

FUNDAMENTALIST FERVOR

The Political Activism of America's Protestant
Fundamentalists

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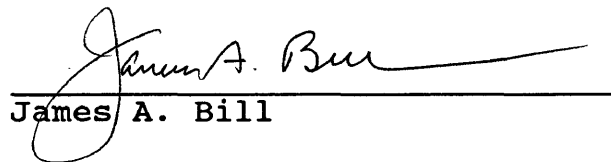
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Paul, whose constant encouragement and support meant everything, and our baby, whose imminent birth provided the greatest inspiration for its timely completion.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the cause or causes of political activism on the part of religious fundamentalists through an examination of one such group: America's Protestant fundamentalists.

Chapter one provides of review of the literature regarding fundamentalist movements worldwide. In so doing, it aimed to establish a definition of fundamentalism that was not system, culture or faith-specific.

Chapter two surveys the literature on the causes of fundamentalist expressions in politics. The most common explanations offered by observers of the phenomena were that such expressions were: (1) a reaction to modernity; (2) issue-dependent; (3) a constant cycle; or, (4) systemically explained.

The third chapter examines one aspect of Protestant fundamentalism in America, the presidential campaign of Pat Robertson, as a case-study of the larger movement in this country.

Analysis of the campaign supported three of the theories presented in chapter two. First, Robertson's bid represented a reaction to modernity. Second, it was also issue-dependent. Third, the campaign confirmed a constant cycle of fundamentalist activism in American politics.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1976, the American political landscape witnessed the resurgence of a religious element many thought had all but disappeared in this modern, secular society. Although Jimmy Carter maintained his profession of born again Christianity was merely a statement of fact vice an attempt to secure an advantage with a particular electoral group, his discussion of the sacred in the world of secular politics galvanized formerly apolitical Protestant "fundamentalist" believers. In subsequent Presidential campaigns, appeals to this group would become common, particularly on the part of conservative Republican candidates.

A similar, more extreme merging of the sacred and the secular was evident in other parts of the world as well. The 1979 takeover of the American embassy in Iran both shocked and perplexed the west. Those responsible for the takeover were said to be acting on the basis of their faith, a "fundamentalist" interpretation of Islam. On December 9, 1987, the world watched the start of an uprising by Palestinians in the occupied territories that continues to this day. Observers of the grass-roots movement credit Islamic fundamentalism for turning this latest expression of hatred against the Israeli occupation into a holy war. At

the same time, "fundamentalist" Jews assert their claims to Gaza and the West Bank through direct political action and acts of violence.

The importance of religion has not waned in the modern, secular world. The acts engaged in by fundamentalist practitioners, from the bombing of abortion clinics in the United States to the taking of hostages in Lebanon, raise questions for the student of politics about the increasing relevance of religion in the political realm. A comprehensive explanation of this phenomenon requires a multi-system analysis. Such analysis is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, in the pages that follow a case-study of one facet of this international phenomena will be examined, that of American Protestant fundamentalism since 1976. This paper seeks to answer the following question: what factor or factors gave rise to the recent fundamentalist religious expression in American politics? In so doing, it has raised other questions as well. Is the movement a unique reaction to secularism, or a cyclical phenomenon, perhaps the continuation of past revivalist periods in this country? Are there elements unique to the American political system that encourage this type of religious expression?

This thesis aims to address those questions in the following manner. In chapter one, religious fundamentalism is defined in a way that is not system or faith specific. Later in the chapter the definition is applied to the American

Protestant fundamentalist variant. In addition, the major component groups of the movement are identified and distinguished. Chapter two consists of a review of the literature regarding the political expression of Protestant fundamentalists from the perspectives of both those inside and outside of the fundamentalist camp. This chapter presents four possible explanations for the movement. Through an examination of the Presidential campaign of Pat Robertson--his reasons for running and the reasons given by his evangelical supporters for their political activism--chapter three endeavors to test the explanations presented in Chapter Two. Chapter Four presents the author's conclusions.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF FUNDAMENTALISM

The term "fundamentalism" has been liberally used to connote virtually any type of bizarre, fanatical religious movement. A scholarly examination of the phenomena requires that the term denote specific behavioral or belief patterns; otherwise, it is meaningless. If we are witnessing a surge in the political manifestation of religious fundamentalism, there must be a means of measuring, or at least observing fundamentalism that is not system or faith-specific. The aim of the first portion of this chapter is to develop an operational definition of fundamentalism not restricted to one variant. In the second part of this chapter, the dominant strains of Protestant fundamentalism in America will be examined and the characteristics of fundamentalism in general applied to this variant.

What is Meant by "Fundamentalism?"

The term "fundamentalism" implies an emphasis, or reemphasis of the rudiments of a particular faith. Beyond that, the term is unclear--it seems to escape precise definition. Indeed, controversy abounds in the fields of political science, religion and sociology regarding its exact

meaning. A review of the literature on fundamentalist movements worldwide reveals a number of recurring characteristics, however. Fundamentalist political-religious movements are rooted in both theology and ideology.¹ They are characterized by a heavy reliance on a sacred text and strong grassroots support. They are separatist, revivalist, reactionary and absolutist. In the pages that follow, these features will be and discussed. They do not lend themselves to neat compartmentalization. The reader will, therefore, note some overlap of characteristics. Together, they provide great insight into the nature of fundamentalist movements generally.

First, fundamentalist movements are characterized by a heavy reliance on a sacred text by both movement leaders and followers. The sacred text is the source of general and specific guidance, in particular, the doctrinal "fundamentals" of the faith. It provides life's rules. That which divides fundamentalists and the larger religious community is often a dispute over a particular reading of the text. In his comparison of fundamentalist and sacramental Christianity, Martin Marty observed that fundamentalists emphasized "a highly selective selection of the fundamentals of the faith, a fresh patterning of the presumed 'essences'" which often makes "little sense" to the larger body. The selected

¹Harvey Cox, Religion in the Secular City (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1984), pp. 60-61.

fundamentals come from an earlier, purist period in the group's sacred history.² Fundamentalists tend to interpret their sacred text literally, in contrast to a more liberal reading of the text by the larger religious community. According to Frank J. Lechner, their "literal interpretations often involve some doctrinal innovation."³ Gush Emunim, Israel's Jewish fundamentalists, provide an example of these tendencies. They maintain their claim to the occupied territories on the basis of a literal reading of scripture, although Israel's larger Jewish community, which reads the same sacred text, appears more willing to compromise in order to achieve peace.

The sacred text frames the fundamentalist world view and provides guidance for virtually every situation. As Lechner writes, "all spheres of life" are organized for fundamentalists on the basis of "a particular set of absolute values" revealed in the sacred text.⁴ Fundamentalists believe they alone perceive reality truthfully, something James Davison Hunter terms "cognitive intransigence: rejecting the truth claims of all other religions and maintaining the

²Martin E. Marty, Religion and Republic (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987), p. 290. See also Marty, "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon," Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 62, No. 2 (1988), p. 20.

³Frank J. Lechner, "Fundamentalism Revisited," Society, 26, No. 2 (1989), pp. 51-52.

⁴Lechner, pp. 51-52.

superiority of one's own."⁵ The Persian Gulf states provide a fitting example of this. According to James A. Bill, fundamentalists and mainline Islamic practitioners there "compete to demonstrate their greater commitment to the faith and the law. Each attempts to discredit the beliefs and practices of the other."⁶ The fundamentalist world view, based on a literal reading of the sacred text, emerges as one which opposes the dominant, generally more moderate world view espoused by the majority in a given society.

A second feature of fundamentalist movements is their grassroots nature. In his discussion of fundamentalist and orthodox Islam, Bill devised the term "'populist Islam'" to describe the former. It refers to a "general social and political movement generated from below rather than a movement sponsored by governments...[It] comes from the grassroots of society" and seeks to totally transform the established political and social system. "Establishment" Islam, on the other hand, "seeks to preserve the status quo."⁷ This characteristic of fundamentalist movements seems to indicate they are more attractive to the masses than the haut monde. India's politically militant Muslims, who occupy the lower

⁵James Davison Hunter, American Evangelicalism Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 84.

⁶James A. Bill, "Resurgent Islam in the Persian Gulf," Foreign Affairs, 63, No. 1 (1984), p. 109.

⁷Bill, p. 108, 109.

socioeconomic rungs, are a fitting example.⁸ Similarly, Kevin Phillips observed the "anti-elite rhetoric" and "lower-middle-class constituencies" of the Christian right's largely Protestant fundamentalist following in 1974.⁹ In his characterization of religious activity in the late twentieth century, Harvey Cox projects the key players as those in the segments of society that had "been consigned" to the lower classes, or the "periphery."¹⁰ While this seems to be the case in fundamentalist movements in general, it must be stressed, however, that such activists are not always, or necessarily, the poor and uneducated. Although such individuals are represented in fundamentalist movements in large numbers, the college educated and upwardly mobile may also be among their ranks.¹¹

The Fundamentalism Project, an ongoing study of global fundamentalism by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, is examining fundamentalist movements in virtually all types of political systems. Thus far, the following characteristics

⁸See Sheila Teft, "Religious Militancy Surges in India," The Christian Science Monitor, 9 Nov. 1989, p. 4, col. 2.

⁹James A. Sundquist, Dynamics of the Party System (Washington, D. C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), p. 414.

¹⁰Cox, p. 21.

¹¹The upwardly mobile are most evident among America's Protestant fundamentalists. See Anson Shupe and William Stacey, "The Moral Majority Constituency," in The New Christian Right, Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow, ed. (New York, NY: Aldine Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 104-116. Marty contends that upward mobility is characteristic of a mature fundamentalist movement. See Marty, "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon," p. 19.

have been determined to be common among fundamentalist movements across the board:

(1) Separatism. Fundamentalists establish boundaries on the basis of the fundamentals of their faith, which clearly separate the believers from the nonbelievers.¹²

(2) Revivalism. Fundamentalist movements appear as "a revival drawing upon what are perceived to be fundamentals of a religious tradition which has suffered erosion...or manipulation, by secular forces in the modern age."¹³ This characteristic was also addressed in a 1985 study of Islamic fundamentalism undertaken by the Center for Strategic and International Studies Middle East Program. The product of the study, The Politics of Islamic Revivalism, identified the following characteristics of the Islamic revivalist movement: a "stricter application of [the] law and code of ethics" and "the elimination of [outside]...influences viewed as unorthodox..."¹⁴

(3) Reactionaryism. "Fundamentalists set themselves apart from others when, perceiving cherished traditions, values, and ways of life to be under attack, they engage in counterattack," often against the "co-religionist who shares

¹²Marty, "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon," pp. 21-22.

