discredited.

The perceived failure of Prohibition began the downfall of the Christian Left in the middle of the 20th century. (In historical fact, Prohibition was not such a failure as painted by the opposition. They argued that organized crime increased due to Prohibition, but after Prohibition, organized crime did not drop so dramatically, and the drop was more due to J. Edgar Hoover's increasingly powerful FBI than to legalization of alcohol.) Christian leftists with their constant use of the government to change society were painted as self-righteous meddlers; not only Prohibition but also many labor laws were seen as intrusive usurpation of individual rights. The Christian Left was also portrayed as ignorant country bumpkins in the propaganda of atheist writers like Mencken and Dewey, who also opposed their labor reforms. One of the great leaders of the progressives, William Jennings Bryan, was painted as an ignorant fool for his role in the famous Scopes trial, at which he argued against evolution. This stereotype of Christians has persisted to this day and has been passed on to the Christian Right as a way of discrediting them.

WWII was more important than the failure of Prohibition, however, in the downfall of the Christian Left. Before both WWI and WWII, Christians were strongly pacifist. Just as in the French and Indian War in the 1700's, the atrocities of the enemy discredited the pacifists. Chamberlain's "appeasement" of Hitler echoed the appeasement of the Indians by the Quakers in the 1700's, both with the same political effect. Americans universally perceived WWII as a just war, and pacifism became abhorrent. In addition, leftists tended to embrace communists, and in the 1950's, stories began to come out of Russia and China of the horrid atrocities going on there, including purges which led to the deaths of tens of millions of people, and punishment for all kinds of political and religious beliefs by years in concentration camps.

As the Christian Right had been discredited after the Civil War in the 1800's, the Christian Left was discredited after WWII. In each case, rightists and leftists continued to exist and to have power, but after the Civil War rightists were seen as less *Christian* than the Christian Left, while after WWII, leftists remained powerful but were seen as less *Christian*. The same churches which had supported the progressive movement and Prohibition switched to supporting the anticommunists.

Civil Rights was the last great accomplishment of the Christian Left. Finally awakening to the plight of blacks in the South, the Christian Left marched for their cause in the 1950's. It is safe to say that without the Christian underpinnings of this movement, the South would never have embraced the change. The political actions of the blacks alone would have only met with increased resistance, had not many whites felt guilt over their treatment of blacks. Yet, as discussed in the next section, the Left by this time had become strongly mixed with communists and atheists, and by the 1960's had come to be perceived as having deserted

the Bible altogether.

It may well be said that four wars, each a century apart, discredited each of these movements in turn. The English Civil War in the mid-1600's, which put Cromwell in power, discredited the Reformed Puritans and led them to flee to North America. The French and Indian War in the mid-1700's discredited the Quakers and pacifists, putting Presbyterians and conservatives in the driver's seat and leading Quakers and other pacifists to settle in marginalized communities. The Civil War in the mid-1800's discredited the Right, leading them to be isolated in the South. Finally, WWII, including the aftermath of Stalin's atrocities, discredited the Left, which had opposed confrontation of Hitler and which had befriended communists. Since then, the Christian Left has increasingly moved into its own ghettos.

In each case, the movement did not wither away at once; on the contrary, it was at its zenith at the time. Its failure to address real problems led to the seeds of discontent, however, and caused it to become intellectually dead. Instead of intellectual vigor, the movement fell back on pat answers which did not satisfy most Christians.

## 4 The Influence of Secular Movements

Before the 20th century, no one in America would have used the terms "Christian Left" or "Christian Right." Instead, a person would have been a Patriot, or an abolitionist, or a progressive, etc. The terms "Right" and "Left" do not come from America but from the European politics of the 1800's, and show the influence of other movements on the American scene.

The terms "Right" and "Left" come from the French political battles of the 1800's, in which the Left was communist and the Right was royalist. This division would have made no sense in America at the time, where no one could have imagined supporting either royalty or communism. By the early 1900's, however, the European leftist/communist movement had made its way to America.

