

**INFLUENCE OF THE RELIGIOUS
RIGHT ON AMERICAN POLITICS IN
THE POST-9/11 ERA**

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INFLUENCE OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT ON AMERICAN POLITICS IN THE POST-9/11 ERA

11 EYLÜL SONRASI DÖNEMDE DİNDAR SAĞIN AMERİKAN SİYASETİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

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ABSTRACT

Americans have always been a religious people, and American Protestant Christianity has always been an important part of their lives. In the post-9/11 period, however, thanks largely to the remarks made by George W. Bush, and most evangelicals and fundamentalists who supported him, it became much more vocal in the international scene. Secularists throughout the world shivered with the fear that the most powerful country in the world is falling into the hands of religious radicals. Liberals and moderate conservatives in America panicked at the site of the growing political power of the evangelicals. In short, everybody was concerned.

This piece investigates the roots of religiosity in the United States, and the state of the religious right in American politics in the post-September 11 era.

ÖZET

Amerikalılar hep dindar bir halk olmuşlardır ve Amerikan Protestanlığı da daima hayatlarının önemli bir parçası olmuştur. Ne var ki Protestanlık, 11 Eylül sonrası dönemde, büyük ölçüde George W. Bush ve çoğunluğu onu destekleyen evanjestler ve köktenciler sayesinde uluslararası sahnede sesini duyurmaya başladı. Bu gelişme, tüm dünyadaki sekülerleri, dünyanın en güçlü ülkesinin köktencilerin eline düştüğü korkusuyla titretti. Amerika'daki liberaller ve ılımlı muhafazakarlar, evanjestlerin büyüyen gücü karşısında paniğe kapıldılar. Kısacası, herkes endişe içindeydi.

Bu çalışma, Amerika'daki dindarlığın köklerini ve dindar sağın 11 Eylül sonrası dönemde Amerikan politikası içindeki durumunu araştırmaktadır.

METHODOLOGY

This research has primarily relied on secondary sources. While a significant portion of the bibliography was reserved to works published after September 11th, 2001, books on American history were nevertheless given room in order to reveal patterns of religiosity in America. Works that focus solely on the issues of religion, and secularism were also used in parallel with an effort to avoid possible mistakes in terminology.

Though not quoted in the research directly, other texts, such as films were also checked as possible sources. Especially, selected American new wave films made in the 1970's, and more popular ones from the last decade or so were seen in an aim to perceive how the "liberal" America sees its "conservative" counterpart. Along the same lines, documentaries on the religious right in America were observed but not mentioned in the research.

The aim in limiting the research to the post-9/11 era derives from a two-fold logic: First, as argued above, the role of religion in American politics was arguably ever so apparent to the outsider eye before this period; and second, for a research at this level, it would be too tough a challenge to deal with the issue since the very foundations of this state. Historical context was given marginal space, and most of the examples that would support the argument were taken from the late twentieth century, while the argument itself aimed at the period after September 11th, 2001.

A deductive approach was applied throughout the process of research. Data was gathered from a myriad of books and articles, most of which did not make it to the final draft. The end result, however, did not support the tentative answer in the thesis proposal, which claimed that the religious right in America had become so powerful that it helped shape a significant part of the of the Bush government's agenda. On the other hand, the outcome of the research suggested that while the religious right had indeed become strong and its effect

was apparent on issues such as US' attitude towards Israel, it was still far from having a hold on power, even at this period when George W. Bush has still a year into his presidency.

Finally, the research has tried to stick to the principle of objectivity as hard as it can in order to avoid whatever prejudices its author may have.

DISCLAIMER

Two issues that should have been included within this research were left outside, both because of considerations of time and space.

The first of these was the issue of Native Americans and how they were treated by the settlers from the Old World. As noted in the research, the American religious culture relies to a large degree to the principle of tolerance and an adherence to plurality. Yet when the history of Native Americans is taken into consideration, one would probably feel that the way they were perpetrated by the settlers contradicts impressively with the whole rhetoric of tolerance. However, it is an issue so vast in size that it probably would not fit within the small area in the confines of this research.

Another subject worth mentioning was the role played by the “neocons” in American politics after September 11. Although it was touched upon slightly, the issue was not given enough space to explicate adequately how this group of people affected the Bush administration as well as the public opinion. As with the subject of Native Americans, the influence of “neocons” was left out or mentioned of only marginally due to the limitations of this paper.

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Introduction: Patterns of Religiosity

On the day that Princess Diana was buried, large numbers of British people filled the churches, to share their sorrow in communion. Other instances when Britons pay a visit to the church include Christmas and Easter, where they go to see the Christmas lights and enjoy painting eggs. They willingly attend church ceremonies at the event of births, marriages, and deaths. Also, they still enjoy having their marriage vows made before God (Hunt, 2003: 1).

