

Georgetown University  
Government 350  
The Politics of the "Christian Right"

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For nearly 30 years, the Christian Right has been a force in American politics. This movement of conservative Christians into politics has changed the dynamics of intra and inter-party politics, and affected the content and tone of the policy debate. In the last few years, there have been heated clashes at the national, state, and local level over teaching sex education and evolution, stem cell research, gay and lesbian civil rights, the "right to die," abortion, and many other issues that are not central to the politics of other countries, and were not central to US politics a generation ago.

Most social movements are controversial, but the Christian Right has been especially controversial because it is a conservative social movement that mobilizes religious belief into politics, and its agenda is opposed by other active social movements such as the feminist and gay rights movements. The movement's supporters see it as a defensive reaction by conservative Christians to protect their lifestyle and their rights to educate their children, while its opponents see it as a movement that seeks to impose a narrow religious worldview on all Americans and force everyone to live by their rules.

This course will attempt to put the "Christian Right" into broad context. We will examine the historical and theological roots of the movement, and explore various sociological, political, and psychological theories that explain movement activism. We will learn about the organizations and activists that compete to define the movement, and assess the movement's successes and failures. We will attempt to assess the impact of the movement on American democracy -- weighing the positive and negative contributions.

We will explore the policy agenda of the Christian Right, the tools it has used to seek to achieve its agenda, and its successes and failures to date.

**This course is a seminar, not a lecture course. Students should turn off cell phones before class.**

Students are expected to do the readings **before each class**, and participate in class discussion. Note that class discussion constitutes 25% of the final grade in the course. Believe it or not, I can tell when you haven't done the readings, and if you consistently come to class unprepared, your participation grade will suffer. In most class sessions, we will combine a modest amount of lecture material with a discussion of readings. We will also have guest speakers in several sessions. Guest speakers will represent diverse points of view. Students are permitted to ask tough questions and to challenge the positions of speakers but I do require that you do so politely. Speakers give of their time freely, and they are entitled to respect.

This course works best when students actively seek information outside of class -- from web sites, newspapers, and other sources, and share them with other students. You should regularly scan Christian Right web sites and those of the movement's opponents. In addition, it is sometimes interesting to get on the mailing list of one or more groups -- you can sometimes do this without making a contribution; in all cases a small contribution will assure you a lot of mail, e-mail and newsletters and such.

I also recommend attending church services in fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and evangelical churches, but please be respectful of the sincerity of belief of worshipers if you do this. Some classes have organized groups to attend services, and this has proven very insightful. It is difficult to understand this movement unless you understand evangelical Christianity, and for at least some of you this will be your first exposure to this theological tradition.

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#### GRADING:

Final Exam 35%

Book Report 10%

Paper 30%

Class Discussion 25%

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Students will write and present to the class one book report. The report will be 3-5 pages, and the oral presentation should last 5 minutes or so. The report should summarize and critique the book. These reports are due in different weeks, and **are not accepted late**. Students should examine the list of books and choose one for a review, I will circulate a list for you to sign up on the second class session. You might not get your first choice if someone else chooses it first, so have a backup choice. Some books are due early in the course, for those I will accept the written report on September 29.

Students will also write one medium length (15-25 page) paper on a research topic. All topics must be cleared with the instructor. Research papers are not literature reviews -- I expect you to actually gather information about a topic that involves more than searching on Google for an hour or going to the library. In the past few years, some of the best papers have involved interviewing one or more political activists, site visits to Christian Right-associated colleges or universities, participant observation in a political group, content analysis of Christian Right journals and magazines, and a survey of students in religious high schools in the South. Some class papers have been published in an on-line journal of student papers on religion and politics. I am willing to look at outlines of papers, and even comment on drafts, but I do not require that you submit these.

**Papers are due the last day of class.** I understand that computer hard drives freeze and printers die, so it is important that you **back up** your paper on floppy disk from time to time. Also please note that I will enforce the Universities policy on plagiarism. If you do not know what constitutes plagiarism this would be a good time to look at the University policy on the question.



