

Backwards Christian Soldiers:
The Role of the Religious Right
on the Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy
in the Post-9/11 Era

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The moral certitude of the state in wartime is a kind of fundamentalism. And this dangerous messianic brand of religion, one where self-doubt is minimal, has come increasingly to color the modern world of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

—Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Random House, 2003, p. 147.

Although the influential role of religion in American politics is not new, its proximity to power is, as multiple developments over the past few decades have helped to make the Religious Right a particularly significant player in the militarization of U.S. foreign policy in the post-9/11 era. An analysis of some of the academic literature on the subject has shown that there appears to be at least four important themes trending on the issue: the first being that, with the conclusion of the Cold War era, the Religious Right found impetus for greater *political mobilization* through strategic political and military alliances, the rise of the movement's leadership, and its growth in organizational strength. Secondly, in the post-9/11 era, the movement's *proximity to power*—through the election of an evangelical president and a neoconservative alliance—helped to advance the Religious Right as a major player in U.S. foreign policy. Thirdly, that after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the combination of a *religiously infused political ideology* with *nationalistic ideals* surrounding notions of American Exceptionalism helped to provide the moral justification for a broader, more militaristic foreign policy agenda. Fourth, and lastly, that the Christian *fundamentalism* of the movement, tied to militaristic, right-wing politics after 9/11 constitutes a dangerous brand of bad theology.

Although different sources refer to the group using various, albeit largely interchangeable terminology, for the purposes of this paper, the group shall most consistently be referred to as the “Religious Right.” To simply denote the group as the “Christian Right” or

“Christian evangelicals,” can be seen, in a sense, as unfairly implicating other Christian believers who do not share the movement’s hard-lined political views or fundamentalist interpretations of Biblical scripture.

The Historical Background of the Religious Right

To begin, for the majority of American history, Christian conservatives have remained adherent to the doctrine of separating the church from the state. In "The Deeper Roots of Faith and Foreign Policy," Andrew Preston notes that, fearing government regulation, the group had generally avoided involvement in the more secular concerns of politics (452). However, beginning in the late 1970s, largely in reaction to the liberal cultural and sexual revolutions of the period, the “longstanding separation of conservative religion from conservative politics began to erode” (452). By the 1990s, the Christian conservative “subculture” had stepped away from its former detachment from political affairs, and into the mainstream (453).

The Political Mobilization of the Religious Right Through Strategic Alliances

Andrew J. Bacevich expands on this history in his book *The New American Militarism*. He argues that with the cultural upheavals of the 1960s and the decline in military strength after the failure in Vietnam, Christian conservatives became increasingly mobilized in American politics. In response to the perceived threat that these events posed to the traditional American way of life, this paved the way for the group’s adoption of a “crusade theory of warfare” for U.S. foreign policy—essentially comprising a view that mandated the combination of national security interests with the use of force as a means for fulfilling a religiously imbued moral imperative (135). This moral imperative heralds back to the Wilsonian paradigm that a “world remade in America’s image” is a world at peace, along with the certainty that America’s mission is a providential one (10). In order for this religious imperative to be achieved, such thinking

demanded a reconstitution of U.S. military power and a more aggressive reconfiguration of the traditional concept of “just war”—both essential to the militarization of U.S. policy (135).

Bacevich supports this argument by noting that these ideas were able to bear fruit after the end of the Cold War Era, when the Republican Party (with its emphasis on patriotism and “traditional values”) found favor with the Religious Right (136). Beginning under the Reagan administration, each side perceived its own benefit with the alliance: the Republicans were able to advance the military build-up and their national security agenda after the war, while the evangelicals regarded it as a way to “reclaim and reshape [the U.S.’s] destiny” (137-138). Thus, Bacevich argues that, with this alliance and the revival of Wilsonian ideals following the conclusion of the Cold War, military power has come to be seen as the instrument with which the creation of a new international order could be facilitated.