In Western Europe, God is on the wane¹. Religiosity, however, persists. In Britain, public engagement with churches may have been replaced with “private” or “personal means of reaching spirituality and meaning in life, but this only makes religious practices, beliefs, and symbols less visible” (Norris, Inglehart, 2005: 88). The proportion of those who still hold a conviction to Christian values, along with the unchanged percentage number of those believing in nontraditional sources (fortunetelling, ghosts, horoscopes) tells us that while religion is losing blood, religious beliefs are not out of the scene yet (Robin, Haddaway, Marler, 1998).

Another case in point is concerned with “church taxes” in Germany. Here, the state does not endorse any religion (which means that there are no longer state churches), and there is complete religious freedom. But most religious institutions are registered as “corporations of public law”, and therefore they are entitled to eight percent of the individual’s income tax. Citizens have the right to declare themselves as “religiously unaffiliated” and therefore get rid of this eight percent. However, “what is surprising is how many –indeed the majority at least in the western part of the country- have not done it.” The reasons they give as a justification of their attitude vary: “because they might need the church at some point in their lives,

¹ A comparison of surveys which asked people to differentiate between belief in a personal God and belief in a more impersonal “spirit” or “life force” indicates the type of theistic belief that has lost favor. Over five decades the percentage of the British population professing belief in *an impersonal God* (a spirit or life force) has fluctuated only 2 percentage points, increasing from 38% in the 1940s/1950s to 40% in the 1990’s. However, those professing belief in a *personal God* declined 12 percentage points from 43% in the 1940s/1950s to 31% in the 1990s (Robin, Haddaway, Marler, 1998).

because they want the church to give moral guidance to their children, because they see the church as important for the moral fabric of society” (Berger, 2005: 116).

The cases of Britain and Germany suggest that even though the role played by organized church in religious life declines, religiosity is still a social fact. In America, on the other hand, there is no organized church as such, but in its disorganized manner, it can be the most influential among its counterparts in the developed world.

According to a survey, 85 percent of Americans express allegiance to an organized faith, and a third of them attend a house of worship on a weekly basis (Brooks, 2006). A more revealing account on Christianity and Judaism in America notes that;

When asked in 2003 simply whether they believed in God or not, 92% [of Americans] said yes. In a series of 2002-03 polls, 57% to 65% of Americans said religion was very important in their lives, 23% to 27% said fairly important, and 12% to 18% said not very important. Large proportions of Americans also appear to be active in the practice of their religion. In 2002 and 2003, an average of 65% claimed membership in a church or synagogue. About 40% said they had attended church or synagogue in the previous seven days, and roughly 33% said they went to church at least once a week. In the same period, about 60% of Americans said they prayed one or more times a day, more than 20% once or more a week, about 10% less than once a week, and 10% never (Huntington, 2004: 8).

Compared with figures on Britain, these look highly interesting. One explanation states that there is no need to be surprised at the high levels of religiosity in America, because it represents how the Americans have always been: “extremely religious and overwhelmingly Christian.” The first settlers in the 17th century came to America and settled there in large part for religious reasons. In the following century, they defined their Revolution in Biblical terms. Revolution reflected their “covenant with God,” and the War of Independence was fought between “God’s elect” and the British “Antichrist.” The Declaration of Independence (but not the Constitution) laid the basis of its legitimacy on “Nature’s God”, the “Creator”, the “Supreme Judge of the World”, and “divine Providence” (*op. cit.*, p. 8).

Another account emphasizes the structure of the church, or rather, of the churches in the U.S. The proliferation of diverse churches within Protestantism has maximized choice and competition among faiths, and therefore mobilized the American public. Also, because of their diversity, churches have become subject to market forces, being dependant on their ability to attract clergy and volunteers, along with money that will flow from their members, while European churches rely on state subsidies. This eventually makes the European religious monopolies less innovative and efficient. Individual churches of America, on the other hand, attract new adherents by offering social activities beyond worshipping, such as religious education, arts groups, engagement in community politics, and voluntary services such as soup kitchens. This makes the American religious culture a much more lively and active area than its European counterpart.

Obviously, this constitutes only a small part of the answer as to why Americans are so religious. What makes them believe that they are the “good” people, as opposed to the “evil” terrorists?

American Protestant Christianity has always played an important role in American life. This role became most apparent in periods where Americans’ interaction with modernism seemed to include a certain level of confrontation. Since the early 18th century, modernity came in many forms; it came as Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, as dancing, urbanization, pornography, abortion, secularism, etc. Every time the American society felt the sting of one of these side effects of modernity, a part of it sought shelter in religion. As much as, say, the counterculture movement of the 1970’s (see p. 17) was influential, it nevertheless also gave way to the emergence of a conservative movement that defined itself along patriotic and religious lines. Novelties like anti-Vietnam War protests and sexual revolution were deeply disturbing to a significant proportion of Americans. American religious conservatism, as to be shown with various examples throughout this paper, has often taken a tough, reactionary attitude against the inevitable intrusion of modernity into everyday life. To a certain degree,

this research is an account of how the religious right tries to get back at modernity whenever it feels attacked.