¹³R. Scott Appleby, Religious Fundamentalism as a Global Phenomenon, College Theology Society Plenary Address, 1 June 1989 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, 1989), p. 10.

¹⁴Shireen T. Hunter, ed. The Politics of Islamic Revivalism (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. vii.

the right beliefs but has not followed the...strategy fundamentalists deem necessary to prevent erosion and preserve identity." They "enter into a kind of symbiotic relationship with the enemy," be it modernity, westernization, or secularism. It is their source of vigor, their raison d'etre.¹⁵

(4) Absolutism. In response to an enemy challenge of their values, their commitment to their beliefs increases. Fundamentalists reject relativism and compromise; rather, they see the world as divided into two camps: good and evil. There is not common ground to be shared with the enemy.¹⁶

A final characteristic of fundamentalist movements, that which is most perplexing and has brought them to the attention of the world, is their political activism. As a fundamentalist movement matures and as the discrepancy between the fundamentalist world view and the dominant world view becomes increasingly striking, fundamentalists must choose either to withdraw from society and become more separatist or become actively confrontational. Their uncompromising effort to bring all of society in alignment with their sacred source allows for no middle ground. Although separatist by nature, when significant clashes with the dominant society result in mobilization with the goal of implementing fundamentalist

¹⁵Appleby, p. 14, 17.

¹⁶Marty, "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon," pp. 21-22.

values, beliefs and traditions as the operating code for the larger society and its institutions, fundamentalists believers cease to be merely religious adherents. Rather, they become an ideologically motivated political element.¹⁷ Fundamentalist political mobilization emerges as an effort to forge ahead to the past--to an idealized, more sacred time. This was evident among the al-Salafi Sunni Muslim fundamentalists in Iran who sought to transfer contemporary Iranian society "into a replica of the Muslim Society of 1,400 years ago."¹⁸ Similarly, Protestant fundamentalists, through such organizations as the Moral Majority and the Coalition for the Preservation of Traditional Values, as well as the Republican party, have sought to return America to what they perceive to be its more godly past--a period in U. S. history when traditional families were the norm, students prayed daily in the nation's public schools, sexual promiscuity and the use of illegal drugs were rare, and national leaders defined "right" according to a Biblical standard--or so it appeared. This backward mobilization, which Lechner calls a "critique of modern society," may prove highly explanatory in understanding the causes of fundamentalist movements generally.¹⁹

¹⁷Cox sees the decision to confront or withdraw from society on the part of fundamentalists as equally logical. As fundamentalists believe "the whole world...should reflect [their] sacred source," there is no room for compromise. See Cox, p. 62.

¹⁸Bill, p. 110.

¹⁹Lechner, p. 52.

Protestant Fundamentalism in America

The Protestant fundamentalist movement in America involves two important subgroups--fundamentalists and evangelicals--as well as a smaller Pentecostal/charismatic element.²⁰ In the remaining pages of this chapter, the distinguishing characteristics of these subgroups will be discussed and the movement as a whole examined in light of the elements of fundamentalist movements put forth above.

Fundamentalists and Evangelicals

Fundamentalists and evangelicals are often treated as a religious and political monolith.²¹ The 1987 Gallup poll of Evangelicals in America, for example, defined evangelicals as

²⁰Pentecostals and charismatics would tend to define themselves as fundamentalists and evidence the characteristics of fundamentalists put forth in the preceding pages. They differ from the other two subgroups in their practice of mystical healings, glossolalia (speaking in tongues) and prophecy, largely rejected by the larger fundamentalist community as occurrences unique to the New Testament church. The reader should also note that number of nonprotestants (Catholics, Mormons, Jews, and secular moralists) have supported the movement and engaged in related political activity. See Dinesh D'Souza, "Jerry Falwell's Renaissance: The Chairman of Moral Majority is Redefining Both Politics and Fundamentalism," Policy Review (Winter, 1984), p. 42.

²¹See Corwin Smidt and Paul Kellstedt, "Evangelicals in the Post-Reagan Era: An Analysis of Evangelical Voters in the 1988 Presidential Election," p. 5, and Lyman A. Kellstedt and John C. Green, "Waiting for Realignment: Partisan Change Among Evangelical Protestants 1956-1988," p. 23, both prepared for delivery at the Citadel Symposium on Southern Politics, Charleston, S.C., 8-9 March 1990.

those who professed a born-again experience.²² But such an experience is professed by fundamentalists and Pentecostals as well. Precisely what does it mean to be a Protestant fundamentalist in America, and what groups or subgroups may be accurately placed in the fundamentalist camp? Clyde Wilcox's 1986 study of fundamentalists is helpful in this regard. He determined two core fundamentalist beliefs: (1) a confession of a born-again experience, and (2) a belief in Biblical literalism. If an individual espoused these core beliefs, regardless of denominational affiliation, Wilcox classified him as "fundamentalist" for the purposes of his study.²³ Wilcox's core beliefs are also embraced by each of the movement's subgroups--evangelicals, Pentecostals, and charismatics. A summary of the roots of fundamentalism in America provides insight into the distinctive characteristics of the two dominant component groups that are the focus of this thesis, Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals.

What many today would consider to be Protestant fundamentalism was actually termed evangelicalism in the 19th century. Evangelicals maintained a literal interpretation of divinely inspired scripture, in contrast to a growing number

²²Kenneth A. Briggs, "Evangelicals in America," The Gallup Report, Report No. 264 (Sep. 1987), p. 28. A born-again experience is defined as an individual's having accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and the establishment of a personal relationship with God on that basis.

²³See Clyde Wilcox, "Fundamentalists and Politics: An Analysis of the Effects of Differing Operational Definitions," The Journal of Politics, 48 (1986), p. 1042.

of liberal theologians who reduced the sacred text to a "human testament of religion."²⁴ A 1909 publication, The Fundamentals, set forth five doctrinal truths deemed the essentials of the Christian faith by evangelicals: (1) the divine inspiration and infallibility of scripture; (2) the virgin birth, deity, and miracles of Jesus Christ; (3) substitutionary atonement; (4) the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and (5) his second coming.²⁵ Those who embraced the fundamentals later became known as fundamentalists. They rejected any attempts to "adopt the Gospel to the modern world view."²⁶

In many respects, fundamentalists and evangelicals are quite similar. Both espouse the fundamentals of the Christian faith outlined above and both profess the born-again experience discussed previously. Over the years, however, they have emerged as distinct groups due to different doctrinal emphases. For the purposes of this study, these differences are most important in determining the way fundamentalists and evangelicals relate to the larger society.

²⁴J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 26.

²⁵Edward Dobson, In Search of Unity (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), pp. 36-40, and Packer, p. 28. See also Kenneth D. Wald, Religion and Politics in the United States (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 63, and Robert Booth Fowler, Religion and Politics in America (Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985), p. 94.

²⁶Cox, p. 73.

Fundamentalists have been characterized by a greater degree of separatism, legalism, authoritarianism, and absolutism than evangelicals. According to fundamentalist Jerry Falwell, they "practice separatism from the world and all of its entanglements," refusing to "conform to the standards of a sinful society."²⁷ Packer maintains that fundamentalists seek not only to separate themselves from the world, but from other Protestants whom they distrust.²⁸ The legalism that characterizes fundamentalists was observed by Robert Booth Fowler and Packer. Fowler depicted fundamentalists as "ever on the watch to avoid compromise and sin."²⁹ Packer characterizes their use of scriptures as authoritarian. For fundamentalists, the scriptures become a rule book, a means of preserving control, in contrast with evangelicals who rely on the scriptures as the purist element of their faith.³⁰ According to fundamentalist Edward Dobson, fundamentalists maintain an absolutist, black/white view of

²⁷Jerry Falwell, "An Agenda for the 1980's," in Piety and Politics, ed., Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Cromartie (Washington, D. C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1987), p. 119.

²⁸Packer, p. 32. It must be noted that Packer makes any distinctions between fundamentalists and evangelicals with great hesitation. He contends the term "fundamentalism" is a "prejudicial, ambiguous, explosive" term devised by critics of evangelical Christianity to cause division and muddy the waters of discussion.

²⁹Fowler, p. 94.

³⁰Packer, p. 39.

the world.³¹ In addition to these features, fundamentalists reject the use of scholarly tools and the intellect in an approach to their faith. As Packer writes, they are "skeptical as to the value of reasoning in matters of religion..." Furthermore, fundamentalists are less likely to address social issues than evangelicals.³²

Evangelicals are more likely to embrace intellectual tools in an approach to their faith than their fundamentalist counterparts. In addition, they are more inclined toward social activism, moderation, and more interaction with the larger society than fundamentalists. Regarding the intellectual nature of evangelicals, Packer notes:

"The Evangelical is not afraid of the facts, for he knows that all facts are God's facts; nor is he afraid of thinking for he knows that all truth is God's truth...He is called to love God with all his mind...it is his business to demonstrate the intellectual adequacy of the biblical faith..."³³

While evangelicals, like fundamentalists, strongly believe in the need for personal salvation, they also tend to actively meeting the needs of their community.³⁴ In so doing, they appear more tolerant than their fundamentalist counterparts.³⁵ Although uncompromising in their beliefs, evangelicals do not,

³¹Dobson, pp. 66-72.

³²Packer, p. 32.

³³Packer, p. 34. Dobson, pp. 66-72 and Falwell, p. 120, also credit evangelicals for their scholarship.

³⁴See Packer, p. 34.