Bacevich’s second key supporting argument for the role of the Religious Right in the militarization of U.S. foreign policy deals with the evangelical commitment to the restoration of “traditional” American values through a second alliance, this time with the armed services. To counteract the internal threat posed by the cultural shifts of the late 20th century, it was perceived that, by promoting such military values as “duty, honor, and country,” moral renewal could be facilitated at home (140). By restoring the American way of life, evangelicals could “reverse the tide of godlessness and social decay” and ensure that the U.S. adhered to its providential mission (124). As they too felt the negative repercussions of the ongoing culture war, the military recognized the benefits of sharing a common cause with the Religious Right, whose support added significantly to their efforts to rebuild American military power after Vietnam (140-141). Bacevich supports the strategic power of this notion through the example that, following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the accommodating stamp on use of force was

ultimately used to justify a preventative war as a war against “evil” (145). Again, this signaled a willingness to reinterpret the just-war theory in accordance with the infallibility of American interests and to advance its providential mission.

At the same time, Bacevich notes that the militarization of U.S. policy and the imperialistic advancement of the American vision abroad has occurred with little to no debate as to whether or not such militarism may be contradictory to founding American principles such as freedom and democracy (14). Consensual support by mainstream Republican politicians (and the public alike), in combination with a consensus that American military supremacy serves as an affirmation of American exceptionalism, has contributed to the propagation of a militarized U.S. foreign policy (15). Bacevich cites the example of Senator John Kerry in his 2004 run for the presidency against incumbent George W. Bush. Instead of questioning the national security consensus surrounding the “war on terror,” Kerry focused on painting himself as equally militaristic and “sound of defense” by arguing against the tactics of the war rather than the principles (15). However, support for this militaristic doctrine, Bacevich argues, fails to uphold traditional American roots and principles. He supports this idea by disputing that, in the alignment of the ends of the Wilsonian paradigm with the militarization of U.S. policy as the means for implementing a providential mission, “we have chosen to...[rely] on force and the threat of force to spread the American Way of Life” (33).

Political Mobilization: The Role of Religious Leaders and Grassroots Organizing

In a 1999 edition of *Foreign Policy*, William Martin also emphasizes that American religious conservatives no longer adhere to the separation of the church from the state. In fact, he notes that their political activism does not even stop at the water’s edge anymore as the Religious Right has played a growing role in the formulation and implementation of U.S. foreign policy

(67). Not only does he point out that white evangelicals comprise around 25 percent of all registered voters, but he also notes the fact that American religious leaders are playing an increasingly vocal role in addressing foreign policy issues (68). Thus, he argues that, although the Religious Right is not a mainstream movement, it is not a marginal one either.

He claims that, in the 1980s, religious groups and their leaders came to the forefront of American politics with “better organization, greater political sophistication, and stronger connections to Washington insiders” (69). Most visible among these groups were leaders like Reverend Jerry Falwell, with his Moral Majority; televangelist and founder of the Christian Coalition, Pat Robertson; or radio-broadcaster, James Dobson, with *Focus on the Family*. Martin argues that these religious opinion leaders “recognize that they are in the minority but compensate for their modest—though hardly negligible—numbers through mobilization and organization” (69). Using radio broadcasts, television, and the Internet, these individuals are able to reach and mobilize their millions of viewers on a daily basis. At the same time, their highly sophisticated level of group organization enables them to identify supporters, to set up networks for communication, form organizations to rally around their candidates, and to build support to get out the vote. In fact, in 1980, after Ronald Reagan won the Presidency by a surprising margin, even the media attributed the Republican victory to the organizational influence of the movement (Robinson and Wilcox 6). “The ability to mobilize the electorate rapidly,” says Martin, “coupled with an effective lobbying apparatus, has endowed the Religious Right with a level of influence that is unique in American politics” (69).