In the post-9/11 period, however, thanks largely to the remarks made by George W. Bush and most evangelicals and fundamentalists who supported him, the religious right in America became much more visible in the international scene. Secularists everywhere shivered with the fear that the most powerful country in the world is falling into the hands of religious radicals. Liberals and moderate conservatives in America panicked at the site of the growing political power of the evangelicals. In short, everybody was concerned.

It is the aim of this research, then, to explicate how the religious right in America came to be what it is today, and the nature of its political clout at the beginning of the post-9/11 era.

1. A NATION WITH THE SOUL OF A CHURCH: CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA

1.1. Historical Background

Over 90% percent of Americans say they believe in God and two-thirds claim to be members of a church [...] Voters do not like atheists: 41% say they would never vote for one, far more than say they would not vote for an evangelical, Catholic, or Jew (*The Economist*, No: 8378, 2004).

The presence of such figures in arguably the most advanced country in the world seems at first surprising, if not outright shocking. Yet the high level of religiosity among Americans is not a new phenomenon, and it surely dates far back than the relatively recent rise of evangelicalism and fundamentalism.

In both Europe and America, most of the rural population remained largely medieval in its thinking and behaviour until the nineteenth century. In Europe, the civilizing of the rural population was managed by the state, along with the help of the upper class. Church's role in this transformation was marginal.

However, when the first settlers came to America, there was no state as such. In these areas, "it was above all the churches that prevented the settlers from lapsing into not only complete barbarism but isolation." In general, church was the sole social institution in the entire area where the local population could meet regularly, and where the children received education. Therefore, without the Protestant Church, the modernization of the American societies would have been impossible. Still, while it was laying the basis for a modern social and economic order, it also created a religious culture that often found itself in conflict with the modern culture, as it evolved in the rest of the Western world (Lieven, 2005: 126).

American Protestantism has had a decisive effect on the shaping of American society and culture, and it still continues to do so, unlike the situation in Europe. And the roots of this

perpetual influence have to be looked for in the early 17th century, when the first settlers came to America with a sense of special, divine mission- a feeling that continues to occupy the collective American psyche.

1.1.1. From Colonies to States: The Puritan Era

As the first seeds of its foundation came to be sown, the United States of America was showing signs that it would become a place of religious diversity. Although the original settlers were Protestant Christians who were strict in their belief, they carried with themselves a firm hope that the new world would be one that is clean of the quarrels of the old world, and of the religious ones in particular. Also in this period, “the separation of church and state,” a concept that would become one of the most controversial pillars of American political culture was being established slowly but firmly.

When the European colonization of North America began, the Protestant Revolution was barely a hundred years old. Many of the new settlers had painful memories of the religious turmoil that dominated that period. Most of them were grandchildren of people who were part of either one of the two sides that aimed at redefining Christianity’s practices. Thus the religious atmosphere of the era was one of bloody conflicts rather than peaceful discussion and tolerance (Gaustad, 2003: 2).

The first permanent colony –Jamestown- was established in 1607, within the larger area named Virginia. It naturally became home to the Anglican Church, the national Church of England. At the time, mundane and sacred were not so easily separable from each other, and the order of the church was also the order of the state. Laws that derived from that order required the Church of England to be the national church of the colony. Harsh measures were imposed upon those who failed to join divine services such as morning and evening prayers. Anglicanism quickly spread to the colonies founded in the south, and into Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York. But it was unable to keep competitors outside of its borders. “The

European ideal of one church in one nation remained the goal, but it was a goal never fully achieved before the American Revolution” (*op. cit.*, p. 6).

Around the same time, “The single most influential cultural force at work in the new nation was the combination of religious beliefs and social attitudes known as Puritanism.” Though the degree of adherence differed between denominations, “the organizing principle of Puritan social thought was the concept of covenant.” This covenant was not one in which parties on both sides of the agreement have obligations to fulfil. Believers are called to the covenant individually, through an experience of spiritual rebirth, and therefore form as a group a “gathered community” that is bound together by their shared knowledge of individual salvation (Reichley, 2002: 55). It is noteworthy here to state that modern evangelicals share this same idea of “spiritual rebirth” as an implicit requisite of initiation, as will be discussed in the following pages.