³⁵Cox, p. 46.

as Hunter writes, "avoid the strains that a sustained contact with [differing] forces engenders."³⁶ This, no doubt, allows the evangelical Christian to "challenge the current normative mode of American politics" with seemingly fewer difficulty than the fundamentalist. As Carl F. H. Henry writes, rather than rejecting "direct political participation...Evangelicals advocate" it.³⁷

In summary, the core beliefs of the evangelical and fundamentalist are much the same. Both profess a born again spiritual experience and a belief in the literal truth of Biblical scriptures, as well as the tenants outlined in The Fundamentals. Differences lie in their particular emphases and approaches. Fundamentalists tend to be more legalistic and separatist; evangelicals evidence a greater inclination to employ a critical mind to matters of the faith and have, historically been more tolerant regarding sustained contact with society at large despite contrasting world views. In recent politics they have emerged as one force with one agenda: the restructuring of America according to scriptural truths so as to remake the larger society into a place more hospitable to their beliefs.³⁸ Despite different doctrinal emphases, American Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals

³⁶Hunter, p. 84.

³⁷Carl F. H. Henry, "Making Political Decisions: An Evangelical Perspective," in Piety and Politics, p. 101.

³⁸See Cox, p. 61.

will be treated as one political entity throughout the remainder of this thesis. The terms fundamentalist and evangelical will be used interchangeably unless otherwise indicated.

Fundamentalism and American Protestant Fundamentalism

How does the American Protestant movement compare to fundamentalist movements in general? There are a number of similarities, in particular a heavy reliance on a sacred text, the populist nature of the movement, revivalism, separatism and absolutism. The greatest difference between American fundamentalism and similar movements elsewhere, particularly Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East, concerns the extent to which the American movement is truly populist in nature.

(1) Sacred text. Both of the movement's major subgroups, fundamentalists and evangelicals, display a tremendous reliance on their sacred text, the Bible. Despite different motivations for reliance (authoritarianism versus purism, for example), and varying degrees of tolerance regarding the interpretation of scripture, the Bible, for both, is guide and dictates their world view.

(2) Revivalism. America's fundamentalist movement is revivalist in at least two respects. First, as previously mentioned, its adherents seek to return modern America to its sacred roots. Second, the movement seems to correspond to a nationally heightened religious consciousness in the past

decade. The 1985 Gallup Report on religious trends since 1935 noted the following: increased participation in Bible study groups, the growth of evangelical churches, and increased political activism on the part of conservative Christians.³⁹ The Republican party has been particularly affected by the addition of conservative moral-social issues to its conservative economic agenda.

(3) Separatism and absolutism. The characteristics of separatism and absolutism are also apparent in the American movement, but to a greater degree among the fundamentalist subgroup than the evangelical one. To the extent that evangelicals are less separatist, the movement in this country could perhaps be more accurately labeled evangelical; yet a staunch fundamentalist and self-labeled separatist, Jerry Falwell, emerged as a leader in the field of Christian political activism. Such political mobilization has been the obvious characteristic of the movement.

(4) Populism. The fundamentalist movement in America appears to be nonelitist. The 1987 Gallup poll of Evangelicals in America showed 40% had not completed high school, followed by 35% who had but had not gone on to college. The modal level of annual income was less than \$15,000 (37%), followed by an annual income of between \$15,00

³⁹"Religion in America 50 Years: 1935-85," The Gallup Report, Report No. 236 (May 1985), pp. 11-14.

and \$24,999 (36%).⁴⁰ In his study of the political behavior of evangelical Christians, or those who said religion played an important role in their life, professed a belief in the entire Bible as true and a born-again experience, Corwin Smidt found similar demographic information. Southern evangelicals were largely uneducated--40.5% had not completed high school. Outside of the south, high school education was more common (35.8%). One-third of nonsouthern evangelicals (33.8%) had not completed high school.⁴¹

America's fundamentalists are not wholly poor and uneducated, however. A 1981 study of Moral Majority supporters in the Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas area, for example, found 44% had completed some college; 35% were college graduates. The modal annual income for this group was over \$40,000 (38%), followed by \$30,000 to \$39,000 (23%). In addition, the majority (60%) were white-collar workers.⁴² In sum, America's fundamentalists in general appear to fit the populist label. Some, however, evidence traits that do not neatly fit such a characterization. In comparing the American movement to fundamentalist movements in the Middle East, Bill argues the former is far less radical and populist in nature.

⁴⁰Briggs, p. 28.

⁴¹Corwin Smidt, "Born-Again Politics: The Political Behavior of Evangelical Christians in the South and Nonsouth," in Religion and Politics in the South, ed. Todd A. Baker, et. al. (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1983), p. 34.

⁴²Shupe and Stacey, p. 105.

Both the leaders and followers of the Protestant movement evidence "middle and upper class aspirations." Both press toward power "and even mimic the political leaders of the day" in an attempt to preserve the political status quo while making themselves "part of it." Populist Islamic movements, such as the one that led to the overthrow of the Shah in Iran, are characterized by greater opposition to the status quo and the rejection of middle and upper class values rather than their emulation.⁴³ Still, both fundamentalist groups consists of those who were formerly excluded from political power and influence.

Conclusions

The term "fundamentalism" inadequately captures the recent injection of militant religion in world-wide political processes. Fundamentalist movements go beyond an examination of the core beliefs of a particular faith. Rather, they emerge as campaigns to apply those beliefs to the larger community, sacred as well as secular. Fundamentalist movements are revivalist and populist. They are provocatively paradoxical: religious separatists appear as integrationists.

The Protestant fundamentalist movement in America consists of two dominant subgroups, fundamentalists and evangelicals, who share a belief in Biblical literalism and profess a born-again spiritual experience, despite some

⁴³Letter from James A. Bill, 6 March 1990.

differences regarding their approach to their faith (ie., evangelicals are more likely to apply scholarly tools to the study of scripture). Politically, they exist as one force. From the establishment of "Christian" political organizations such as the Christian Voice, the Religious Roundtable, and the Moral Majority, to the distribution of report cards on the moral-issue positions of candidates, fundamentalists and evangelicals have entered the American political scene like never before.

The movement in this country is characteristic of fundamentalist movements in general. Protestant fundamentalists in America rely heavily on a sacred text. Demographically, the movement represents the less educated and lower income earners. Although Protestant fundamentalists seek not so much a radical transformation of American politics as the incorporation of themselves and their interests in the least compromising manner. The feverish desire of Protestant fundamentalists to return to a seemingly more sacred past is indicative of the movement's revivalist tendencies. Last, save their recent political expression America's Protestant fundamentalists have been separatists. It is this last characteristic that provokes study of their recent political activism.

CHAPTER TWO

A SURVEY OF THE CAUSES OF FUNDAMENTALIST POLITICAL EXPRESSION

This thesis is designed to explain the recent fundamentalist expression in American politics. In Chapter one, fundamentalism was defined and its dominant characteristics identified. The Protestant fundamentalist variant in America was then examined in light of the features of such movements in general. This chapter provides a survey of the literature on the causes of the political expression of Protestant fundamentalism in the United States since 1976.

A review of interdisciplinary literature (from the fields of religion, history, sociology, and politics) revealed four popular explanations for the recent surge of political fundamentalism in this country: (1) Protestant fundamentalism emerged in response to modernity; (2) the fundamentalist expression in politics is related to a few, particular issues--that is, only when certain critical issues arise do fundamentalists engage in political activity (this explanation is very much related to the preceding one); (3) American political fundamentalism is cyclical, a normal part of the political landscape; and (4), fundamentalism, like any other political movement, emerged as a result of America's open

political system. An examination of each of these explanations follows.

Fundamentalism as a Reaction to Modernity

Many observers of the fundamentalist movement label its political expression reactionary. Indeed, a recurring theme throughout much of the literature on the political activism of fundamentalists and evangelicals correlates their activity directly with modernity. Modernity has been defined by James A. Bill and Carl Leiden as the process by which man "gains control over his environment."¹ The physical evidence of this control includes a host of technological innovations--highway systems, satellite communications, and the like. As a society modernizes, the old, informal institutions, such as family or tribal networks, wither away, to be replaced by formal, highly specialized institutions.² As a society modernizes it becomes increasingly secular as well. Formal institutions diminish the need for and influence of the spiritual. In addition, the modernizing society tends to become increasingly inclusive and pluralistic. All people, regardless of their race, tribe, or religion, become full, participating members of the society. No longer is one worldview or belief system necessarily shared

¹James A. Bill and Carl Leiden, Politics in the Middle East (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, & Co., 1984), p. 3.

²Bill and Leiden, p. 4, and Frank J. Lechner, "Fundamentalism Revisited," Society, 26, No. 2 (1989), p. 52. Lechner calls this the process of "structural differentiation."

by all members of the society. Rather, they will, at most, share only the general, core values required to be fully participating members of the society.³

Modernity, in sum, is a process characterized by man's gaining increased control over his environment. It involves technological progress and institutional change. It poses a significant challenge to the domain of the sacred, as it threatens to fulfill many functions formerly accomplished through religious channels. Can the political expression of America's Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals be explained as a reaction to modernity? Frank J. Lechner, James Davison Hunter and Richard John Neuhaus argue the political activism of Protestant fundamentalists can be so explained.

Lechner contends the movement is "a reaction against the process of differentiation and secularization that is inhospitable to the old tradition;" it seems to "go against the grain of modernization, or modernity."⁴ Similarly, Hunter asserts that American fundamentalism came about as a reaction against modernity--initially, the application of the scientific method to the study of the scriptures in the early 1900s.⁵ He contends modernity poses three threats for

³Lechner, p. 52.

⁴Lechner, p. 57.

⁵James Davison Hunter, "The Evangelical Worldview Since 1890," in Piety and Politics, Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Cromartie, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1987), pp. 34-35.

religion in general, religious fundamentalism in particular: (1) "functional rationality," (2) "cultural pluralism," and (3) "structural pluralism." "Functional rationality," or rationalization, threatens fundamentalism in that it undermines the influence of "myth, magic, tradition and authority...[the] core elements of religion." "Cultural pluralism," or, a highly subdivided society, diminishes any one worldview. The threat of "structural pluralism," the separation of public and private spheres, similarly challenges fundamentalists. In response to these threats, fundamentalists may either resist, accommodate, or withdraw. Since different societies modernize at varying paces, there is not one model of modernity. Likewise, there is no single pattern of fundamentalist response.⁶ In the U.S., many fundamentalists and evangelicals who were, by nature, separatist, began to question if obeying God could be "effectively expressed in the context of the burgeoning secular mind-set in American society." Their level of involvement in the modern world tended to dictate their response. Those who participated in secular society were more likely to resist or accommodate than withdraw.⁷ Some fundamentalists determined that an effective response to the

⁶Hunter, American Evangelicalism Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), pp. 12-15.

