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## Christians and Social Issues

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infallible Word of God to people, they *must* divide. The gospel is a divisive message. It creates categories of saved and unsaved because there are some who believe and some who do not believe, even within the same family. So the excuse that some won't get involved in politics because politics divides is a copout. If they are preaching the gospel, they are already dividing, so the question is how much further does God want me to go in preaching the fullness of His Word? The answer is the same as it is to the question, "How far should I follow Jesus?" All the way!

Today in the last quarter of the twentieth century, we are again being asked who we will serve. Shall we be ultimate servants of the state, placing all our trust in its beneficence to do through the programs and plans of men what is in our own best interest? Or shall we say, instead, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"?

Liberal ministers and liberal politicians want to drive a wedge between Christianity and politics. More precisely, they are the latter-day Pharisees. We are a threat to their established disorder. They are, like Herod, afraid of these Messiah followers who refuse to bow to any, save the Lord Jesus Christ. Their power rests on the premise that Congress, the Supreme Court, the President, and even the Gallup Poll will decide what is right and moral and true. When we question whether such institutions have the wisdom to properly lead a people, we elicit denunciations and questions regarding our legitimacy.

But for the Christian it must not be otherwise. We must serve God rather than men. We must say no to abortion, the

killing of God's image-bearers, little babies who have been created by God so that He might have the possibility of fellowship with someone different from anyone else He has ever created. We must say no to homosexual practice, while loving and seeking to help the homosexual to ultimate peace and happiness in a relationship with the Living God. We must do this because homosexual practice is perversion and we do not help the homosexual by pretending that what God has condemned as sin is, in reality, something else. Is the cancer patient helped more by surgery or assurances from the doctor that what he has is not cancer but indigestion?

We must say no to attempts by Liberal theologians and politicians to weaken the family through easier divorce laws and through policies that undermine the sanctity of the home and the worth of the wife and mother.

Not to speak out on such issues is to make a political statement, too. It is to align oneself with the government of Satan, who temporarily runs this world.

It is impossible for today's Christian, for today's Christian pastor, not to be involved politically. One way or the other, he will take a political stand. It will either be that of Satan and his helpers (some of whom are even saved individuals that serve the evil one by their inaction, apathy, or affirmation of liberal agenda under the guise of "separation of church and state") or it will be that of the Living God, the Author and Finisher of our faith and the ultimate and final Authority over every man, woman, and nation.

Choose this day whom you will serve. "No opinion" is not an option. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"

# FUNDAMENTALISM TODAY



## Christians and Social Issues

by Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson

**T**he recent renewal of conservative Christian involvement in the social and political life of America is indeed the religious phenomenon of our time. Resurgent Fundamentalism is being recognized by friend and foe alike. It is a movement that is gathering momentum and growing to such proportions that its reality cannot be denied. *Newsweek* (Sept. 15, 1980) stated: "What is clear on the philosophical level — and in the rough-and-tumble arena of politics — is that the Falwells of the nation and their increasingly militant and devoted flock are a phenomenon that can no longer be dismissed or ignored."

During the 1980 election campaign, theological and social

critic Martin E. Marty observed the media impact being made by Fundamentalists and warned: "Before 1980 ends, not a few candidates will have ducked for cover to escape the Fundamentalist barrage." Often dubbed the *New Right* or the *Religious Right*, the resurgent conservatism is here to stay. Richard Neuhaus, project director of the Council on Religion and International Affairs, recently addressed New York's Harvard Club, stating: "I believe the New Religious Right is a long-term phenomenon in American life. These people must be engaged as partners in the process of redefining America" (*Christianity Today*, March 19, 1982).

Three basic questions must be answered in order to understand the current phenomenon of the conservative

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Christian bombardment of the socio-political process:

1. Where did they come from?
2. Why are they getting involved?
3. Should they get involved?

### Where Did They Come From?

Conservative Christians are as old as the church itself. They have worn different labels at different times in history, but they have always been there. They represent simple Bible-believing people who intend to live their Christian convictions whether they are popular or not. By the end of the nineteenth century, conservatives were generally known as Evangelicals. They merged two opposing theological strains: that of Calvinistic Puritanism and Wesleyan Revivalism. To this was added a strongly premillennial and dispensational view of eschatology.

### The War with Liberalism (1900-1930)

As the twentieth century dawned, the Evangelical movement was confronted with the threat of theological Liberalism. The resultant reaction within the Evangelical camp produced the Fundamentalist Controversy (1909-1929). Essentially, Fundamentalism was a doctrinal controversy centering upon the essential ("fundamental") elements of the Christian faith. These were usually articulated as the (1) inspiration of Scripture; (2) deity and Virgin Birth of Christ; (3) substitutionary atonement; (4) literal Resurrection; and (5) literal Second Coming of Christ.