### Books

The following books are available in the bookstore for purchase:

Lienesch, **Redeeming America.**

Green, Rozell, and Wilcox, **Marching to the Millenium: The Christian Right in American Politics** \*\*

Buss and Herman , **Globalizing Family Values**

**\*\* My royalties from this book are donated to charity.**

Three other books are assigned but not available in the bookstore.

Wilcox and Larson, ***Onward Christian Soldiers (3<sup>d</sup> edition) (pdf files distributed)***

Rozell and Wilcox, **Second Coming.** (This will be handed out in class)

Bates, **Battleground\*\*\*** (out of print, can buy from author or from Amazon used)

Dobson, **Marriage Under Fire.** (You should be able to find used copies on Amazon.com for \$1 or so)

## READINGS



Reserve readings are indicated by a \*.  
Other readings not on reserve will be  
distributed by email or posted on  
Blackboard.

### September 1

Introduction to class, Syllabus distributed

### September 8 Religion in the US/Church and State in the US

1.) Religion in the US -- a comparative and historical overview  
Kenneth Wald, **Religion and Politics in the United States** (4th edition) Ch 1-3.\*  
Finke and Stark, **The Churching of America**, Ch 1,3,5,7\*  
Jelen and Wilcox, "Religion and Politics in an Open Market: Religious Mobilization in the United States." from Ted Jelen and Clyde Wilcox (eds) **Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, the Few, and the Many.**\*

Recommended: Wald, **Religion and Politics in the United States**, 4th edition Ch 4

2.) Church and State in the U.S.

Recommended: Dionne and Chen, *Sacred Places, Civic Purposes: Should Government Help Faith-Based Charity?*

Jelen and Wilcox, *Public Attitudes On Church and State*

Jelen, *To Serve God and Mammon: Church-State Relations in the United States*

Fisher, *Religious Liberty in America: Political Safeguards*

### September 15 Conceiving of the Christian Right/Early History of the Movement

1.) Conceiving of the Christian Right

Boston, **Close Encounters with the Christian Right** Introduction, Ch 1.\*

Rozell and Wilcox, **Second Coming** Ch 1\*

Rohter, "Social and Psychological Determinants of Radical Rightism" in Schoenberger (ed) **The American Right Wing\***

Reed, **Politically Incorrect** Ch 1\*

Recommended: Read about other social movements, such as the labor movement, civil rights movement, feminist movement, gay rights movement, environmental movement.

2.) Early History of the Christian Right

Falwell, selection on reserve from Scopes trial.\*

Wilcox and Larson **Onward Christian Soldiers** Chapter 2

Wolfinger, et al. in Schoenberger (ed) **The American Right Wing\***

Liebman, "Mobilizing the Moral Majority" in Liebman and Wuthnow (eds) **The New Christian Right\***

Fitzgerald, **Cities on a Hill: Liberty Baptist\***

Allen Hertzke, **Echoes of Discontent** Ch 3,4\*

Recommended: Watch movie *Late Great Planet Earth*, narrated by Orson Welles

**Book Reviews: Brown, Bruce, Ribuffo, Robertson**

## **September 22** Understanding Evangelical Religion

This class session may include video clips of evangelical sermons of various types.

Lymann Kellstedt, "The Meaning and Measurement of Evangelicalism." in Ted Jelen (ed.) **Religion and Politics in the United States.\***

Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, 1996. **Left Behind: A Novel of Earth's Last Days**, Ch 1-3\*

**Book Review -- Ammerman, Smith, Emerson and Smith**

Recommended: Visit services at an evangelical, fundamentalist, and pentecostal church service. Watch Jerry Falwell on television or the internet. Watch a sermon by Billy Graham. The video **The Apostle** is a nice depiction of white pentecostal services. Read or watch **Left Behind** and other books in the series for one account of fundamentalist eschatology .

## **September 29** The Christian Coalition and Transformation of the Christian Right Rozell and Wilcox, **Second Coming** (entire)

Students are expected to visit the web sites for Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America, Christian Coalition, Virginia's Family Foundation and other groups.

For links, see my links page

All students should try to find a group that is not on this list, and bring in something from their web sites.

**Book Reviews -- Aho, Barkun, Martin, Watson**

Recommended: Visit People for the American Way's web site and read through some of their reports.