⁷Carl F. H. Henry, "Making Political Decisions: An Evangelical Perspective," in Piety and Politics, p. 102, and Hunter, American Evangelicalism, p. 15, 102-103.

"moral perplexities posed by modernity" must be both spiritual and practical in nature. Thus, they pursued both repentance (the spiritual), and well-organized political action (the practical). The spiritual problems posed by modernity eventually became political problems as well. Political activism became the tool for fundamentalists to express their resistance to modernity; hence, the emergence of the Moral Majority, the Christian Voice, and the Religious Roundtable-groups that support traditional values in America.

Richard John Neuhaus also perceives fundamentalism as a reaction to modernity, specifically, modernity gone awry. The undesirable accompaniments of modernity--a demise in moral standards, for example--have enhanced the sacred realm.⁸ Wald explains American fundamentalism similarly. America has witnessed a religious revival, he says, because technological society has "run amuck." He refers to advances in medicine to support his argument. In technologically advanced societies,

"there has been a striking loss of faith in reason as a solution to all human problems...the spectacular growth of medical technology has raised agonizing moral dilemmas about the nature and conditions of life, dilemmas that appear on the political agenda in the form of issues such as abortion, euthanasia, organ transplants, in vitro fertilization, genetic engineering,"

⁸Richard John Neuhaus, "What the Fundamentalists Want," in Piety and Politics, p. 8, 10.

and the like.⁹ Man now has more control over his environment than ever before. His ability to alter what were heretofore feats of nature has created what Martin Marty calls a "values crisis."¹⁰ Fundamentalists confront an uncertain, modern world with rigid, simple absolutes. The relativism characteristic of contemporary America incited them to political action.

Marty and Harvey Cox also opine a parallel relationship between modernity and fundamentalist activism; however, they add a new dimension to the relationship, one not addressed by Lechner, Hunter, Neuhaus and Wald. They contend America's fundamentalist movement arose in conjunction with modernity, but not necessarily as a reaction against it. Marty considers one of the unique aspects of fundamentalism in this country to be its efforts to simultaneously divorce itself from the philosophy of modernity while it exploits its tools, through technologically sophisticated satellite ministries and the like.¹¹ In the same vein, Cox maintains that fundamentalism seeks not to reject modern scientific advances, but to marry them to theology, as was attempted in efforts to prove the

⁹Kenneth D. Wald, Religion and politics in the United States (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 13-14.

¹⁰Martin Marty, Religion and Republic (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987), pp. 299-300.

¹¹Marty, p. 275. See also Marty, "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomena," in Piety and Politics, pp. 303-320.

resurrection of Jesus Christ through examination of the unique markings on the Shroud of Turin.¹²

Fundamentalism as Issue-Dependent

Very much related to the thesis of fundamentalist expressions in politics as a response to modernity is the explanation of fundamentalism as a reaction to particular issues, issues that, it could be argued, are components of modernity in general. Such is the position of Nathan Glazer, who labels America's Protestant fundamentalist movement "defensive-offensive," a response to aggressive actions taken by the government, in particular the Supreme Court. The recent activities of fundamentalists and evangelicals in American politics, he argues, are highly issue-oriented. Fundamentalists were galvanized into political action because of the abolition of prohibitions on abortion and school prayer by the Supreme Court, a change in traditional male-female roles and the threat posed by the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to further alter such roles, open sales of pornographic publications of the 1960s and 1970s, and restrictions placed on private schools. He attributes the "great successes of the secular and liberal forces...operating through the specific agency of the courts" as having "created

¹²Harvey Cox, "Fundamentalism as an Ideology," in Piety and Politics, pp. 289-290.

the issues on which the Fundamentalists have managed to achieve what influence they have."¹³

Hunter, Mary Hanna, Neuhaus and Jerry Falwell cite similar threats to traditional morality that have given fundamentalists and evangelicals an earthly focus. To Glazer's list Hunter adds inflation, which fundamentalists call "a national sin arising from [a] failure to apply God's economic guidelines," perceived weakened U.S. defense capabilities vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, the nation-state posing the greatest threat to Christianity, and secular humanism, a philosophy which advocates "atheism, evolution, amorality, the deification of man, and atheistic socialism."¹⁴ Hanna notes an increase in the national divorce rates and use of drugs as trigger issues.¹⁵ Neuhaus contends the movement rose in response to "an assault upon [the] religious freedoms" of fundamentalists by "what they perceive as government actions dictated by the secular humanists in control of American public life." The events that triggered the fundamentalist response, which he terms "flash points," were the banning of prayer in the public schools and the threatened

¹³Nathan Glazer, "Fundamentalism: A Defensive Offensive," in Piety and Politics, pp. 250-252.

¹⁴Hunter, American Evangelicalism, pp. 103-110. See also James Reichley, "The Evangelical and Fundamentalist Revolt," in Piety and Politics, pp. 69-98. Wald includes an increase in crime and a grossly imbalanced national budget in his list of issues critical to fundamentalists. See Wald, p. 191.

¹⁵Mary Hanna, "We Haven't Seen the Last of Jerry Falwell," The Christian Science Monitor, 22 June 1989, p. 18.

loss of the religious tax exempt status.¹⁶ Jerry Falwell, perhaps the most well-known fundamentalist in America, explains his political activism likewise. "The federal government," he says, "was encroaching upon the sovereignty of both the church and the family" in the areas of abortion, the ERA ("its vague language, threatened to do further damage to the traditional family"), and the homosexual rights movement.¹⁷

The 1976 Presidential election campaign provided impetus for debates over moral issues throughout the nation. At least two heated grassroots controversies over school textbooks in West Virginia and gay rights in Dade County, Florida, communicated to fundamentalists that a "godless society" threatened to replace "firm moral standards with a system of [moral] relativism" and the underlying philosophy of secular humanism.¹⁸ The movement was further strengthened by positive role models, such as Rev. Billy Graham, and the electronic church, which served as an articulator of national issue concerns.¹⁹ Politically active groups like Moral Majority

¹⁶Neuhaus, pp. 15-16.

¹⁷Jerry Falwell, "An Agenda for the 1980s," in Piety and Politics, p. 112. See also Dinesh D'Souza, "Jerry Falwell's Renaissance: The Chairman of Moral Majority is Redefining Both Politics and Fundamentalism," Policy Review (Winter 1984), pp 34-43.

¹⁸Wald, p. 187.

¹⁹James A. Reichley, "The Evangelical and Fundamentalist Revolt," in Piety and Politics, pp. 77-81.

became banner carriers for traditional morality, for "however long it [would] take" in order to "ensure that Christianity" would "survive in the U.S."²⁰

Fundamentalism as a Constant Cycle

A third explanation for the recent fundamentalist expression in politics asserts it is a constant element in American politics manifest in cyclical occurrences. At first glance, this appears to be a contradiction. Its suggestion is fairly clear, however. Political-religious fundamentalism, a continuation of past revivalist movements in this country, has been constant in that such expressions have been apparent since the nation's founding. This position is advanced by Cox, Fowler and Wald.

Cox argues that Protestant fundamentalism in America has gone through periods of involvement and withdrawal. Periods of involvement have been characterized by "highly confrontational efforts to remake the whole of society...[stemming] from the belief that the whole world, not just some religious segment, should reflect its sacred source." Periods of withdrawal occurred when the larger, non-fundamentalist society successfully resisted the type of change proposed by the evangelical community. Periods of

²⁰Robert Booth Fowler, Religion and Politics in America (Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985), p. 99. The Moral Majority closed its doors in June 1989. See "If You Don't Swing, You Can't Zing," U.S. News and World Report, 26 June 1989, p. 12.

withdrawal reveal a feature common among all political activists. When the possibility for successful change is slight, fundamentalists have retreated "to a smaller, more manageable subculture" such as the church, where their prescription for change had a greater likelihood of being carried out.²¹ A brief overview of American history, as interpreted by Fowler and Wald, reveals Protestant fundamentalist political activism to be a near constant denominator, part of an historical continuum of religious involvement in U.S. politics. It also shows some of the periods of involvement and withdrawal Cox discusses.

According to Fowler, Protestant religion was a "pervasive" element in colonial American culture. He argues that Puritanism, in many respects a form of fundamentalism, was the "dominant...influence...the most stimulating religious force of the age." The first great religious revival in the colonies stressed the "absolute sovereignty of God,...the reality of sin...and a commitment to [the] radical realization of God's will in person and...society." How did such theology translate into political action? Fowler contends its greatest political manifestation to have been the rallying of "support for...limited government." In addition, "Puritan values...encouraged the colonial stress on...moral condemnation of evil...and the hope that in America, the new Israel, Christians could...be an example for the world,"

²¹Cox, p. 291.

recurrent themes in Protestant fundamentalist activism. A period of increasing pluralism following the American revolution gave way to a theology reflective of an increasing "sense of individualism" in the new country. Indeed, the importance of individual salvation was a hallmark of the second Great Awakening.²²

Prior to the Civil War, Protestant fundamentalism emerged as a motivating factor in the slavery issue, both for Northern abolitionists and Southern supporters, according to Wald.²³ Post Civil War activism, such as the temperance movement and efforts to reform institutional care for the insane, were also stimulated by religious concerns.²⁴ In the 1920s, Protestant fundamentalism again showed its political character in the notorious Scopes trial when, much like today, the issues of evolution and education were topics of controversy. William Jennings Bryan declared the relevance of evangelicalism to a host of political issues, to include women's suffrage and the settling of international disputes. The failure of fundamentalist activism to achieve lasting success, particularly in the areas of prohibition and evolution, coupled with the challenges posed by an increasingly pluralistic and urban nation, led to a period of withdrawal from politics for many years. The influence of evangelicals

²²Fowler, pp. 14-15.

²³Wald, p. 183.

²⁴Fowler, p. 16.

and fundamentalists shifted as they retreated to the churches and small towns, particularly the towns of the rural south.²⁵ A period of limited fundamentalist resurgence occurred in the 1950s with the "fortress America" movement observed by Marty. The notion of America as the "new Zion" whose people were Providentially chosen resulted in a zealous commitment on the part of the evangelical community to keep America free from communist influences, largely so the gospel could continue to be spread to the rest of the world by U.S.-based missionaries and churches.²⁶

What do such cycles reveal about fundamentalist expressions in politics? According to Fowler, "when [they] care enough about events in the larger world and believe the state can help, they lay aside their normal resistance to politics" and get involved.²⁷ When their ability to successfully affect change wanes, fundamentalists temporarily withdraw from the political scene.