### The Aftermath (1930-1980)

After the initial confrontation of the "War with Liberalism," Fundamentalists for the most part withdrew from the main line denominations and assumed a strongly separatist stance. In the years following (1930-1980), they regrouped and retrenched outside established church structures. They spent 50 years building churches, schools, and various evangelistic ministries. Almost unnoticed by general society, they rebuilt the most dynamic religious movement in America. They had taken with them some of the best leadership and certainly the best "followership" from the established church. With strong personal commitment to biblical principles

and aggressive evangelism, the conservative Fundamentalist-Evangelicals won millions of converts during the 50-year period which served as the "aftermath" to the "War with Liberalism."

### Resurgence and Confrontation (1980-2000)

With the political campaign of 1980, Fundamentalists surged into the public arena. Upset with the liberal drift to the left, both politically and theologically, and disturbed by the "moral shock" of the 1970s, conservative Christians began to form a mutual alliance of co-belligerency for self-defense. Just as the common threat of Liberalism rallied the early Fundamentalists together, so today the common external threat of secularism and humanism has brought together an unusual combination of conservative Fundamentalists, and Evangelicals.

### Why Are They Getting Involved?

The resurgent impact of conservative Christianity upon the American socio-political process may mystify some, but to the conservative it is a matter of self-preservation. Finding themselves victims of a "War on the Saints," threatened by and yet functioning within a free democratic society, the conservative Christians are determined to use the political process in order to get that process to leave them alone.

### A New Beginning

The slogan of the 1980 Republican Convention has also become the slogan of the *New Right*. In the election victory of Ronald Reagan, conservative Christians found the ray of hope for which they had been waiting nearly 50 years. The liberal establishment has itself to thank for the rise of the *New Right* because of its willingness and determined daring to embrace the most extreme and bizarre elements of society.

Sensing the impending moral crisis, various conservative groups, including the Moral Majority, were formed to combat any further legislation that could be viewed as detrimental to Christian churches, schools, and families. These groups do not desire to "take over" America. Rather, they

want secular America to leave them alone and give them the freedoms guaranteed them by the Constitution.

### A Return to Moral Sanity

The rise of the *Religious Right* is a reaction to the encroachment of the *Liberal Left*. The new conservatives are mobilizing millions of previously "inactive" voters to make their beliefs count at the ballot box. They are becoming the most vocal moral activists in America today. They are concerned about the major moral and ethical issues facing our nation, including the sanctity of human life, the dignity of the family, and the freedom of worship and education. Thus, they oppose abortion, homosexuality, pornography, secularism, and humanism, viewing themselves as normal and traditional Americans. They are not "fanatics" or "sociopaths." They are ordinary people who do not want to see America ruined by godless philosophies that are undermining the very foundation of the nation.

### Should They Get Involved?

Should Christians really get involved in social and political issues? This question is being asked by many sincere Christian believers today. The answer is a strong and definite YES! The political process is nothing more than the legalization of the social process. For Christians to divorce themselves from the political process would be to divorce themselves from society itself.

Some Christian leaders seem to fear that Christian confrontation with society is not warranted lest they become "entangled in the affairs of this life." Yet Christians are usually the first to criticize governmental failure in dealing with social issues. This "tension" between involvement and noninvolvement is as old as the church itself. Some early Christian leaders advocated a hermit-like total abstinence from society. The most extreme case involved Simeon Stylites who lived atop a 60-foot pillar near Antioch for 30 years, after previously remaining buried up to the neck in the ground for several months. By contrast, the early Chris-

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tian apologist Tertullian argued that Christians were loyal citizens of the Roman Empire. He urged believers who were soldiers, merchants, servants, and noblemen to use their positions to promote Christian influence upon the empire.

*History of Christian Confrontation with Society*

At the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther rocked the medieval world by objecting to the social and religious issue of selling indulgences in Germany in order to finance the building of St. Peter's in Rome. What began as a religious and social issue became a political issue involving the German electorate. Other Reformers, like Calvin and Zwingli, were politically exiled for their religious beliefs. Many Christians in Holland and France were slaughtered by the government. It should not surprise anyone, then, that the Reformation gave rise to the concepts of capitalism and democracy based upon the free choice of the individual.