John Winthrop, a layman and a lawyer who would become the first mayor of Massachusetts, told his fellow passengers in a sermon as they crossed the Atlantic to America in 1630 that theirs “shall be as a city on a hill”, with the eyes of all people are upon them. Laying the burden of being obedient and faithful Christians upon the colonists, he preached that they would be cursed if they would pursue only their own material wealth and thus turn toward evil. This argument kept Puritans going on through various hardships such as starvation and harsh criticism from abroad (Gaustad, 2003:10). Positioning themselves on a city on a hill that they’ve built through their own efforts, meanwhile, has nevertheless evolved in centuries to find its form in the contemporary American understanding that theirs is a unique nation with a special mission.

Winthrop suggested that the public has a tendency to act like a “wild beast,” which is to be restrained by divine rules and laws. This principle, which upon its inception was intended to imply that “people should be seen but not heard,” also “laid the basis for resistance to autocratic government.” The reference made to the inherent corruption of all

man-made institutions became Puritanism's legacy to the future and its contribution to democracy, for it paved the way for the deep feeling of distrust for and suspicion towards the central administration –an attitude that is commonplace in today's America (Reichley, 2002: 57).

The word "Puritan" referred to a willingness on the part of worshippers to purify the Church of England from the still hanging elements of Roman Catholicism. But Puritanism was also called "Congregationalism," and the term congregational derived from "a desire to make each local church or congregation independent, free from the authority of a bishop or a synod that could demand of worshippers what to do or what to believe". But Puritanism was not equally eager to let this freedom spread to other denominations that could threaten to reduce the scope of its rule (Gaustad, 2003: 7). Although there were individual cases of toleration, such as the 1649 Act of Toleration of Maryland which would preserve religious freedom for Catholics, there was a sense of intolerance for other denominations especially among the authority figures (Reichley, 2002: 82).

Still, even though the puritans held an overwhelming majority in the land, they were going to become unable to keep the doors closed to the influence of others. In New England, there was little space for newcomers and little spirit of tolerance; while Pennsylvania gradually became a place of religious toleration, allowing the newly migrating Catholic Germans to settle there (Brogan, 2001: 94). Moreover, the Puritan rule was further damaged by the Act of Toleration of 1693. By this Act, toleration was extended to all Protestants, and ownership of property was replaced by church membership as a requisite for political suffrage. And although the puritans held a majority in the colonial legislature, the old severity was giving way (Reichley, 60: 2002). Dissenters like Baptists and Methodists, along with the support of Presbyterians joined forces to challenge the rule of Anglicans. Though the Act, in practical terms, did not immediately guarantee religious toleration as firmly as it was in the homeland, the idea of toleration was spreading with the establishment of new denominations.

Furthermore, the era of revolution was at hand, and all issues concerned with religious freedom were about to change (Gaustad, 2003: 5).

1.1.2. Independence and Freedom: Unity through Plurality

During the revolution, “slowly but steadily, an American pattern of religious liberty displaced the European pattern of a single national church.” With the advent of revolution, acts of toleration committed by individual colonies throughout the 17th century became almost a model for all colonies to replicate. Revolution was about liberty, in terms of both the mundane and the sacred. For most of the colonists, freedom of the soul was essential to establish freedom of the individual (Gaustad, 2003: 13).

In 1776, the thirteen states in North America declared in union their individual independence from Great Britain. The document that stated this decision was called the Declaration of Independence; later named as the founding document of the USA. To a large part, it was written by Thomas Jefferson. At that same year, Virginians and others had already begun to mobilize in order to sever all ties between the Church of England and their respective states. Within itself, this was also a move towards cutting all links between church and state, for it included “to stop enforcing any sort of religious conformity in either belief or behaviour, and above all to stop collecting taxes from all for the religious benefit of a few.” But to Jefferson and some others, this was far from being enough. He thought that a positive step had to be taken in order to guarantee religious liberty to all of Virginia’s citizens. So when he became governor in 1779, he introduced a “Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom” to the legislators. But most of them thought that Virginia was not yet ready to take such radical measures, especially with the fighting between Britain and the states still going on. In 1785, Jefferson accepted an appointment to become the US minister to France, and therefore was no longer able to press with his proposed law in Virginia (*op. cit.*, p. 21).