Fundamentalism Explained Systemically

A fourth explanation for fundamentalist political activism posits such activity is, and has been, encouraged by

²⁵Wald, pp. 183-184.

²⁶Marty, Religion and Republic, p. 298. The fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches proclaimed "America [was] specially chose by God to launch the world's redemption." See also Reichley, p. 73.

²⁷Fowler, p. 140.

America's open political system. Wald puts forth four reasons why Protestant fundamentalist activism may be so explained. First, to the extent to which ours is an open, pluralistic political system, all special interests are permitted expression. Indeed, competition between group interests, be they religious or not, is encouraged. Second, unlike other democracies, the U.S. government has not put legal restrictions on religious or church bodies regarding political participation.²⁸ Third, the decentralized nature of politics in the U.S. has meant that Americans can review and affect policy outputs as citizens in few other countries can. They may influence the legislative process or the administrative branch, the national or state and local governments.²⁹

A fourth aspect of the system-politics explanation for fundamentalist political expression examines socio-economic and psychological factors. Wald points out that in order for individuals to be participating members of a political system, they must, first, have their basic needs met. Second, they must perceive themselves to have political efficacy. He observed that southern evangelicals after World War I withdrew from the political arena because of "social and economic deprivation." Such deprivation did not permit them the luxury to engage in political discourse as northern liberal

²⁸Endorsement of a particular candidate may result in a church's loss of tax-exempt status, however. See Wald, p. 27.

²⁹Wald, pp. 27-29.

Protestants did. Since then, evangelicals have advanced socio-economically, both in terms of years of formal education and real income, affording them the opportunity for political involvement. White Southern Baptists, for example, had an average formal education of eight years in the 1940s, as compared to eleven years in the 1970s. Increases in income, levels of education, numbers entering the professional and white collar fields and relocating to urban areas led to the "development of an evangelical middle class." As they advanced economically and educationally their exposure to information, ability to interpret and relay such information and organize on the basis of issue concerns led to an increase in their level of political activism.³⁰

In summary, the systems politics explanation offers the following insight into fundamentalist and evangelical political activism. A political system that does not discriminate between religious and nonreligious political interests, encourages group competition, and permits its citizenry to affect policy at a number of levels is likely to witness greater political activism on the part of all of its members than a system that does not. That, coupled with an upwardly mobile, increasingly educated and aware evangelical class may explain their recent surge of activism.

³⁰Wald, pp. 206-207.

Conclusions

A review of the literature regarding the political activism of America's Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals revealed four widely accepted explanations. First, such activism may have arisen in response to modernity. The simultaneous increase in man's control over his environment and growth of secular institutions, and the withering away of traditional institutions, in particular the church, may have provoked a reactionary political expression on the part of fundamentalists. Second, fundamentalist political expression may have occurred in response to particular critical issues, components of a larger modernizing trend. The perceived encroachment of the government in the domain of the sacred through Supreme Court rulings on abortion and school prayer, for example, issues too dear to be left unchallenged, may have triggered a political response. A third explanation posits the political activity of fundamentalists as a constant element in American politics, observable in particular cycles. According to this explanation, Protestant fundamentalism has played a significant role in politics since colonial times, with its emphases on limited government and the condemnation of social evils. Overt fundamentalist political activity ever since has been merely a matter of pragmatism. If the dominant society seemed favorably disposed to their agenda, fundamentalists became politically active. Otherwise, they would withdraw

from such activity until the appropriate time. The fourth explanation considered the uniquely open nature of America's political system as having allowed for the participation of all interest groups, secular or religious. Such competition has been encouraged. As a group, fundamentalists lacked the resources and political efficacy to become politically active until recently. As they have advanced socio-economically their opportunities for political action and the ability to effectively organize have also increased.

There is a great deal of overlap among the explanations, particularly the modernity and critical issues theories. There is also some overlap among the observers of the movement itself. The reader may have noticed, for example, that Wald provided support for all of the explanations. There is, no doubt, some truth to each. The purpose of this chapter has been merely to put forth the major possible causes for the movement. The testing of the explanations will occur in the next chapter, where one facet of the fundamentalist movement in America, the 1987-88 Presidential campaign of Pat Robertson will be examined in light of the propositions advanced in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PAT ROBERTSON CAMPAIGN

Chapter two presented and discussed four potential causes of fundamentalist expressions in politics. The first two explanations are quite similar. The first states that political fundamentalism may arise as a reaction to modernity in general, while the second maintains their appearance is a response to specific issue components of modernity. The third explanation posits a constant yet cyclical character to such movements, while the fourth contends they are a unique characteristic of the United States' political system. This chapter examines one component of the Protestant fundamentalist movement in America, the 1987-1988 presidential campaign of evangelical Pat Robertson, in order to determine which factor or factors gave rise to the recent fundamentalist political expression in this country. While this analysis will not result in a comprehensive explanation of the movement, its illumination of one facet of the phenomena is a step toward piecing together the movement as a whole.

Four findings emerged as a result of this study, three of which supported possible explanations for the phenomena

presented in chapter two. First, the Robertson campaign undoubtedly arose as a reaction to modernity (or secularism). Second, it was, specifically, a response to certain critical issues that may be termed "moral" issues. Third, the injection of evangelicals into national politics that was brought about by the campaign marked the resumption of a tradition of influence between religion and politics in this country strongly perceived by the candidate himself.¹ Last, Robertson's Presidential bid represented a pragmatic effort to galvanize evangelicals into long-term, overt political activism.

Why Pat Robertson?

The Robertson campaign was selected to operationalize of Protestant fundamentalism in America for several reasons. First, and most significantly, Robertson had ties to virtually all subcomponents of the movement. His Southern Baptist ordination provided him a link to "pure" fundamentalism (discussed in chapter one), while his more recent religious practices, such as faith healing and glossolalia, established firm ties with charismatics and Pentecostals.² In addition,

¹This relationship is referred to as a constant cycle in chapter two.

²It should be noted that charismatics and Pentecostals consider themselves fundamentalists. They have not, however, gained acceptance among the larger fundamentalist community due to their mystical practices which, according to the larger community, were limited to the New Testament church.

his 30 years in religious broadcasting and his stated perspectives on national issues gave him appeal with the larger evangelical community.³ Second, his heavy reliance on a sacred text as a means for interpreting world events and providing support for his positions on various issues was evident throughout the course of the campaign.⁴ Third, he personified the paradoxical nature of the movement. Earlier in his ministry he was opposed to political activism, to the point that he refused to aid his father, former Senator A. Willis Robertson of Virginia, in his last political bid. His premillennialist beliefs regarding "the impending end of history" and his emphasis on individual salvation had prohibited his working toward contemporary political solutions; yet, his outlook changed in 1977 when, according to the candidate himself, the issues of the day were such that they demanded a response from the evangelical community.⁵

Robertson did not, however, have the blanket support of fundamentalists and evangelicals. Jerry Falwell, for example, remained a solid supporter of George Bush, while other evangelicals such Tim and Beverly LaHaye of the American

³Pat Robertson, America's Dates with Destiny (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), p. 20.

⁴See T. R. Reid, "Robertson's Ever Changing Approach," The Washington Post, 13 Feb. 1988, p. A 14, cols. 2-3.

⁵Harrison Donnelly, "Getting Religion in Politics," Editorial Research Reports, 46 (1988), 679, and Reid, "Robertson's Bid Powered by Faith, Self-Assurance," The Washington Post, 11 Sep. 1987, Sec. A, p. 10, col. 5.

Coalition for Traditional Values, publicly supported Robert Dole.⁶ (And some fundamentalists, such as Bob Jones, remained adamantly opposed to political action on the part of believers). Unlike other candidates, however, Robertson's supporters were almost entirely from the fundamentalist/evangelical community.

Method of Study

In order to determine the cause of political fundamentalism per the Robertson presidential campaign, the campaign was studied in a two-faceted approach. Both the candidate's reason(s) for running, stated as well as observed, and the reasons put forth by evangelicals who became involved in national politics as a result of the campaign were examined. Issue summaries and press releases made available by Americans for Robertson, the candidate's Chesapeake, Virginia-based campaign organization were heavily relied on, as were the candidate's own writings, in particular his 1986 work, America's Dates with Destiny. In addition, speeches and interviews published in The Washington Post and The New York Times as well as weekly news magazines and other popular periodicals were examined. Research for the historical dimension of the campaign consisted of a review of Robertson's book and speeches in addition to the writings of others both inside and outside of the Protestant evangelical community.

⁶Dan Morgan, "Evangelicals a Force Divided," The New York Times, 8 Mar. 1988, Sec. A, p. 9, col. 1.

Findings

Examination of the Robertson campaign, both of the candidate and his evangelical supporters, revealed four significant findings. First, the Robertson campaign was a response to modernity. In particular, it was a reaction to specific moral issues that stood in stark contrast to the evangelical worldview, issues such as abortion, the elimination of prayer and other religious references in the public schools, and a less defined national moral code. Those issues and others provoked evangelicals to leave the church pews and articulate their beliefs in political terms. This is the second finding of this chapter--the Robertson campaign was a reaction to particular component issues of modernity in general. As these two explanations are so interrelated, they shall be treated as one throughout the remainder of this chapter. Third, the campaign evidenced elements of political pragmatism. Whether he won or lost, Robertson sought to move evangelicals to become politically active for the long term, and to continue to popularize the issues on which his campaign was most focused. Fourth, the campaign indicated a resurgence of an historical relationship between religion (particularly the Protestant fundamentalist/evangelical variant) and politics in this country.⁷

⁷This relationship was the thesis of America's Dates with Destiny, Robertson's 1986 portrayal of significant moments in U.S. history.

Modernity and Moral Issues

Modernity was defined in chapter two as a process of secularization in which old institutions, to include the sacred, whither away as the society becomes increasingly inclusive and pluralistic. As man gains control over his environment, the need for mystical explanations decreases markedly. It was also stated that certain issues, to include what may be called "moral" issues, may be considered components of modernity. This section treats these two potential causes of political fundamentalism as one.