The French communist revolution was explicitly atheist; Christianity was identified with the Roman Catholic church, which was part of the established order, and thousands of priests were killed and churches destroyed. This movement soon evolved into the dictatorship of Napoleon, who was eventually defeated by the European royalists. The French communists never took control again, but remained a powerful force in French politics up to the end of the 20th century, with several attempts to overthrow the government. Because Paris was the center of culture in Europe in the 1800's, the influence of the communists was spread far and wide. In particular, the Russian intellectuals idolized the French, and Russian intellectuals by the end of the 1800's had embraced communism. The Russian revolution was also explicitly atheist, and it successfully stamped out Christianity in the Soviet Union for most of the 20th century. Russia exported communism and supported it financially all over the world, including in the United States. Thousands of communist organizers in the U.S. were supported by the Soviet Union. Although it is a byword now that McCarthy went too far in trying to purge communists, it is nevertheless a fact that Russia did indeed have a plan for hostile infiltration of the U.S. and succeeded in finding and supporting many sympathizers in the media, the protest movements, and the universities.

It is hard to imagine now, but in the first half of the 1900's, many American Bible-believing Christians openly embraced communism. They had supported the labor movement and labor reform, and communists seemed to stand for the same thing. The ideal of communal ownership appealed to many people (some people believe the early church in the book of Acts in the Bible lived this way.) As discussed above, the progressives supported the idea of "big government," including governmental control over the economy to solve social problems. Joseph Stalin was "Uncle Joe" in WWII, partly because of the propaganda efforts of President Roosevelt, who sympathized with communism and who expanded the power of the Federal government in the U.S. tremendously, and partly because many Americans sympathized with communism. The enemies of the progressives in the early 1900's were atheist capitalists such as Mencken who believed in the virtue of grinding the weak under foot. Since these people also hated the communists, many Christians followed the dictum, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

The mixing with atheist communists eventually did have effects on the Christian Left. First, it led them to become apologists for the atrocities of the communists. A hallmark of the Christian Left up to the end of the 20th century was its ambivalence toward communism. On one hand, they mostly did not directly advocate communism. On the other hand, they tended to deny the validity of reports on atrocities in communist countries, attributing these reports to right-wing exaggeration. Malcolm Muggeridge and Alexander Soltseneitsn, two famous writers who documented the atrocities, were dismissed as rightist propagandists well into the 1980's. In the 1950's, word only slowly leaked out of the communist countries, and the communists had slick propaganda which presented a good image to the West, including official "show churches" whose leaders told the West all was well, so that it was easy to doubt the stories of atrocities and suffering. This image only crumbled at the end of the 1980's, with the fall of the Berlin wall and Eastern European communism.

Second, the Christian Left came to embrace morality which would have shocked progressives in the early part of the century. By the end of the 20th century the Christian Left had mostly embraced homosexual rights and abortion rights. They did not necessarily advocate these practices, but insisted on the legal right to do these things, on the basis that Christians do not have the right to force their morality on others. Progressives in the first half of the century would have found this argument strange; they felt no compunction in enforcing morality, whether in child labor laws, desegregation, or, most famously, Prohibition. By the end of the 20th century, some of the Christian Left supported abortion and homosexual rights because they had moved to theological liberalism, an explicit rejection of the validity of the morality of the Bible. A substantial fraction of the Christian Left, however, the "evangelical" Left, maintained the belief that these actions are sinful, but nevertheless advocated legal tolerance. While they might well argue this position based on various passages in the Bible, there is also no question that they did not come up with these positions on their own; these issues were pressed on them by secular leftists with whom they frequently associated. The Democratic Party of the U.S. essentially has not allowed anti-abortion or anti-homosexual members to have any voice in leadership since the 1980's, and therefore evangelicals in the Democratic Party had, at minimum, to remain silent on these issues.

In one sense, this evolution can be seen as simply an extension of the progressivist desire to continue to change society. First, blacks are given rights, then women, then homosexuals. In another sense, it is a sea change. The old liberalism believed in absolutes of right and

wrong, and it felt a high moral calling to change society to conform to the right. The new liberalism embraces the idea of moral relativism, that one person cannot tell others what is wrong. Taken to its logical extreme, this would seem to undercut the entire basis of progressivism, by saying that no one can call any society unjust by any absolute standard.