It was now up to James Madison to follow the destiny of the bill. He toned down some of the more radical themes in Jefferson's original text, and then brought the bill to the legislature's attention for debate. At last, in 1786, the bill became Virginia law. Three years later, Madison reintroduced the bill, this time at the level of individual states, which had all ratified the constitution in those last three years. The First Amendment², as it was ratified by all states in 1791, and therefore had become part of the constitution, reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (*op. cit.*, p. 29). Yet while they agreed upon such a wording, the "Founding Fathers" also thought that religious belief was crucial to the well-being of the country. During the 1787 convention on the drafting of the constitution, when no consensus could be reached at all, Benjamin Franklin proposed that each daily session be opened with a prayer, and asked; "...And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his [God's] notice, is it possible that an empire can rise without his aid?" (Reichley, 2002: 100). George Washington, often called a deist, was "keenly conscious of the public value of religion." As commander of the Continental Army, he ordered all soldiers who were not on actual duty to attend church every Sunday. When he became president in 1789, to his presidential oath he added the phrase "so help me God," and every president that succeeded him followed this custom (*op. cit.*, p. 101). Though impressed by rationalist humanist ideas of the era, John Adams, the second president of the US, also argued that "it is Religion and Morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. A patriot must be a religious man." Although they held their reservations, the Founders nonetheless shared a largely positive view

² The US constitution was signed on September 17, 1787. Upon its inception, many of its framers thought that including the freedoms outlined in the Bill of Rights to the Constitution would be unnecessary. Yet after vigorous debate, it was adopted. The first of these freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights came to be known as the First Amendment. The Bill constituted of the first ten amendments of the Constitution and it went into effect in 1791. In its entirety, the First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." (Source: http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/about.aspx?item=about_firstamd)

of religion. What was apparent in their understanding was “the need for religion as an underpinning for republican government. And, to varying degrees, they phrased their transcendent idealist values through religious connotations (*op. cit.*, p. 103).

With the addition of the First Amendment to the constitution, the “Founding Fathers” were laying the basis for a realm of religious plurality. While this plurality and freedom of exercise were to be two of the defining characteristics of the Republic, they were also going to be divisive factors when it comes to everyday social life. And the authority to settle such disputes was no other than the Supreme Court.

1.1.3. A Lonely Court

During the 19th century, the Court went through a relatively quiet period. Yet in the year 1878, it handled a case that stood out among others with its significance in terms of the social effects of religious practices. In 1862, the Congress outlawed polygamy in the territories, clearly aiming at the Mormons –a sect infamous for allowing men to have several wives. Then, in 1878, a Mormon man who had previously been convicted of polygamy appealed to the Supreme Court on the grounds that the First Amendment allowed him to fulfil his religious obligations freely. But the court decided that Congress could not have any authority over mere opinion, but was free to forbid acts which were “in violation of social duties or subversive of good order.” Polygamy, it concluded that, was such an action, but not an opinion. Chief Justice Waite, upon delivering the Court’s unanimous decision, made reference to Thomas Jefferson’s idea that clauses on religion require “a wall of separation between church and state.” This was in fact a historic moment in terms of future decisions to be taken by the court, for the “wall” concept and the reasoning that derives from it would be referred to on various instances throughout the new century (Reichley, 2002: 120).

During the 1920’s, in several southern states, fundamentalists had seen to it that laws that prohibit the teaching of the theory of evolution were enacted. John Scopes, a high-school

biology teacher defied the state's laws by teaching Darwinian theory. Consequently, he was taken to the local court and convicted of breaking the law. This trial took its place in the collective American memory also as the "Monkey trial" because of the way the fundamentalists' arguments sounded on creationism. When the trial came to an end, William Jennings Bryan, popular fundamentalist, part of the prosecution team and then presidential candidate had become "a laughing stock." Later, the Supreme Court reversed the decision on technicality (*op. cit.*, p. 207).

By the 1950's American society had already become a realm of religious pluralism. Yet, although the constitution was prohibiting it and practice was quitted by most states, the state of Maryland required "a declaration of belief in the existence of God" by every official in the state. In the late 1950's, Roy Torcaso was denied the position of notary public because he, as an atheist, refused to take the oath. He took his case to the Supreme Court in 1961, which agreed that "neither a State nor the Federal Government can constitutionally force a person 'to profess a belief or a disbelief in any religion,'" and that therefore, the state of Maryland had violated Torcaso's rights that stemmed from the First Amendment (Gaustad, 2003: 52).

According to a 1960 national survey, one-third of American schools began school day by saying devotional prayer, and 42 percent also required reading the Bible. But in 1962 parents of five children took to the supreme court the question of whether the reading of Regents' prayer in New Hyde Park schools was constitutional or not. The court had so far shown reluctance on dealing with school prayer cases, but this time it could not avoid getting involved anymore. The majority of justices in the court decided that; "in this country it is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite as part of a religious program carried on by the government" (Reichley, 2002: 142). But the issue was far from being resolved. Opinion polls have repeatedly shown that nearly 75 percent of the population favoured saying of prayers at school. In some rural areas,

it is reported that Bible reading did not even stop. In the 1980's, President Reagan tried to reintroduce the practice through an amendment in the constitution, but failed to do so. To this day, practices of religion at schools remain a widely discussed issue among Americans (*op. cit.*, p. 146).