Modernity and Moral Issues: The Candidate

The Robertson campaign was markedly antimodern. Robertson's stated goal was to "restore traditional moral values' to the...pervasiveness...they enjoyed up to a generation ago."⁸ As one political observer put it, "A moral alarm clock is going off in America, and not many politicians hear it. Pat Robertson does, and so do more of his fellow citizens than we less godly folk have been willing to admit."⁹

Just what did the candidate tap into? A feeling that greed, lust, pornography, divorce, homosexuality, unorthodox living arrangements and the use of illegal drugs were on the rise, as were the number of parents deserting family

⁸Harrison Rainie, "Robertson's Grand Design," U.S. News and World Report, 22 Feb 1988, p. 16.

⁹Garry Wills, "Robertson and the Reagan Gap," Time, 22 Feb 1988, p. 27.

responsibilities. In his basic speech, published in the New York Times, candidate Robertson attributed America's troubles--budgetary imbalance, a burgeoning welfare state, and a State Department in gross need of reform, as well as the AIDS epidemic--to an underlying "moral decay."¹⁰ In an earlier work as well, he linked his political activism to immediate moral threats--the elimination of the mention of God in public school texts, the Supreme Court's rulings on abortion and school prayer--which would lead to the eventual decline of the nation as a great power.¹¹

By his own account, Robertson's campaign was a moral and spiritual crusade, an attempt to reverse the secularizing influences of modernity, particularly as they concerned family and moral issues. In a cassette tape entitled, "What I Will do as President," distributed at each campaign stop, he highlighted a deep national malaise as the underlying problem in America. The solution he offered was a religious and spiritual revival in order to ensure national survival.¹² In Iowa, Robertson's message was "a return to morality, family values and school prayer."¹³ In fact, wherever he campaigned

¹⁰Robertson, "A Strong Warning that Moral Decay is Basic Trouble Facing the Nation," The New York Times, 14 Jan 88, Sec. A, p. 20, cols. 3-5.

¹¹See Robertson, America's Dates with Destiny.

¹²Americans for Robertson, "Pat Robertson: What I Will Do As President," 1987.

¹³Marci McDonald, "Working Miracles in Snowbound Iowa," Macleans, 101, No. 7 (1988), 22.

his message was much the same. Robertson wanted to "restore the greatness of America through moral strength."¹⁴ Symptoms of the country's "moral death" included "abortion, homosexuality, premarital sex, drug use, and the breakdown of the [traditional] family." If elected as President, he pledged to reverse this "moral decline" and help Americans find a "common ethical standard that will bring us back to traditional conceptions of morality."¹⁵

Throughout his campaign the following themes, solutions to the moral dilemma, would be emphasized: "prayer in the schools, a ban on abortion, support for the [traditional] nuclear family," reducing communist influences in the Third World, and tougher sentences for convicted criminals.¹⁶ Robertson addressed the gamut of national issues during the course of his campaign, but those cited most were abortion and the family, education, the budget deficit, and international affairs. All reflected his evangelical worldview, all were discussed in moral terms, and all indicated strains of antimodernism.

Robertson strongly believed that the government was in part to blame for the break-up of the traditional family. Tax

¹⁴Reid, "Robertson's Ever Changing Approach," Sec. A, p. 14, col. 1.

¹⁵Reid, "Traditional Morality at Core of Robertson's Political Quest," The Washington Post, 2 Mar. 1988, Sec. A, p. 8, col. 1.

¹⁶Andrew Kopkind, "God's on His Side," The Nation, 245 (1987), 401.

codes penalized married couples and rewarded those mothers that sought outside child care rather than caring for their children at home, the federally funded Legal Services Corporation aided individuals seeking divorce proceedings, and welfare laws made marriage a disincentive for welfare recipients. Moreover, the government's approach to abortion was symptomatic--it failed to address its cause. All pointed to the government as part of the national moral problem. Robertson favored a tax policy that would reward "stable families" by eliminating the marriage penalty, tax exemptions for stay-at-home mothers, the abolition of aid to the Legal Services Corporation that would go toward the funding of divorces, and changes in the welfare system to strengthen and encourage traditional families.¹⁷ He contended the break-up of the American family was the nation's "number one social problem," and estimated that perhaps 30% of the divorces in this country were the result of "misguided welfare laws."¹⁸ In terms of abortion, Robertson argued that "the only long term solution" was "the teaching of continence and marital fidelity."¹⁹

¹⁷Americans for Robertson, "Pat Robertson: Strengthening the American Family."

¹⁸Robertson, Republican National Convention Speech, New Orleans, LA, 16 Aug. 1988.

¹⁹Americans for Robertson, "Pat Robertson Speaks Out for the Rights of the Unborn," Press Release, 23 Apr. 1987, p. 1.

Perhaps in no other issue discussion were the candidate's antimodern views revealed as poignantly as they were in his discussions of education. Take, for example, the introduction to his 1986 work, America's Dates with Destiny:

"During the past twenty-five years, early American history has been rewritten. This generation of public school students can go through twelve years of elementary and high school and another four years of college without one lesson featuring the central role of America's Judeo-Christian heritage in the founding and later history of the nation...the religious faith and biblical heritage of our forefathers have been eliminated from the record almost altogether."²⁰

In a 1986 speech given at Constitution Hall in Washington, DC, the candidate underscored the same message:

"We have taken virtually all mention of God from our classrooms and textbooks. Using public funds we have begun courses in so called 'values clarification' which tend to undermine our historic Judeo-Christian faith. We have taken the Holy Bible from our young...Instead of absolutes our youth have been given situational ethics..God is out, casual sex, infidelity and divorce, the recreational use of drugs, and radical lifestyles are in."

He continued, "There can be no education without morality, and there can be no lasting morality without religion...we must bring God back to the classrooms."²¹ Each of the candidate's remarks indicated concern over a society moving from a time when the sacred wielded the greatest influence in society, to one in which secularism dominates. He contended the result of this shift in influence was a national moral problem

²⁰Robertson, Americans Dates with Destiny, p. 15.

²¹Robertson, "A New Vision for America," Constitution Hall, Washington, D.C., 17 Sep. 1986.

evidenced by a rise in the use of illegal drugs, illegitimate pregnancies and abortions, particularly among the nation's youth. Robertson favored the restoration of "traditional Judeo Christian moral values" to the heart of school curriculums, as well as the reinstatement of "voluntary prayer as a legitimate freedom guaranteed by the first amendment." He advocated a return to an earlier, what he believed to be a more accurate method of studying history that presented God as a key-player, and a facts-oriented, vice values-oriented or relativistic approach to education.²² If values were to be taught in the classroom at all, Robertson proposed a return to traditional, or absolute values.²³

The national deficit was discussed in moral terms by the candidate as well. "Mounting federal budget deficits," he said, "are immoral because they steal the future from our children."²⁴ The nation's underlying problem, that of moral decay, he argued, was one that could not be solved by injection of additional government dollars. Robertson maintained he would not leave a legacy of both "moral and economic bankruptcy" to America's youth; rather, he would make

²²Americans for Robertson, "Pat Robertson: Restoring Excellence in Education."

²³Reid, "Traditional Morality at Core of Robertson's Political Quest," Sec. A, p. 8, col. 4.

²⁴Americans for Robertson, "Pat Robertson: Reducing the Federal Budget Deficit," p. 1.

necessary cuts in unspecified government programs in order to reduce the deficit debacle.²⁵

Robertson concluded his campaign with a confirmation of his moral crusade: "I entered the race as a champion of conservative values, I entered the race so that I might speak out on the great moral issues of our time."²⁶ Even his address to the Republican National Convention, likening America to a "city set on a hill," emphasized the importance of maintaining spiritual and moral values if the country was to maintain its greatness.²⁷

Modernity and Moral Issues: Evangelical Supporters

An examination of Robertson's religious support base underscores the antimodern character of his campaign. Most supporters linked their newfound political activism to particular issues rather than the moral malaise identified by their candidate, however. Galvanized by Supreme Court decisions on school prayer (1962) and abortion (1973) and a general shift in the definition of family in the U.S. that included a marked accommodation of the homosexual community, this remnant of the Reagan era, the "only partner in the Reagan coalition whose agenda was ignored," saw great promise

²⁵Americans for Robertson, "Pat Robertson: Strengthening the American Family," p. 1.

²⁶Americans for Robertson, "Pat Robertson Suspends Campaign," Press Release, 16 May 1988.

²⁷See Robertson, Republican National Convention Speech.

in Robertson.²⁸ In an assessment of Robertson supporters at the Michigan Republican convention, one observer noted a higher interest in moral issues on their part than their professional party counterparts. Their reasons for getting involved in politics were related to an intrusion by society on their "personal space," a sense that the dominant culture threatened "to undermine the discipline and moral principles that are at the center of their lives.." What issues were most dear to them? According to one observer at the Michigan convention, Robertson's supporters cheered "loudest for Robertson when he denounces abortion and calls for tax breaks for homemakers--they are looking for validation for the tough decisions they have taken...They do not want the values of Hollywood script-writers imposed on their children..." In addition, they saw "the things they believe most deeply in--their church, sexual restraint--under attack or ridicule." Their unnatural political involvement was simply an attempt to "protect their values against society's invasions."²⁹ Robertson supporters in Oklahoma and elsewhere were painted similarly. Abortion, the abolition of prayer in schools, violence, and moral decline were the issues they cited most

²⁸Morgan, Sec. A, p. 9, cols. 2-3, and Mark Shields, "Those Who Voted for Robertson," The Washington Post, 16 Feb. 1988, Sec. A, p. 19, col. 5.

²⁹Michael Barone, "They're Defending Their Personal Space," The Washington Post, 11 Feb. 1988, Sec. A, p. 27, cols. 2-3.

often to explain their political action.³⁰ A study of Robertson delegates at the 1988 Virginia Republican State Convention also showed their high degree of issue orientation. Over half of them, 61%, had become politically active on the basis of issues, particularly the issue of abortion. Almost two-thirds of the Robertson delegates said it was the most important issue to them in the Presidential election.³¹

Although they did not specifically articulate it, evangelical supporters of Pat Robertson indicated a dissatisfaction with the entire process of modernity in America as well. Indeed, it was the candidate's appeal to a "more traditional America, one angered and confused by modernity, yearning for old values..." to which they responded.³² Supporters in Iowa embraced Robertson's assurances to maintain traditional, particularly family values through an aggressive attack on the public schools.³³ A South Dakota supporter explained his involvement this way: "We [evangelicals] have wanted a moral government to lead this

³⁰David Maraniss, "Oklahoma and the Robertson Difference," The Washington Post, 29 Feb. 1988, Sec. A, p. 11, cols. 3, 5.