One notable example of the influence of the Religious Right on American politics, as Martin points out, is the fact that the Christian Coalition has been distributing voter guides and congressional “scorecards” prior to every election since 1990 (70). These purportedly

nonpartisan scorecards rank various candidates according to their voting history, and whether or not their positions are in-line with the Coalition's on various issues. However, filing a lawsuit against the Coalition, the Federal Elections Committee argued that the organization was "illegally influencing elections" with its cards, as they "consistently gave the highest marks to Republicans" (70). The court ruled in favor of the Coalition, stating in 1999, that "'express advocacy' would only apply to an 'explicit directive' that 'unmistakably exhort[s] the reader/viewer/listener to take electoral action to support the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate'" (Glasser and Miller). Likewise, it is evidentiary that such sophisticated leadership and organized grassroots efforts give the Religious Right a vast and significant level of influence when it comes to the political arena.

The Religious Right and its Proximity to Power: An Evangelical President

The second theme in this relationship between the Religious Right and the militarization of U.S. foreign policy is the newfound access to power that the movement found after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In an article titled "God Is Not Neutral: Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy," Andrew J. Bacevich and co-author Elizabeth H. Prodromou argue that after 9/11, "conceptions of justice, largely evangelical in their origin, became fused with a set of policy prescriptions aimed at transforming U.S. national security strategy" (44). Religion was used as an "instrument...to provide moral justification for what is, in effect, a strategy of empire" (44). The personal theology of President George W. Bush and his religiously infused political ideology becomes particularly significant in this light.

Although raised in a Christian home, it was not until President Bush was in his 40s that his faith found a central role in his life. Indeed he is quoted as acknowledging: "There is only one reason I am in the Oval Office and not in a bar...I found faith. I found God" (46). Bacevich

and Prodromou argue that, not only was the way Bush communicated laced with religious language and imagery, but his personal theology also gave him “confidence in his own ability to discern good from evil” (46). Thus, President Bush’s personal faith and moral outlook served as a powerful framework for crafting his administration’s response to the attacks of 9/11, ultimately leading up to his open-ended “crusade” on terror. Expressing his Manichean worldview in either/or terms, Bush heralded the “war on terror” as a “monumental struggle between good and evil,” and warned other nations that “you’re either with us or against us” (48). Bacevich and Prodromou note the implications of such dichotomous thinking:

[Bush’s] faith assured him that as the elected leader of the United States he was acting in a manner that was consistent with the good and that accorded with God’s will... This conviction invested Bush with an unshakable confidence that his decisions were fundamentally sound. (48-49)

The problem with Bush’s faith, then, is not only that it compares the U.S.’s calling with God’s will, but that it leaves little room for retrospection, or for the examination of other possibilities and their potential consequences. Bacevich and Prodromou express their concern in this regard, by pointing out the fact that Jesus Christ preached a doctrine of love, mercy, forgiveness, and forbearance (50). However, in the “blending of religion and statecraft that became the war on terror,” they note that these values were largely absent. “Bush promised not mercy but retribution. ‘Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies,’ he promised the Congress on September 20, 2001, ‘justice will be done’” (50).

Proximity to Power: A Post-9/11 Neoconservative Alliance

Of further interest in the theme regarding the militarization of foreign policy and the Religious Right’s proximity to power was the alliance that ensued with the hawkish, right-wing

neoconservatives, who were so highly represented within the Bush administration. Some of these noteworthy individuals included Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and think-tank leader and founder of the *Weekly Standard* (the neocon bible), William Kristol. Neocons are generally noted for a common set of characteristics: their belief in the human condition as a struggle between “good” and “evil”; for their value of American military superiority as evidentiary of American exceptionalism; for their willingness to use military force to protect American interests and advance their agenda; and for their focus on the Middle East as the “primary theater for American overseas power” (Urban 78).