On the other side, secular conservatism had great influence on the Right in the second half of the 20th century. When word started to arrive in the U.S. in the 1950's of the atrocities of the communists, in particular the rampant persecution of Christians documented by believers such as Brother Andrew, Christians began to rally to the anti-communist banner. By their side they found the secular capitalists who had been the enemies of fundamentalist Christians when they were progressives, particularly in the Republican Party. On the principle that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," evangelical Christians began to listen to economic conservative arguments. Some of the argumentation for capitalism came from Reformed Calvinist arguments, with roots in John Locke, Adam Smith, and Max Weber. But many of these arguments were made on the basis of another, atheist anti-communist movement, called "objectivism" in its philosophical form and libertarianism in its political form, led by the Russian emigre Ayn Rand. Ayn Rand resonated with many conservative Christians, because she taught the objectivity of truth in the face of the increasing subjectivism of the day and because she spoke out against the communists. Her world view was entirely atheistic, however, and the Libertarian world view has several elements which directly contradict the Bible. For example, it is common in Libertarian argument to say that all government is equivalent to nothing more than thugs who have power. As discussed above, Romans chapter 13 says that the institution of government is established by God, even if particular governments are evil. Libertarians also reject the idea of universal morality, saying that the only legitimate action of government is preventing harm of one person against another against his will, and not preventing harm of a person against himself or harm against a person who consents to it. Therefore Libertarians support legalization of drugs, prostitution, gambling and abortion. The Bible teaches a universal morality, and the Old Testament precedent of the Bible contains many cases of laws which have the aim of preventing self-harm, such as the prohibition of prostitution.

Prior to the middle of the 20th century, royalists had little influence on Christians in America; the Christian Right which led the charge of the American Revolution hated royalists, British royalists in particular. WWII changed this view. Americans came to see Winston Churchill and his royalist conservatives in England as heroic figures standing against evil. After WWII, the Christian Right embraced the British conservatives as fellow warriors in the battle against communism. British conservatives, however, explicitly embraced the idea of inequality under the law, with special rights for the nobility, something the early Christian Right fought strongly against in the American Revolution. American conservatives, of course, would never embrace an official class of nobles, but came to see social inequity as normal. As mentioned above, the influential book, *The Conservative Mind*, which some say defined modern conservatism, explicitly embraces social inequities as good and proper.

The result of this embracing of Libertarians and British conservatives has been a near-complete reversal from the aims of the progressive movement among fundamentalist Christians. Many in the Christian Right embrace a fairly bleak picture of letting the poor starve if they can't find work, letting ignorant people suffer from poor choices such as drugs and gambling, and letting large corporations run by the upper classes hire workers for extremely

low wages in dangerous conditions, if the person foolishly agrees to it. If this leads to a permanent underclass, so be it. It was revealing that Gary Bauer, a representative of the “Christian Right,” banned the term “compassionate conservatism,” as though compassion has no place in conservatism. The Christian Right would say that churches should help the poor instead of the government, and if the government did not take so much in taxes, the churches could do far more. Many very conservative churches do work actively to help the poor. But even in this work there is often a strong undercurrent of “letting a person suffer the consequences of his own poor choices.” If God treated us this way, who could be saved? The Bible constantly talks of intervention to compassionately save people from the consequences of their own poor choices. Even if the government is not commissioned to do this, the church is.

## 5 The Future of the Movements

Can these movements ever get together? Often, the rhetoric of each side paints the other side as purely evil, or at best, naively manipulated by evil powers, hardly the basis of reconciliation. Yet there is no denying that there have been solid Bible-believers on both sides throughout history.

The European influence on the Left colors the way leftists see the Left-Right spectrum. In Europe, both the Christian Left and the Christian Right were essentially nonexistent after the 1800’s; unbelief and nominalism took over in Europe by the end of the 1800’s, following the apparently devastating attacks on biblical Christianity by Hume and the higher critical movement. The Christian response to these attacks in Europe, typified by Kierkegaard, was mostly to redefine Christianity as an irrational leap of faith, a personal experience of “transcendence” rather than objective, historical truth. Those who would afterward call themselves “Bible believers” in Europe mostly belonged to the “pietist” movement. This movement emphasized personal piety, in the form of Bible reading, worship and song, and good works such as feeding the poor, but did not emphasize involvement in evangelism, missions, or politics; i.e. in overt confrontation of the larger culture. These “public” activities were seen as fruitless since a person could only know that the Bible is true by a personal, private, “transcendent” experience. The last great openly Christian involvement in European politics was Wilberforce, who led the abolition movement in England; progressives following in his footsteps who worked for labor reform existed in England up through the late 1800’s, but on the continent evangelical Christian involvement in politics was negligible throughout the 1800’s and 1900’s.