³¹John McGlennon, "Religious Activists in the Republican Party: Robertson and Bush Supporters in Virginia," Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL, 13-15 Apr. 1989. Other significant issues were Contra aid, school prayer, sexual freedom, morals, family values, and drugs.

³²Richard Cohen, "They're Hunkering Below the Radar Line," The Washington Post, 11 Feb. 1988, Sec. A, p. 27, col. 3.

³³Tom Curry, "Faithful on the Move," Commonweal, CXIV (1987), 728.

nation, but what we couldn't stomach was that the only route to government [was] through politics.'"³⁴ In contrast to the majority of Republicans who saw America as healthy and prosperous, evangelical activists were concerned with a national "spiritual decline."³⁵ According to Jeffrey Hadden, Robertson supporters believed something had "gone terribly wrong with America--that God's covenant [had been] broken.'"³⁶ Since the 1960s America had witnessed enormous social change, change which threatened their way of life. Evangelicals became politically active to "protect themselves from secularization" imposed by the dominant society.³⁷ Robertson, whose goal was to "restore traditional moral values' to the...pervasiveness...they enjoyed up to a generation ago," was their banner carrier.³⁸ He described his supporters this way:

"They are getting involved now...because they think the government and courts are interfering with their lives and their ability to pass along their beliefs to their children. They are intensely patriotic, and they don't want their country's greatness frittered away. Ten years ago, they believed politics was too much 'of this world' and it was sinful to get involved. Now, they believe it's sinful and evil not to get involved in politics.'"³⁹

³⁴Raine, "The Power and the Preacher," U. S. News and World Report, 14 Dec. 1987, p. 44.

³⁵Raine, "Robertson's Grand Design," p. 15.

³⁶Raine, "The Power and the Preacher," pp. 44-45.

³⁷Donnelly, p. 679.

³⁸Raine, "Robertson's Grand Design," p. 16.

³⁹Raine, "The Power and the Preacher," p. 45.

Political Pragmatism

Robertson's foray into national politics as a Presidential candidate was a reaction to modernity. His concern for moral decline in the country struck a chord with many evangelicals who had no former political experience. But Robertson's campaign was more than a mere exercise in reactionism. By tapping into the fundamentalist-evangelical vision for America, Robertson hoped to make permanent political fixtures of his likeminded followers.

His 1986 work, America's Dates with Destiny, concluded with a chapter on the 1988 election. It was not a revelation of his own political aspirations; rather, Robertson stressed the importance of voting and being informed about national issues. The book's postscript, specifically about and to evangelicals, was an exhortation to political activism. He encouraged evangelicals to believe that political change, in accordance with their worldview, was possible, but required effort on their part. He targeted the local precinct as the starting point.⁴⁰ Robertson's political biography stated his future plans as to include the formation of a national political action committee, Americans for the Republic, Inc., "to mobilize and train conservatives in the political process and to support conservative candidates running for offices nationwide at every level of government."⁴¹ Even on

⁴⁰See Robertson, America's Dates With Destiny, pp. 292-304.

⁴¹Americans for Robertson, "Biography of Pat Robertson," p. 1.

announcing the suspension of his campaign, Robertson expressed delight in knowing that his supporters were becoming politically active. "I...am now seeing my supporters elected to position of responsibility in the Republican parties of 20 states."⁴² By getting evangelicals active in national politics, Robertson met one of his objectives, despite an unsuccessful bid for the nation's highest elected office.

A History of Protestant Fundamentalism

In the eyes of the candidate, Protestant Christianity was a constant in American politics until the early twentieth century. Pat Robertson saw his campaign as a resumption of the relationship between God, government and citizen established at the 1607 landing at Cape Henry, Virginia, confirmed by the founding fathers' belief in God, evidenced by their knowledge of scripture, and reaffirmed in periods of religious revival such as the Great Awakenings. The lapse in that relationship occurred from approximately 1920 to 1975, when America departed from its sacred roots. Robertson's thesis is presented in America's Dates With Destiny, an overview of which follows.

Robertson argues that Christianity was the most significant element in the settling of what would become the United States. The settlers' objectives for the New World, he contends, were scriptural: to take dominion over civic and

⁴²Americans for Robertson, "Pat Robertson Suspends Campaign."

family life, to take dominion over the land, to share their Christian faith with the natives, and to introduce all to the concept of government under God. Such goals, he states, were expressed in the Mayflower Compact. The Massachusetts colony was to be established for the purposes of proselytizing the Indians and governing on the basis of scripture. Other colonies were similarly founded. Even King James' charge to the colonists was to keep God first, lest their settlements fail. Robertson's discussion of education in the colonies shows the great emphasis on Christianity common among the first colleges. The purpose of life and study at Harvard, for example, was taken from scripture: "to know God and Jesus Christ" (John 17:3).⁴³

Robertson's discussion of the founding fathers and the form of government chosen by these men suggests they were greatly influenced by Christian principles. He argues that all of them displayed such knowledge of Biblical scripture that even men like Jefferson and Franklin, often classed as deists, had Christian leanings manifest in a Declaration of Independence proclaiming God as source of liberty and equality. Robertson maintains the only precedent for the American form of government was Israel's covenant relationship with God, revealed in the Old Testament. Of the constitution, he quotes John Adams': it "was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the

⁴³Robertson, America's Dates With Destiny, p. 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 35.

government of any other.'"⁴⁴ Robertson contends the balance of power arrangement reflected the founders' belief in the evil, fallen nature of man. Moreover, the two greatest periods of revivalism in this country, the First and Second Great Awakenings, he explains as reactions to departures from the nation's Christian roots. The First Great Awakening was preceded by the Age of Enlightenment which had spread from Europe to America. Early strains of modernity provoked a religious response. The second period of revival, he explains, was stirred by the sin of slavery.⁴⁵ When did America begin to distance itself from its Christian roots? Robertson proposes a number of important turning points. Most significant is his discussion of the signing of the Humanist Manifesto in 1929 by 34 Americans, to include John Dewey. Its authors stated, "We consider the religious forms and ideas of our fathers no longer adequate." For Robertson, it marked the time when America's spiritual roots were pulled up and its Judeo-Christian heritage disregarded. Eventually the rights of the majority of Americans who believed in God would become less significant. The eventual loss of face as a result of the Vietnam and Iranian debacles he attributed to the nation's turning away from its spiritual and political foundation.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Robertson, "A New Vision for America."

⁴⁵Robertson, America's Dates With Destiny, pp. 64-65, 90, 92-93, 49-59, and 136.

⁴⁶Robertson, America's Dates With Destiny, p. 182, 191-192, 270.

Robertson's view of American history, while controversial, finds support among other observers. John W. Whitehead notes that Samuel Rutherford's Lex Rex, which refuted the notion of the divine right of kings espoused in Europe, influenced the founding fathers. Rutherford contended "the basic premise of government and therefore of law must be the Bible." Through John Witherspoon and John Locke, his idea was realized in colonial America. The impact of Lex Rex on the Declaration of Independence include two ideas. The first was the notion of a "covenant" relationship between the ruler, God, and the people, one which King George III had violated by exercising excessive power. The second was that of the equality of men, the result of the sinful state common among all men. In addition, Whitehead argues that basis of law in the United States was the result of the influence of William Blackstone, an 18th century English jurist who believed the foundation of all law to be in Scripture. Blackstone's influence is also apparent in the Declaration of Independence--the "laws of nature and of nature's God" were what entitled the colonists to independence.⁴⁷

David Gill's perspective on the nation's roots includes both the influences of Christianity and Deism. Both he and Robert Booth Fowler credit Puritanism with influencing colonial thought more than any other single factor. Fowler

⁴⁷John W. Whitehead, "The Christian Idea," in America, Christian or Secular?, ed. Jerry S. Herbert (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984), pp. 42-45.

writes, "Puritan values undoubtedly encouraged the colonial stress on...moral condemnation of evil, support for a limited government, and hope that in America, the new Israel, Christians could do better and be an example for the world."⁴⁸ According to Gill, even as deism gained appeal (it is evidenced in the Declaration of Independence through such language as "the pursuit of happiness" rather than the pursuit of "God's glory"), Puritanism continued to exercise influence.⁴⁹ If one accepts this view of American history, then periods of political fundamentalism cannot be explained as mere aberrations or the result of an open, pluralistic political system. Rather, the notion of a constant relationship between this form of religion and politics, which suffered demise as a result of secular, modernizing influences, must be considered.

The View from Outside

The method of study used to analyze the Robertson campaign emphasized analysis of the candidate's writings and speeches, as well as the stated positions of his followers. A brief summary of what outsiders had to say regarding the nature of the Robertson campaign is also insightful.

⁴⁸Robert Booth Fowler, Religion and Politics in America (Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985), p. 14.

⁴⁹David Gill, "Faith of the Founding Fathers?" in America, Christian or Secular?, p. 132, 140.

The Robertson campaign was classed as a reaction to modernity by at least two observers. Richard Cohen of The Washington Post noted that Robertson appealed to "a more traditional America, one angered and confused by modernity, yearning for old values..."⁵⁰ Michael Barone, also of the Post, considered the threat posed by the dominant, secular society to undermine fundamentalist beliefs to have provoked a political response.⁵¹

The characterization of the campaign as issue-oriented was also common among campaign outsiders. T. R. Reid perceived the moral-issue orientation of the Robertson campaign "fundamental." While the candidate presented definite positions on issues such as communism and the nature of the Soviet threat, terrorism, reduction of the federal budget deficit and social security, issues such as the breakdown of the traditional family, an increase in the use of illegal drugs and sexual promiscuity dominated the campaign. These issues, according to Robertson, were symptoms of the "'moral death'" of the U.S.⁵²

Bob Benenson of Congressional Quarterly considered the greatest success of the Robertson campaign to have been the

⁵⁰Cohen, Sec. A, p. 27, col. 3.