## **October 6** The Christian Conservative Political Agenda

Reed, "What do Religious Conservatives Really Want?" in Cromartie, **Disciples and Democracy\***

Wilcox and Larson, **Onward Christian Soldiers** Ch 4

Lienesch, Introduction, Ch 3-4

For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility.

[http://www.nae.net/images/civic\\_responsibility2.pdf](http://www.nae.net/images/civic_responsibility2.pdf) (please let me know if this link has changed).

**Book Reviews -- Carter, Reed**

**Recommended:**

## **October 13** Education

Bates (entire)

Larson and Wilcox chapter, "The Christian Right and College Students"

**Book Review -- Riley**

**Guest Speaker Stephen Bates**

## **October 20** Family Policy

Lienesch, ch 1, 2

Didi Herman, *The Gay Agenda is the Devil's Agenda.\**

Dobson, **Marriage Under Fire** (entire)

Campbell and Larson chapter "Religious Coalitions For and Against Gay Marriage"

Wendy Wright from CWA as guest speaker (date tentative)

Book review, Farris, Herman, Melich

## **October 27:** Foreign policy

Lienesch, Ch 5

Bus and Herman (entire)

## **November 3** Electoral mobilization

Green, "The Christian Right in the 1994 Elections: Overview" in **God at the Grassroots\***

Green, et al. (entire)

Guest speaker -- Chuck Cunningham, NRA (formerly Christian Coalition), date tentative

**Book Review -- Green**

**November 10** The Movement meets the Party

Green, Guth, and Wilcox, "Less than Conquerors: The Christian Right in State Republican Parties"

Hertzke, *Echoes of Discontent* Ch 3

Green, et al. *The Christian Right in American Elections* (entire)

**Book Review: Layman, Oldfield**

**November 17** Working with Congress and the Courts

Hacker, (entire)

Green and Bigalow, "The Christian Right Goes to Washington."

**Book review - Moen**

**November 24 No Class**

**December 1** Assessing the "Christian Right"

Wilcox and Larson, *Onward Christian Soldiers*, Ch 5

Warren, "Civil Society and Good Governance"

Fowler, "The Failure of the Religious Right (and comments), in Michael Cromartie **No Longer Exiles\***

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## Books for Review

- Aho, James. 1990. **The Politics of Righteousness: Idaho Christian Patriotism.** Washington University Press.
- Ammerman, Nancy. 1987. **Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World.** New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Apostolidis, Paul. 2000. **Stations of the Cross: Adorno and Christian Right Radio.** Durham: Duke University Press.
- Barkun, Michael. 1994. **Religion and the Racist Right.** Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Brown, Ruth. 2002. **For A Christian America: A History of the Religious Right .** New York: Prometheus Books.
- Bruce, Steve. 1988. **The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carter, Stephen. 1993. **The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion.** New York: Basic Books.
- Emerson, Michael, and Christian Smith. 2000. **Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America.** New York: Oxford University Press.
- Farris, Michael. 1996. **Anonymous Tip.** Nashville: Broadman and Holman.
- Green, John, et al. 1996. **Religion and the Culture Wars.** Armonk: Rowman.
- Herman, Didi. 1997. **The Antigay Agenda** Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hunter, James Davison. 1991. **Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America.** Basic
- Layman, Geoffrey. 2001. **The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics.** New York: Columbia University Press.
- Martin, William. 1996. **With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America** New York: Broadway Books
- Melich, Tanya. 1996. **The Republican War Against Women** New York: Bantam.
- Moen, Matthew. 1989. **The Christian Right and Congress.** Tuscaloosa: Alabama
- Oldfield, Duane. 1996. **The Right and the Righteous The Christian Right Confronts the Republican Party.** Armonk: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Reed, Ralph. 1994. **Active Faith: How Christians are Changing the Soul of America.** New York: Free Press.
- Ribuffo, Leo. 1983. **The Old Christian Right** Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Riley, Naomi Schaefer, **God on the Quad: How Religious Colleges and the Missionary Generation are Changing America** New York: St. Martins Press.
- Robertson, Marion (Pat). **The New World Order.**
- Smith, Christian. 1998. **American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Watson, Justin 1997. **The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition.** New York: St. Martins.