Another controversial issue was abortion. This was a highly dividing issue, drawing thick lines between "pro-life" and "pro-choice" camps. In the early 1970's, there was a large variety of abortion laws among states, and women who did not have the chance to have it in their own state could go to another where abortion is legal. But those who did not have the means to leave their state had to rely on "back-alley" operations which were neither legal nor hygienic. So in 1973, in the now-famous "Roe v. Wade" trial, the court decided that state laws that ban abortion are a violation of individual rights and privacy. Yet again, as with the problem of Bible reading at schools, the issue of abortion remained a hot topic of debate to this day (Gaustad, 2003: 58).

Supreme Court decisions were widely discussed in the American public. On trials linked with religion, the court's decision at times differed from the majority of the public opinion, as is evident in the subject of Bible reading. And within this group of people that disagreed with the court were fundamentalists and evangelicals, who influence and shape the American social and political culture to a certain extent.

1.2. The Christian Right

Religion explains both Americans' sense of themselves as a chosen people and their belief that they have a duty to spread their values throughout the world. [...] In one sense, religion is so important to life in the United States that it disappears into the mix. Partisans on all sides of important questions regularly appeal to religious principles to support their views, and the country is so religiously diverse that support for almost any conceivable foreign policy can be found somewhere. Yet the balance of power among the different religious strands shifts over time; in the last generation,

this balance shifted significantly, and with dramatic consequences. The more conservative strains within American Protestantism have gained adherents, and the liberal Protestantism that dominated the country during the middle years of the twentieth century has weakened (Mead, 2006).

Such is the significance of religion to Americans, according to Walter Russell Mead. Yet among these ever-competing strands, three of them stand out with their influential nature, namely; the fundamentalist, the liberal, and the evangelical ones. Each of these, accordingly, had their impacts on Americans politics at varying degrees during different periods of time. And for the time being, the fundamentalist and the evangelical strands are seen to be having the most, if any, effect on policy decisions (*op. cit.*, p. 2006). It is these two subdivisions of American Protestantism, and their influence on politics, that we will turn to now.

1.2.1. Evangelicalism

At times hard to distinguish from each other and inextricably intertwined; (although figures are given below) neither evangelicalism nor fundamentalism can be seen as a distinct religious organization the members of which have their names on a list. Rather, they are both religious movements, each of which is composed of a “coalition of submovements.”

The word ‘Evangelical’, which originates from the Greek word for “gospel”, eventually became the common name for the religious revival movements that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The evangelical gospel preached the proclamation of Christ’s saving work through his death on the cross and the necessity of personally trusting him for eternal salvation (Marsden, 1991: 2). Similarly, today’s evangelicalism includes all Christians who cherish their religious traditions as to affirm the principles of nineteenth century evangelical consensus. These principles of evangelicalism are, “the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible; the real historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture; salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ; the importance of evangelism and missions; and the importance of a spiritually transformed life.”

In the case of modern American evangelism, these essentials can roughly be summarized into three: to believe that the sole authority of the religion is the Bible; to believe that the only path to salvation goes through a life-changing experience brought by the Holy Spirit through belief in Jesus Christ (the “born-again”) (*op. cit.*, p. 65); and to evangelize (to take on a journey to save other souls and to lead them to salvation/ to convert them). However, evangelicalism cannot be confined within the limits of a loose group of Christians who happen to believe some of the same old doctrines; for modern evangelicalism looks more like a semi-organized interdenominational movement, with various periodicals, tv and radio shows, and a number of leaders and institutions (*op. cit.*, p. 5). As such, it is a religious movement composed of various denominations that agree on some basic principles and mobilize around a specific set of issues, such as the antiabortion, pro-life movement.

Such diversity is rooted in the established feeling of distrust for centralized institutions, including the institutional church. Except at the level of congregations, the organized church has little part to play in the movement (*op. cit.*, p. 81). Hence, those subgroups of evangelicals do not always agree on each and every issue they face, and they have more than one centre of authority, yet for the last two elections in America they’ve shown enough solidarity to help draw the nation’s political path (in 2000, 68 percent of evangelicals, and in 2004, 78 percent of them voted for Bush). The most populous of the evangelical denominations is the Southern Baptist Convention, with more than 16.3 million members. The second largest one consists of the African American churches, including the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., and the National Baptist Convention of America, each of which claim 5 million members. The largest Pentecostal denomination is, with 5.5 million members, the predominantly African American Church of God in Christ. The rapidly growing Assemblies of God, which has 2.7 million members, is the largest denomination which is not predominantly black. The second largest predominantly white evangelical denomination is the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, with 2.5 million members (Mead, 2006).