Because of this, the main opposition to leftists in Europe came not from Christian Bible-believers but from royalists and Nazis, who embraced the idea of a class society with ruling classes and underclasses, superior races and inferior ones. For this reason the Left in Europe and, by extension, leftists in the U.S., therefore came to equate the Christian Right with Nazis. This is completely artificial. The Christian Right has had only small influence from British royalist conservatives and none from the Nazis, who added the goal of a totalitarian government to the idea of a class society, a goal which is far more compatible with communism. The Nazi party was, after all, the “National Socialist” party, and Hitler embraced a view of big government that was quite socialist, except that he extended the social contract

only to those of the proper race. British and American conservatives fought against the Nazis in WWII and continue to despise them and other dictators.

The other false charge made by the Left against the Right is that the Right wants to set up a “theocracy” something like the Spanish Inquisition. This is partly the result of deliberate, false propaganda to discredit the Right. Anti-Christian humanists in the 1800’s painted a picture of Calvin’s Geneva and Puritan New England as horribly intolerant (defining the word, “puritanical” as perhaps our greatest bugaboo). In historical fact, these places were not so intolerant (judged by comparison to other societies of the same day) and the condemnation of them by later historians was largely an exercise of self-justification, just as a person who feels guilty around a good person often mocks the good person as “self-righteous” or “judgmental.” Furthermore, the modern Christian Right has no desire or plan to set up a theocracy. It is proper to say that the Christian Right would like to make America “a Christian nation,” but by this they mean one which generally avoids extreme violations of God’s laws but still has a large degree of tolerance. The beliefs in personal freedom and independence from a snooping government are deep-rooted in the Christian Right.

Two criticisms of the Right are true to a fair degree. The first is that they do not largely appreciate the value of the reforms made by the progressives in the first part of the 20th century, and the horrors of the poverty of those times, and so they can sound hollow in promoting a return to laissez-faire capitalism. The Christian Right does care about the poor, but it does not have a well-developed view on helping the poor other than saying that in a strong economy, everyone does better, just as all boats float higher when the tide rises. That is true, but to what degree does a strong economy depend on government interventions such as breaking up monopolies, preventing a permanent upper class by means of hefty inheritance taxes, and enforcing labor safety laws? If the Right would chide the Left for not learning from the real historical experience of communist societies, the Right must also be willing to learn from the real historical experience of laissez-faire capitalist societies.

Another valid criticism is that just as they do not appreciate the progressive movement, the Right also does not have an accurate memory of the pre-Civil Rights days. Almost every black family in the U.S. knows of some near relative or friend killed by racist terrorism. This is a recent memory, not a distant one, for most blacks. While the Right may want to tinker with the laws, it can not act as though the racist past of the U.S. is some imagination of leftists. Many rightists view the 1950’s as a golden era, but for most blacks it was the “bad old days” when saying the wrong thing to a white could get you killed.

As stated above, one of the greatest weaknesses of the Left at the end of the 20th century has been its intellectual deadness; most rightists have the experience of trying to engage a leftist in debate and finding that instead of a rational exchange of ideas, one faces merely ever shriller shouting. This is especially true on college campuses, where true intellectual dialogue has almost completely died. In the 1980’s, the pro-abortion-rights movement deliberately created the picture of the Christian Right as evil and full of “hate.” Mother Theresa has been condemned as an angel of death; Jerry Falwell as the next Hitler. An entire fictional conspiracy story has been created about how the Christian Right would like to create a neo-Nazi society, and this view has been popularized in books and movies such as *A Handmaiden’s Tale*. The Christian Left must repudiate this type of language if there is to be dialogue. While it is true that the Right has also poisoned the air with pejoratives against the Left, these are nowhere near the shrillness of the language by which the Left labels the Right as pure evil.

A pro-abortion speaker in a Bible Belt church would get a far more polite reception than an anti-abortion speaker at a liberal university.

Both movements have suffered from defending the sins of their leaders. Most notably, the Right rallied to President Nixon's side throughout Watergate, and the Left rallied to President Clinton when he committed perjury in regard to his sexual affairs. A major difference, however, is that Nixon resigned under pressure while Clinton did not. In general, the idea of "doing the honorable thing" and resigning is more typical of the Right than the Left. Part of the reason for the intransigence of the Left is the view of many leftists that the Right are evil Nazis, and therefore any means of preventing the Right from getting power is justifiable, and any admission of weakness is unacceptable because it will give evil forces the upper hand.

The greatest question facing each movement is how it will define itself in the future. As discussed above, the Right has no interest in "theocracy," that is, control of the government by a church. At the same time, the Right does believe that the church should be an advocate telling the government to enact righteous laws. This leads to a tension. Exactly what laws should the church advocate? There is agreement on certain issues, such as abortion, but there is no general, comprehensive plan for legal change in the long run. Without such a plan, the Right is open to attacks from the Left which imagine a secret, hidden agenda of the Right to do all kinds of evil things.