Bacevich and Prodromou claim in their second argument that for these neoconservative ideologues, who “tend toward a secular version of fundamentalism,” 9/11 represented not a fight of good versus evil, but of “democracy against dictatorship” (50). Having long touted the righteousness of a “benevolent American hegemony,” and favoring the use of military power as the instrument needed to promote American values and interests around the world, the neocons found 9/11 to be a strategic (albeit tragic) opportunity to implement their own foreign policy agenda (51). Bacevich and Prodromou point out, for example, that just a little over a year later, the administration released its *National Security Strategy*—constituting a “veritable manifesto” reformulating U.S. policy after the 9/11 attacks (53). Again, the *Strategy* employed religious language and imagery, imbuing it with a moral authority that “reaffirm[ed] America’s purpose to ‘rid the world of evil’” (53).

It follows then that, as Bacevich and Prodromou ask, one must question “what are the implications of this marriage between presidential faith and secular ideology in a time of national and international crisis?” (54) They conclude that, firstly it will contribute to the ongoing

propensity to instrumentalize religion in politics. Secondly, by lending a moral justification to American efforts, the combination will be used to further the expansion of a Pax-Americana empire. And thirdly, that by making the “use of force synonymous with liberation and the overthrow of evil,” it will reinforce the further militarization of U.S. foreign policy (54).

Religious Nationalism: American Exceptionalism in the Post-9/11 Era

A third theme common to the study of religion and militarism in the post-9/11 era is that, after the terrorist attacks, religion was used as a moral justification for a broader, more militaristic foreign policy agenda through nationalist symbolism and notions of American exceptionalism. In a journal article titled “American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy from September 11 to the Iraq War,” Paul T. McCartney argues that deeply rooted nationalist themes provided the framework within which Americans responded to and comprehended the terrorist attacks. “[These] strikes,” he says, “provided a rare clarifying moment in the nation’s collective consciousness, when both American national identity and U.S. foreign policy were reinvigorated...and a national focus...absent since the end of the Cold War, reemerged” (400). By blending the “legitimizing power” of nationalism with the perpetual use of lofty and moralistic terms to interpret and characterize the attacks, the Bush administration “laid the groundwork in the American consciousness” for an ambitious and militaristic foreign policy agenda (400).

McCartney also notes that the American national identity finds its foundation in a conviction that American principles are “rooted in qualities and capacities shared by all people, everywhere” (402). Implied within such notions of American exceptionalism is a crusading mentality, a sense of duty to spread our national values and ideals. That in the battle of the “war on terror,” it is the U.S.’s particular mission to spread the “light” of freedom in a world of

“darkness” and terror. McCartney contends that such an American “civil religion” serves to function as the religious expression of American nationalism:

Civil religion allows Americans to express in the language of transcendence that the United States is an exceptional country and that the American people have a providential destiny. A certain unshakable confidence attaches to foreign policies that are believed to be not only approved by God, but perhaps even required by His inscrutable plan for mankind. (404)

It is in this consideration, where the role of President Bush demands a second examination in the formulation of the U.S.’s post-9/11 foreign policy agenda.

The Bush Administration—Linking Nationalist and Religious Fundamentalism

McCartney points out that it was ultimately President Bush who focused the American mission after September 11th, particularly through his articulation of patriotic sentiments with religious language. By defining the world in Manichean terms, with the U.S. symbolizing the “good,” Bush added an implicit moral justification to the administration’s policies, while preparing the American public to accept its broader foreign policy agenda (408). For example, in a speech on September 12th, Bush stated that, “Freedom and democracy are under attack.... This enemy attacked not just our people, but freedom-loving people everywhere in the world.... This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil. But good will prevail” (399). Thus, his strategy in framing the attacks not only served to provide the American people with reassurance during a time of crisis, but it also gave the administration a vague and open-ended opportunity to shape the nation’s grand strategy in foreign policy (408).

Likewise, the belief in such American Exceptionalism during the “war on terror” not only provided the key to fulfilling the U.S.’s providential mission, but it also paved the way for the

Bush Doctrine of unilateralism, preemptive war, and the supercession of international law. McCartney argues that the grand vision for America's global role in the post-9/11 world culminated in the administration's *National Security Strategy*, released in September 2002 (415). The general theme read along the lines of the following statement: "Today, humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further freedom's triumph over [its] foes. The United States welcomes our responsibility to lead in this great mission" (416). Thus, by marshalling nationalist symbolism in support of their goals, the Bush administration was able to spell out a broader foreign policy agenda, while using religion and American exceptionalism to ascribe to it a notion of moral authority (420).