Observing Kansas as a microcosm for the change in the tone of cultural and political attitudes throughout the United States, Thomas Frank quotes the experiences of a particular individual who, as a teacher, stood by the left during his whole career. Yet at the late 1980's, this figure begins to feel that "the sanctity of the fetus outweighed all of his other concerns," and from there on he internalized the notion that "Christians are vilely persecuted" in America by the liberal elite media and the American Civil Liberties Union, the feminists; all of whom, supposedly, have a disdain for traditional American values (Frank, 2005: 4). Yet this change of perceptions is not particular to this individual at all, and its roots go deeper than religious sensitivity alone. Feeling of being surrounded by liberal persecutors was widespread in parts of American society.

To the traditional-minded American, the culture that developed after the 1960's seemed like a "pandemonium of scarcely credible monsters and abominations; and much of the television continues nothing less than a daily assault on their world of faith and culture." The counterculture movement (protestors against the Vietnam War, sexual revolution, Woodstock Festival, etc.) was a novelty for sure, and it seemed to shake the foundations of whatever the traditional American has known as moral and decent. Economically, the long post-war boom was put to an end with the oil shock of 1973, and the following three decades witnessed long term stagnation in the real incomes of middle class Americans. The White working class of Midwest was used to a realm where their steady work and rising income was guaranteed. When America came to the end of that realm, it was a serious blow to their "moral economy" (Lieven, 2005: 142).

By 1968, the New Deal consensus had broken down. The grim picture of the Vietnam War, the black riots, and the counterculture movement had fatally damaged the idea of a "liberal-Protestant-Catholic-Jewish-secular-good citizenship consensus." This was a backlash with a largely secular character. Yet with the help of the coming period of economic stagnation, an even greater backlash from the opposite direction was looming. And in the

second half of the 1970's, when it came, it came in the form of a religious coalition around such issues as antiabortion, anti-pornography, and symbolic religious issues such as school prayer (Marsden, 1991: 95).

Frank calls this combination a cultural “Great Backlash, a style of conservatism that first came snarling onto the stage in response to the partying and protests of the late sixties.” And its distinctive characteristic is that, unlike earlier forms of conservatism, it mobilized voters with massive social issues (abortion, gay marriage, supreme court decisions on religious issues) and then those are tied to pro-business economic policies (Frank, 2005: 5). This Great Backlash was in fact the coming together of two different political factions: “traditional business Republicans; and working- class Middle Americans.” Most evangelicals found their place in this second group (*op. cit.*, p. 136).

The engine that drives the radical Christian right in the United States [...] is not religiosity, but despair. It is a movement built on the growing personal and economic despair of tens of millions of Americans, who watched helplessly as their communities were plunged into poverty by the flight of manufacturing jobs, their families and neighbours torn apart by neglect and indifference (Hedges, 2007: 33).

Despair, accordingly, crosses economic boundaries, and reaches those members of the middle class who live suburban life in communities that lack a truly cohesive factor in their environment (*op. cit.*, p. 33). Yet here the evangelical churches enter the scene in order to save these desperate souls. Most of these churches, with their web of schools; study groups; parents', children's, adolescents', men's, women's and senior's clubs; marriage counselling services; excursions; sports activities and even touristic trips to the Holy Land, add a strong sense of community to suburban life, which is somewhat hollow and arid (Lieven, 2005: 138). As for economic despair, Chris Hedges explains the scenery as:

There are parts of United States, including whole sections of former manufacturing centres such as Ohio, that resemble the developing world, with boarded-up

storefronts, dilapidated houses, potholed streets and crumbling schools. The end of the world is no longer an abstraction to many Americans (Hedges, 2007: 33).

However, as shown in the figures above, evangelicals cannot be said to be limited to poor, white, working class Americans; as currently, born-again Christians (those who experienced a life changing event that introduced them to the path of Christ) are richer and better educated than the average American. Furthermore, there are 25 million black evangelicals, who are little by little moving to the right, along with an estimated 8 million Hispanic evangelicals (*The Economist*, 2005, No: 8432).

Ultimately, “Evangelicalism is ‘a religious persuasion that has repeatedly adapted to the changing tones and rhythms of modernity’, especially when it comes to the employment of modern mass media and modern techniques of mass mobilization”. In the 1960’s, A.A. Allen, a prominent Pentecostalist preacher declared that “The most treacherous foe in America isn’t communism (as perilous as it may be), Nazism, Fascism, or any alien ideology, but MODERNISM”³(Lieven, 2005: 124). Evangelicalism, then, with its Megachurches, its websites, internet blogs, its television and radio shows, becomes a phenomenon that makes use of virtually every social-technological opportunity that modernity provides in order to spread its vision. But controversially, it gives its followers substitutes for what they’ve lost (economic well-being, cultural sterility, and spiritual fulfilment) as a direct result of modernity’s intrusion into their lives. Thus, as a movement, it is explicitly anti-modern in its rhetoric and promises, yet apparently modern in form.