In particular, there is disagreement on the Right regarding how to regard religious freedom. Some on the Right argue for complete freedom for all religions, embracing the idea of the secular state. The problem they face is that some religions seem atrocious, and allowing anything at all in the name of religion seems to be a slippery slope. For example, devil worship is on the rise in the Western world. Should a nation tolerate this? Would no one be bothered by a neighbor invoking spirits to curse him? Some may say that this is a stereotype of devil worship, and actually devil worshippers are peaceable and loving, but what if a person does call down curses on another? Should this be tolerated? What if a religion involves sexual orgies as part of its worship? (This was common in the Roman Empire.) What if a religion seems to deceive its members for profit, as some accuse of Scientology, or seems to use brainwashing to keep its members under control, as some accuse of the Moonies? What if a religion involves drug use? Many national evangelical Christians supported the freedom of Native Americans to use peyote, an illegal hallucinogen, in their worship services as a religious freedom. Can sex cults be allowed on the same grounds? Is anything legitimate if someone feels religious about it?

Others on the Right argue that no state can be devoid of a national religion, and that if no official religion is chosen, then secularism itself will be that religion. Secularism is a world view that says that religion is unimportant, that God is irrelevant to most of life. This view itself has huge religious implications. By forbidding prayer and religious displays in public places, the U.S. effectively "establishes" secularism as a religion. Therefore many on the Right would like to affirm Christianity as the official religion. This shocks many people, because they assume that this means that other religions would be forbidden and persecuted. This does not follow; a country may have an official religion without persecuting all others. Every nation defines a "circle of tolerance," a range of freedom in which people may operate, but beyond which a person may not go. A secular state is no different— in the American secular state at the beginning of the 21st century, racism and sexism are not

tolerated, and carry severe legal penalties. A Christian state could be similar— much can be tolerated, without tolerating everything. The question is not whether to draw a line, but where.

Even among members of the Christian Right who embrace the idea of official Christianity, however, there is disagreement about where to draw the line of the “circle of tolerance” in a Christian state. At one extreme are “theonomists,” who would say that the entire law of Moses should be adapted to modern society. On the other extreme, “dispensationalists” argue that the advent of Christ overturns the whole Old Testament, and we must look only to the New Testament for direction regarding laws. There are many intermediate views as well. This ongoing debate is evidence of intellectual vitality, but until there is consensus on what the Right wants, they will often work against each other.

The Christian Left also faces tensions about its long-range vision. Few in the Christian Left support communism these days, but many support “socialism.” (The word “socialism” often means the same thing in Europe as communism, but in the U.S. it connotes a state in which the government controls the entire economy, but allows other freedoms. In Europe, this system, which is the basic form of government in all countries, is called “social democracy.”) In general, the Left in the U.S. is enamored with Europe and wishes that the U.S. had a system of government similar to that of Europe. In the 1990’s, however, almost all European social democracies fell into an economic and social crisis. This problem is two-fold. First, a system which awards generous economic benefits to the poor is likely to have significant immigration of the poor from other countries, and second, a system which heavily taxes those who work is likely to have significant outward emigration of the skilled and wealthy, known as “brain drain,” or simply the phenomenon of “Atlas Shrugged,” in which workers stop working when they feel they could do almost as well by not working. Old-style communism prevented these problems by sealing its borders, e.g. the famous Berlin Wall, and by forcing people to work. Modern social democracies in Europe allow freedom of movement and freedom of work. They have experienced tremendous economic and social stresses as a result, first in the huge waves of immigration from impoverished nations, and second, in a dropping level of productivity.

The waves of immigration have led to a backlash against immigrants in most European nations. The U.S., which has somewhat less generous social welfare programs, has experienced the same thing to a lesser degree. Unfortunately, much of this anti-immigrant backlash is couched in racist language, and the Left as a result has completely opposed all attempts to limit immigration, viewing all such attempts as racist. Many anti-immigration advocates simply see the issue in terms of mathematics— immigrants did not pay into the social welfare system but receive benefits from it, and therefore if the number of immigrants is large enough, the country must be bankrupted. They also question whether those immigrating who do not share the basic beliefs of the nation, for example, Muslims who do not believe in tolerating other religions, can be quickly integrated into the social fabric. By labeling all discussion of restricting immigration as racist, the Left has not seriously addressed these concerns.