During the later period of religious revivals in Europe, England, and America, Christian theology was applied to scores of social issues. The Moravian and Pietist revivals in Europe not only brought an emphasis upon personal conversion but also Christian concern for the poor and needy. In England, the Wesleyan revival opposed the social evils of the

Industrial Revolution. In America, the Great Awakening saw one third of the colonial population profess a new-birth conversion to Christ. The preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield proclaimed the gospel of saving grace to sinners but also urged the need for education, care of orphans, and the evangelization of the Indians.

By contrast, France had turned a deaf ear to the gospel, and, when the Revolution brought independence, a decadent society erupted into violence and chaos that eventually led to the dictatorial takeover by Napoleon. No such thing happened in America. Instead, the freedom brought by the Revolutionary War gave a Christian majority an opportunity to construct positively the greatest nation on earth. Certainly all of our founding fathers were not born-again believers. However, a great mass of the population were truly saved. The greatness of America was her people! Unheralded farmers, workers, and merchants who believed in God, built the moral foundation of a society that made America great.

*Evangelicals and Social Issues*

Jesus said that the Christian believer is to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-16). A genuine Christian cannot live in isolation from society. He is "in the world, but not of the world." Therefore, he has a mission to the world. He is his brother's "keeper." As Christian influence grew in the emerging nations of Europe, England,

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and America, it came into conflict with the social and moral evils of society.

The conversion of the young infidel slave-trader, John Newton (who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace"), led to an evangelical war against slavery. Soon Christian believers formed Exeter Hall and the Chapman group in London to denounce slavery and promote missionary evangelism throughout the British Empire and the European states. He worked through evangelical friends in the Parliament and the British delegate to the Congress of Vienna.

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**Today, renewed religious forces are taking over where establishment liberalism failed to shape the dream of a free and moral America.**

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Another evangelical Christian, Lord Shaftesbury, worked for reform legislation in the House of Commons to protect women and children from labor abuses. His work also resulted in humane treatment of the insane at such asylums as Bedlam, where it had previously been the custom to charge fees to admit the public to see the antics of the mentally disturbed. In the meantime, the Wesleyan Revival left a deep impression upon such nonconformists as John Howard, who secured legislation for prison reform, and William Booth, who founded the Salvation Army.

In 1780, Robert Raikes began the Sunday School Movement to give religious training and elementary instruction to underprivileged children. In America, George Williams founded the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) in Boston, and Jerry McAuley founded the Water Street Rescue Mission in New York City. Revival preachers such as Charles Finney and Dwight L. Moody not only preached the gospel to the lost but urged the application of Christian theology and morals to American social life. Evangelist Sam Jones went so far as to tell people who to vote for in the cities where he held meetings. In

time, baseball player Billy Sunday was converted at the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago and led a campaign against the social evil of alcohol. The Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union joined people from widely different religious backgrounds in the fight against "booze."

*Crisis and Retreat*

The apex of Christian influence upon American social issues came with the final passage of the Prohibition Amendment in 1919, after 20 years of battling the issue. Its repeal in 1933 seemed to take the "heart" out of Christians in America. The economic crash of 1929, the Depression, and World War II changed the moral climate of America. It was a time of religious and social upheaval. Literally millions of Americans left the farm to go to work in our nation's great industrial cities. The family unit began to disintegrate. Mom went to work. Television became an electronic babysitter. The car became available to the teenager. Polarization set in. The divorce rate skyrocketed. Teenage rebellion rejected the adult lifestyle. In the meantime, theological liberalism had dissipated the power and authority of a distinctively Christian witness to society.

During the 1940s and 1950s, most Christians unintentionally joined the "Silent Majority." By the mid 1960s, Christian influence upon the national legislature was virtually nil. The secularists and humanists were now in total control. Soon controversial decisions were legislated or judicially handed down regarding abortion, homosexual "rights," the ownership of children by the family, the legitimacy of private Christian education, etc. Suddenly, Christians began to wake up again. They began to realize that something had to be done immediately to protect freedom, the sanctity of marriage, and the traditional family as they viewed it.

*Resurgence from the Right*

In evaluating our present situation, we would have to agree with Richard Neuhaus that we are now witnessing the collapse of the dominant secular world view as it has been formulated

under the liberal Protestant clergy for the past 50 years. Today, renewed religious forces (*The New Right*) are taking over where establishment liberalism failed to shape the dream of a free and moral America. The majority of Americans agree on a majority of moral issues. It is time for the Liberal Left in American Protestantism to wake up to the fact that they no longer speak for the majority of the American public. A new era has dawned for conservative religion. Fundamentalists have put their dynamic force into the political arena and do not intend to withdraw. Committed to the truth of Scripture, and undaunted by criticism and public opinion, they have resurged into the mainstream of American life! □

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