A second author, Hugh B. Urban, also writes on the crucial role of President Bush in the alliance between the religious fundamentalism of the Christian Right with the hawkish, political fundamentalism of secular neoconservatives—with this bond between religious and secular fundamentalism comprising the fourth, and final theme. In a journal article titled "Machiavelli Meets the Religious Right," Urban contends that "President Bush represents the structural link that ties together the two major factions in his administration: the strong religious agenda of the New Christian Right, and the imperialist military agenda of the Neoconservatives" (95). Adopting what David Domke has termed as a type of "political fundamentalism," Urban notes that President Bush has furthered the "intertwining of conservative religious faith, politics, and strategic communication" (77). Indeed, he points out that Domke has found that President Bush used explicit religious language in his public speeches more often than any other president in U.S. history (89).

In spite of the link between the two factions, Urban notes that the neoconservatives are not a particularly religious group; rather that they merely recognize "that religion, particularly in

its most extreme fundamentalist forms, is a powerful political tool and a means to generate intense nationalist sentiment” (79). For example, part of President Bush’s 2000 campaign strategy formulated by his neoconservative strategist Karl Rove, included an effort to project an image of Bush as a “compassionate conservative” who could “woo powerhouse evangelical pastors and Christian right leaders to [his] side” (89). As Urban mentions, also common within the neoconservative ideology is the belief that a strong leader might sometimes choose to take extreme or unpleasant actions. Cheney, himself, summed up such sentiments through his statement that in the “war on terror,” the U.S. must operate within "the dark side," while using "any means at its disposal" to defeat its enemies (92). Furthermore, in a return to the imperial presidency, the Bush administration’s expansion of presidential powers and disregard for international law has also shown consistencies with a Machiavellian belief system where the “ends justify the means.” Urban claims that the administration’s policies were “rooted in a kind of religious faith...in America's exceptional status as a divinely guided nation and in [the] President's exceptional position as a divinely appointed leader, one who is above public scrutiny, congressional oversight, and even international law” (95).

Fundamentalist Religion and the Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy

Of further significance for the study of the Religious Right and militarism, is the fact that in a 2008 study on “‘Messianic’ Militarism and Political Conflict in the United States," David Barker et al. have determined that a positive correlation exists between Christian fundamentalism and militancy, with militarism being defined as a “willingness to use the U.S. military to defend and protect American interests abroad” (309). They found that Christian fundamentalism and its corollaries encourage aggressive foreign policy postures both directly (even when controlling for nationalism), and indirectly, by promoting greater nationalism (again while controlling for a

variety of related factors) (318-319). These related factors include cognitive dogmatism (or “black and white” thinking), hierarchical visions of authority, religious devotionism, immersion in evangelical culture, attitudes toward the Middle East, and party identification (319). Finding that biblical inerrancy, cognitive dogmatism, and hierarchical visions of authority are all significant predictors of nationalism, they also found that individuals who profess the inerrancy of the Bible are particularly militaristic when it comes to the defense of Israel, beyond that which can be predicted from a generalized sense of militarism (318). At the same time they discovered that traditionalistic believers are more likely, relative to individuals without such an orientation, to base their vote choices on matters of foreign policy—even when considering stringent controls (319). Particularly interesting, however, is the fact that, by summing two variables that measure church attendance and the frequency of prayer, they found that “religious devotionism, as distinct from any of the elements of fundamentalism, is marginally associated with less nationalism” (319).