In general, there is no clear philosophy in the Christian Left of exactly how much the government should do. The attitude has essentially been “more is better.” Without a clear philosophy of the limits of government, the Left will continue to be mistrusted by many people as they see the government continuing to encroach on their freedoms. The newspapers are



filled with stories of government regulators gone amok. As discussed above, although the Left comes from a background of seeing authority as a bad thing, in practice the Left is in the position of advocating far more authority for government than most empires in the world have ever known.

It would be trite to say that the Christian Right and Left should “split the difference” and come together. As discussed above, very basic issues separate the two world views. Nevertheless, there is much opportunity for the Christian Left and the Christian Right to work together. The true debate of the 21st century is not rightism vs. leftism but libertarianism vs. moral absolutism. The majority of secular youth today embrace both “economic conservatism” and “social libertarianism,” i.e. they support less welfare and freedom to have abortions. This is the position of Libertarianism. There is a selfish consistency in this—they care about maintaining their comfortable lifestyle, and both high taxes and unplanned pregnancies would threaten that. Most Christians on both the Left and Right, by contrast, are very concerned about the poor and are also concerned about the helpless unborn.

The weakness of the Libertarian party should not be interpreted as weakness of the libertarian philosophy. The Libertarian party is weak because the two major parties in the U.S. hold a lock on political power. Neither party is defined by a definite philosophy as much as by a history. The Republican Party began as the party of the abolitionists and progressives, and as such became the dominant party of the North. Since the North was heavily industrial, it eventually moved to becoming the party of the industrialists. The Democratic Party was the party of the South, and supported labor unions and Jim Crow laws (most labor unions had no interest in helping blacks at first; many unions formed with the express purpose of keeping good jobs out of the hands of minorities, who they felt would accept lower wages.) In the 20th century after Prohibition, both parties had moved to the “center,” that is, became mostly interested in economic prosperity, with the Republican party generally favoring lower taxes and laws that favored business, and the Democratic party generally favoring more government programs and labor unions.

In the 1970’s and 1980’s, however, new movements began to infiltrate the two parties. Many radicals of the 1960’s moved into leadership positions in the Democratic Party in the 1970’s. The 1960’s radicals embraced a grand plan of societal change in which beliefs and ethics would be radically changed from the traditional Christian view to include acceptance of abortion, casual sex, pornography and homosexuality. For many radicals, this was not mere selfish indulgence but high-minded idealism: many philosophers taught (and still teach) that all social evils come from repressed sexuality, and setting people free sexually would remove their frustrations and make them all good citizens. Abortion was necessary for this sexual freedom since all birth control methods can fail. In the 1980’s, Christians began to stand against this, and many of them moved into leadership positions in the Republican party. The term “Christian Right” was first coined at this time as a pejorative by the Left.

Moral conservatives have been accepted in the Republican party, while the Democratic party has completely rejected them. As discussed above, many in the Christian Right have supported laissez-faire economics because of their alliance with economic conservatives, but might be more comfortable with greater government role to help the poor. George Bush’s “compassionate conservatism,” which supported existing government programs for the poor, received great support among the Christian Right.

Many have described the present state of American politics as the “culture wars.” Al-

though few in the Democratic party explicitly advocate communism any more, the leadership of the Democratic party is still committed to “radicalism” in the sense of societal engineering. The watershed issue for the 21st century is abortion. While most politicians avoid mentioning it, the issue drives much of the behind-the-scenes machinations in the U.S. The position of the secular Left is much like that of the slave-owning South— the arguments don’t really matter, because our lifestyle depends on it. The sexual revolution depends on the availability of abortion, since no birth control method is failsafe; when abortion rights are threatened, an entire way of life is threatened. Even further, new medical developments may make it profitable to use parts of aborted babies to keep others alive. With these stakes, it is hard to imagine compromise.

In the past 20 years, many conservative economic policies have been enacted with support from the Christian Right, but very little progress has been made on abortion or other moral issues important to the Christian Right. It remains to be seen whether evangelical Christians have the same tenacity as their anti-slave Abolitionist forebears. After 30 years many Christians seem ready to give up the fight. It remains to be seen whether the Republican Party can be transformed to a truly pro-life party, which might also embrace “compassionate conservatism,” or if those who believe in universal morality might eventually form a new party, as Lincoln did when he helped found the Republican party. If they did, they might find some in the Christian Left willing to ally with them.