⁵¹See Barone, Sec. A, p. 27, cols. 1-4.

⁵²Reid, "Traditional Morality at the Core of Robertson's Political Quest," Sec. A, p. 8, col. 1. See also Cohen, Barone, and Bob Benenson, "Pat Robertson: The Anatomy of a Candidacy," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 46 (1988), p. 1268.

galvanization of evangelicals into national and state politics. Such was a pragmatic aim of the campaign according to the candidate as well. Pointing out significant victories for fundamentalists in Nevada and Louisiana Republican politics, for example, Benenson projected that Robertson may have succeeded in laying the "groundwork for a continuing presence of Christian conservatives in politics."⁵³

Conclusions

Four findings emerged as a result of analysis of the Robertson campaign. First, it was markedly anti-modern. Its primary emphasis, a reversal of America's moral decay, represented a desire on the part of the candidate and his fundamentalist-evangelical supporters to return to an earlier period in American history when national moral standards conformed to those of the fundamentalist-evangelical community, or so it appeared.

Second, the campaign was highly issue-oriented. While Robertson articulated his position on the gamut of issues to be faced by a President, particular issues received greater attention. Moral issues such as abortion, school prayer, public education, the family, and the immorality of both a national deficit and weak foreign policy were frequently addressed. The issues of abortion, school prayer, education and family particularly captured the attention of

⁵³Benenson, p. 1268.

evangelicals. The campaign represented a response to issues critical enough to provoke political action from the Protestant fundamentalist community.

Third, Robertson hoped that through his pro-moral, anti-modern campaign, evangelicals would become permanently active in national, particularly Republican politics, regardless of the outcome of his Presidential bid. He encouraged grassroots participation and gave fundamentalists and evangelicals a hope that the concerns dear to them could be successfully addressed through political action. In this regard, the campaign was a pragmatic effort to end cycles of involvement and withdrawal on the part of Protestant evangelicals and, instead, make their presence in national politics constant. Last, if one accepts an interpretation of American history in which Protestant fundamentalist Christianity played the dominant role in influencing the formation of U. S. government, Robertson's venture into national politics and the support he secured among evangelicals emerges as less of an oddity; rather, his campaign and the activism of evangelical supporters appears to have been a return to a former way of making policy in this country, one that had merely taken a back seat for over 50 years while the influences of modernity gained appeal among those in government and those they governed.

How do these findings relate to the explanations for fundamentalist political activist presented in chapter two?

If the Robertson campaign accurately represents the movement, or at least a significant segment of Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals, it lends support to three of the four explanations put forth in the preceding chapter. First, the recent Protestant fundamentalist political expression is both a response to modernity (a withering away of the sacred and a growth in secular influences), and critical issues, components of modernity in general. For example, as the influence of the Protestant fundamentalist community diminished, particularly in its ability to maintain a certain type of national morality, and as public opinion shifted toward a more liberal, perhaps secular stance on issues such as abortion, fundamentalists responded with political activism.

The "constant cycle" theory was also supported by findings in this chapter. Although more apparent in the precampaign writings of candidate Robertson, his view of the role of Protestant fundamentalists as critical to the founding of this country, from the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to the establishment of a balance of power arrangement, as well as periods of religious revivalism provoked by modernity, Robertson observed periods of fundamentalist participation in and withdrawal from national politics (as did Harvey Cox in chapter two). Robertson was disturbed by the years of withdrawal commencing in the 1920s with the introduction of humanism in America.

His campaign was not only an effort to win the Presidency, but to secure fundamentalist-evangelical political involvement for the long haul and end the constant cycle of participation and withdrawal. Both he and his followers wanted to secure the relationship between church and state they perceived to have existed at the nation's genesis.

Analysis of the campaign did not wholly confirm or reject the system-politics explanation presented in chapter two.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

The recent political expression of religious fundamentalists, both in the United States and internationally, has altered what had been presumed to be the secular nature of politics. The rise to power of Islamic fundamentalists in Iran, the continuation of the Palestinian uprising (in part the result of the injection of fundamentalist fervor), and the destabilizing effects of Islamic fundamentalism throughout the Middle East seemed to take the west by surprise. Similarly, the seemingly sudden manifestation of Protestant fundamentalism in national politics in the U. S. since 1976 startled political observers and activists alike. America is a modern state. Social scientists had rested comfortably with their prediction that the role of Protestant Christianity in politics (and religion in general, for that matter), as well as other spheres, had appropriately withered.

This study of the recent political activism of religious fundamentalists sought to determine the reason(s) for the phenomenon, specifically the reason(s) for the surge of activism on the part of Protestant fundamentalists in

America.¹ Fundamentalists and evangelicals were thought to be separatists whose worldview precluded action on the issues of the day. After all, fundamentalists historically rejected any notions that conditions on earth would improve; rather, their focus was on preparing individuals for the world hereafter.

A review of the existing literature on fundamentalist movements in chapter two presented four popular explanations of the causes of the political expression of religious fundamentalism. One explanation maintained such movements arose in response or reaction to modernity, the process which James A. Bill and Carl Leiden defined as man's gaining control over his environment.² Such control by man lessens the need for reliance on myth, thus challenging the domain of the sacred. Those who supported this explanation posited a parallel relationship between modernity and fundamentalist expressions: the measure of fundamentalist political response was in direct proportion to the threat posed by modernity or secularism. The second theory explained fundamentalist political expressions as issue-dependent. This explanation is related to the first one in that it identifies certain critical issues, subcomponents of modernity in general, as necessary for a fundamentalist political response. It differs

¹Fundamentalism is defined in chapter one.

²James A. Bill and Carl Leiden, Politics in the Middle East (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, & Co., 1984), p. 3.

from the modernity theory in that it sees the entire process of modernity as too vague and insufficient to adequately explain the phenomena. According to this theory, fundamentalist surges are not likely to occur unless certain critical threat issues are present. In years past, for example, slavery became a critical issue. In recent years, abortion and threats to the traditional family have provided fuel for the fire of fundamentalism.

The third explanation for political fundamentalism in America posited a constant cyclical nature of such movements. Robert Booth Fowler contended political activism on the part of religious fundamentalists was part of a historical continuum of periods of religious involvement and withdrawal in American politics.³ At times, fundamentalists pursued an aggressive course toward conforming the dominant society to their worldview. At other times, when society proved highly resistant to such change, fundamentalists withdrew from political action. The cyclical theory offered no reasons for the ebb and flow of political activism on the part of fundamentalists, however. Last, Protestant fundamentalism in America was explained as a unique part of the American pluralistic political system which allows for the expression of all special interests.⁴

³Robert Booth Fowler, Religion and Politics in America (Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985), pp. 19-22.

⁴The last two explanations apply only to the manifestation of Protestant fundamentalism in the U.S.

The 1987-1988 presidential bid of evangelical Pat Robertson, his reasons for running and the reasons offered by co-religionists for their active support provided a means for measuring the movement in America. Robertson had ties to all of the movement's subcomponents--fundamentalists, evangelicals, and charismatics/Pentecostals. Four findings emerged as a result of the study of the campaign. First, the campaign was a reaction to modernity in general. Second, specific issue components of modernity proved to be the compelling reason for this fundamentalist political expression. Robertson perceived modernity in general as a threat to the domain of evangelicals. His followers responded more to the issue components of modernity, in particular abortion and the demise of the traditional family. Robertson's view of U. S. history, although controversial, provided a third finding.⁵ Robertson perceived a constant relationship between American politics and Protestant Christianity.⁶ He believed Protestant Christianity wielded the dominant influence in establishing the U. S. political system. An examination of the whole of American religious and

⁵Robertson's view of U. S. history is known as a covenant perspective which maintains the Christian tradition was an integral part of the nation's history. It also tends to idealize the past. See George Marsden, "Evangelicals, History, and Modernity," in Evangelicalism and Modern America, George Marsden, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), p. 96.

⁶While he does not specifically say so, Robertson's use of the term "Protestant Christianity" refers to the fundamentalist variant of Protestant Christianity. See Pat Robertson, America's Dates with Destiny (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986).

political history was beyond the scope of this thesis, however, chapter three presented evidence put forth by other observers confirming Robertson's view. If his interpretation of history is accurate (or at least accepted by the reader), it supports the constant-cycle explanation for fundamentalist movements in America. Protestant fundamentalists alternately entered in and withdrew from politics regularly until an extended period of withdrawal from the 1920s to the 1970s, years in which the influences of modernity loomed greater than the ability of fundamentalists to influence politics or effect social change. If Protestant fundamentalism has indeed been a constant in American politics, then, as Steve Bruce writes, rather than the "rebirth of fundamentalism...public awareness of fundamentalism...has been born again."⁷ Fourth, Robertson's campaign evidenced a pragmatic element not encountered in the review of the literature on the topic. Win or lose, one of Robertson's objectives was to make permanent political fixtures of the fundamentalists and evangelicals he was able to galvanize. In so doing, he sought to reinstitute the earlier relationship between politics and Protestant Christianity he perceived as an historical fundamental.

If Pat Robertson and his supporters were representative of the larger Protestant fundamentalist-evangelical movement

⁷Steve Bruce, The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 171.

in the U.S., three findings have emerged. First, fundamentalist political expression in this country represents a reaction to modernity. Second, the movement arose in response to certain critical issues, moral issues such as abortion, the use of illegal drugs, and sexual promiscuity. Last, it was not an aberration unique to the latter part of the twentieth century; rather, Protestant fundamentalists have engaged in political activism throughout the course of U. S. history, to varying degrees. How long this period of activism will last is uncertain, and the results of Robertson's efforts to transcend cycles of participation and withdrawal remain to be seen.

This study of political fundamentalism was an attempt to explain the phenomenon by examining one of its manifestations, Protestant fundamentalism in the U. S., which was further reduced to just one of its manifestations--the Pat Robertson campaign. It does not comprehensively explain the cause for such movements. Rather, it has revealed the reasons for one narrow component of a much larger phenomenon. In order for a comprehensive explanation to be devised, more research, research into other political systems and other forms of fundamentalism, is required. It is hoped that this effort puts the reader one step closer to understanding this highly complex occurrence.

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