This relationship between militarism and Christian fundamentalism is further supported in a 2008 study by Jody C. Baumgartner et al. on “The Influence of Religion on Public Opinion of U.S Foreign Policy in the Middle East.” Even after overall public support for the war had dropped, the study used data on public opinion regarding the Iraq War from surveys done by the Pew Research Center. The group concluded that evangelicals more strongly supported the Bush administration’s foreign policy in the Middle East, and also that their support following the 2003 invasion has declined at a much slower rate than it has with the general public, even when including Americans with other religious beliefs (177). “Most impressive, however, is that this relationship holds even after controlling for the respondents’ party identification” (176).

Fundamentalism and Radicalized Christianity

In his book, *American Fascists*, Chris Hedges argues that the politicization of faith among the Religious Right constitutes a form of religious fascism:

Both the best of American democracy and the best of Christianity embody important values such as compassion, tolerance, and belief in justice and equality.... These values, democratic and Christian, are being dismantled, often with stealth, by a radical Christian movement, known as dominionism, which seeks to cloak itself in the mantle of the Christian faith and American patriotism. (10)

This group within the Religious Right, he notes, is “comfortable with this darker vision of an intolerant, theocratic America. Unfortunately, it is this minority that is taking over the machinery of U.S. state and religious institutions” (19). These hawkish fundamentalists preach that Christians are to build the kingdom of God in the here and now, and see the U.S. as a blessed agent of God. Hedges notes that they tend to speak in the language of battle and paint apocalyptic scenes, finding their final aesthetic in war (33).

Another radicalized group within the Religious Right are individuals who tout a religious doctrine called “premillennial dispensationalism.” In *The New American Militarism*, Andrew J. Bacevich reports that such Christian fundamentalists essentially hold that before biblical prophesy is to be fulfilled, there will be a great end of days tribulation in which Israel plays a prominent role (131). These fundamentalists have taken it upon themselves, however, to ensure that such eschatological events stay on track by espousing a belief in the U.S. as a divine agent, while unwaveringly serving to protect the interests of the Israeli state (133).

Backwards Christian Soldiers: Formulating A Moral Response to 9/11

In his piece “Be Not Afraid: A Moral Response to Terrorism,” Jim Wallis argues that although September 11 shattered American notions of invulnerability and resulted in a foreign

policy rooted in fear, it could have served as a teachable moment instead. On September 12, 2001, Wallis crafted a statement in response to the terrorist attacks, titled “Deny Them Their Victory: A Religious Response to Terrorism.” Within two weeks of releasing it, over five thousand religious leaders had signed on to it (91). In it he called on his fellow Americans to “make the right choices in this crisis—to pray, act, and unite against the bitter fruits of division, hatred, and violence. Let us rededicate ourselves to global peace, human dignity, and the eradication of the injustice that breeds rage and vengeance” (92). He also notes that we cannot adequately comprehend the terrorist attacks of 9/11 without a careful examination of the “grievances and injustices felt by millions of people around the world” (96)

Jon Pahl also writes that the attacks should have been a time for national self-criticism, rather than assuming our own innocence (170). He points out the fact that the attacks were calculated for their maximum symbolic impact, focusing on two architectural symbols of Western neocapitalism and military dominance: the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon (170). However, by marshalling the religious language of sacrifice and the language of mission—for example, calling U.S. military adventures “Operation Infinite Justice” or “Operation Enduring Freedom”—the Bush administration “sought through euphemism to cloak in religious innocence a history of U.S. complicity in creating the very enemies that it now intended to destroy” (168). Even after wrapping the war in prayer—through Reverend Pat Robertson’s “Operation Pray Shield,” for example—we again attempted to render ourselves innocents, on the side of the Lord. “Needless to say, Jesus’ recommendation to ‘pray for those who persecute you’ or to ‘love your enemies’ did not make an appearance here” (169).

Backwards Christian Soldiers: Bad Theology

In his piece titled “Dangerous Religion,” Jim Wallis argues that, in its promotion of American militarism over the past few decades, the Religious Right has interpreted scripture out of context, and fails to address the contradictions and inconsistencies within its views. Although many Christians believe that the Bible is without error, they do not necessarily believe that every word should be taken literally, nor that one may select scripture out-of-context to support their views. Of particular concern for Wallis, in this regard, has been the role of President Bush, as both the head of state and figurehead for the movement. He rightly contends that a president who believes that “the nation is fulfilling a God-given righteous mission and that he serves with a divine appointment can become quite theologically unsettling” (250).

Hence, Wallis says, the problem with President Bush’s use of rhetoric to infuse religion into statecraft is that his quotes taken from the Bible or religious hymns are either taken out of context or used in ways that do not reflect their original meaning (251). For example, Bush is quoted as having stated that, “This ideal of America is the hope of all mankind.... That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it.” Those last two sentences are straight out of the Book of John, but in the gospel, the light shining in the darkness is Jesus Christ. It is not related in any way to America or its values (251). “Bush seems to make this mistake over and over again,” says Wallis, “confusing nation, church, and God. The resulting theology is more American civil religion than Christian faith” (251-252). Furthermore, in his conviction that we are engaged in a moral battle between good and evil, by speaking of ourselves as representing the “good,” and everyone else as being on the “wrong side in that divine confrontation,” this constitutes a bad form of theology. It also “rules out self-reflection and correction” and “covers over the crimes America has committed, which [have] led to widespread global resentment against us” (252). Wallis reveals that even *Christianity Today*

has noted that, “by confusing genuine faith with national ideology,” President Bush’s faith “does not give him pause or force him to reflect. It is a source of comfort and strength but not of wisdom” (250). Wallis argues that, instead, we need to ask ourselves “whether we are on God’s side, rather than the other way around” (Wallis “Be Not Afraid” 97).

In Response

In conclusion, by labeling the Religious Right as an irrational and reactive movement, one fails to address the political astuteness and sophistication of the group. However, when considering the militarization of U.S. foreign policy in the post-9/11 era, the role of the movement has been largely understated. During this period, with the movement’s increased political mobilization and proximity to power, it has contributed to a combination of religious and secular fundamentalism, by infusing religion and nationalism into statecraft. The influential role of the Religious Right on the militarization of U.S. foreign policy has shown that in an age of increasingly intertwined domestic and international issues, religion holds a heightened relevance for the assimilation of foreign policy issues.

Furthermore, such “messianic militarism” fails to address its contradiction with Jesus’ ultimate message of love and forgiveness, and not to mention, peace. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew, when asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus replied that it is simply to, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...the second [greatest commandment] is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (*English Standard Version*, Matt. 22.37-38). In this requirement to love one’s neighbor, the term “neighbor” is an indiscriminate reference to all men and represents the highest order of selfless love. “When we love our neighbor, we do not love ‘the other I’, but the ‘you’. One’s neighbor is the absolutely unrecognizable distinction between man and man; it is eternal equality before God—enemies,

too, have this equality” (Kierkegaard 79). Indeed, this idea is also rooted in the scripture of Matthew 5:43-44 where Jesus states, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” In Romans 12:19-20, Jesus further builds upon this relationship:

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

To put it simply, Jesus’ admonition to “love your neighbor” does not only apply to our like-minded fellows, but to our enemies as well.

Unfortunately, with their dogmatic messages of intolerance and hard-lined politics, the Religious Right has overlooked the loving and peaceful message of Jesus’ gospel, by promoting a militaristic and nationalistic brand of American theocracy. However, not all Christians appreciate nor share their views. For example, an even earlier evangelical American President, Jimmy Carter, emphasized the need to make peace a priority, often directly citing Jesus’ beatitude in Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Berggren and Rae 617). Carter is also quoted as having said that, if the United States is to be the democratic model or light to the world, “The best way, I think, to induce other people to adopt our own persuasion in democratic principles is to make our own system work” (619). In conclusion, if Christians truly want to reflect the light of Jesus into the world, they need to cast off such mentalities as the Religious Right and embrace the pursuit of social and economic justice, political and religious diversity, and the primacy of human rights and multilateral cooperation in foreign policy.

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