1.2.2. Fundamentalism

Kudriashova argues that, although it usually gives the opposite impression, modern fundamentalism is a phenomenon of the present. It utters a feeling of distress that results from the conditions of the present, and emphasizes a return to a certain “golden age,” where

³ Capitals in the original.

everything was at the peak of excellence. One of its distinguishing characteristics is a belief that the heavenly can be realized in the mundane, through actively taking part in politics (Kudriashova, 2003: 43). So instead of leaving aside all that is corporeal and leaning on the ethereal, it emphasizes working through the methods of the material environment to transform it into a plane where the sacred will provide the guiding principles of everyday life.

The term “fundamentalism” –in spite of its immediate connotation as a phenomenon that belongs to the *Islamic vocabulary*- was first used in the United States to characterize certain Christian evangelical groups (primarily Calvinists, Presbyterians, and Baptists) in the second half of the nineteenth century. Later, it was applied to anti-Darwinists during ‘the [Scopes] monkey trial’⁴ of the 1920’s.” Finally, this term was used only recently by Western scholars who study Islam, Judaism, and other religions. The original type of fundamentalism (the Protestant one), perceived the Bible as an “embodiment of original purity,” and as a guide to mundane activity. It insisted on a return to the roots, the core values, the fundamentals (*op. cit.*, p. 41). Also central to this type is the conviction that the United States of America is a special country in religious terms. Having its basis on the Puritan era of the eighteenth century, Protestant fundamentalism cherishes and accepts the truth of the Holy Scripture as historical data, and therefore views America as the “new Israel, on which the salvation of other nations depends” (*op. cit.*, p. 45).

American Protestant fundamentalists’ willingness to take action and change things gets embodied in a one sentence-definition as: “a fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something.” Or, to put it more revealingly, “an American fundamentalist is an evangelical who is militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with ‘secular humanism.’” Accordingly, evangelicalism includes fundamentalism, yet the two have enough differences between each other to lead observers and fundamentalists themselves to seek a special space in which to

⁴ For more information on this trial, see page 12, and 35.

separate from evangelicalism. Yet the most important aspect of fundamentalists that differentiates them from mainstream evangelicals is the former's willingness to take positive action when faced with a challenge (Marsden, 1991: 1). This becomes clearer when we measure their political effectiveness by their numbers. It is argued that nearly half of White evangelicals (including the fundamentalists) share the Christian right's ideology. When put to numbers, their proportion to the overall population appears somewhere between seven and twelve percent. Yet the power they assert on decision making processes –as will be exemplified in the following chapter- is disproportionate. And that results to a large part from the tight-knit structure of the fundamentalist movement. Like some diasporic communities or ethnic minority groups, they demonstrate great social and political commitment; as manifested in higher rates of voter turnout, focusing on particular issues and taking action upon them, willingness to sacrifice time and money, and demographic concentration in politically strategic regions (Lieven, 2005: 141).

In the 1920's, following the First World War, all American religious communities were faced with an unexpected challenge. The war had brought out the secularization that had been growing in American life. Especially in the cities and the eastern part of the country (where the educated liberal culture that dominated the media resided), this "revolution of morals" was becoming apparent. The late 1910's witnessed the emergence of the modern tabloid newspaper, which included and headlined sensational stories. Movies began to depict actors' and actresses' sexuality. Along with such changes came "the virtual collapse of communal enforcement of standards of personal behaviour that had been among the mainstays of the churches." Women began to smoke in public, did not cover their knees all the time (sometimes not even in church), and refused to follow the role model that was imposed on them in the form of their domestic mothers. Dancing, which had for so long been a taboo for Protestants, had now become part of everyday life, so much so that even some church leaders brought it to church youth group meetings. However, there were other

Protestants who were horrified by the practice, as one Southern Methodist bishop complained that dancing was bringing “the bodies of men and women in unusual relations to each other.” Such an atmosphere created an extreme conflict of opinion in many Protestant churches. Liberals were optimistic and perceived the breakdown of traditions as an opportunity to build a new Christian consensus. Conservatives, on the other hand, were in a state of panic witnessing those cultural changes, which they saw as a deterioration of values. Therefore, the postwar era forced each party to step in front and see how much they differed in their visions for the churches and the American culture (Marsden, 1991: 56).

The result of this dichotomy was the fundamentalist-modernist conflict that dominated much of the 1920’s. Liberals were more aggressive than ever in organizing and attacking their conservative rivals. Conservatives, on the other hand, were also organizing, and the most notable manifestation of this was the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association, a group organized with the purpose of combating modernism. The following year, the conservatives in the Northern Baptist Convention organized a “Fundamentals” conference to levy opposition against liberalism within the Baptist denomination. The term “fundamentalist” was used here for the first time by Curtis Lee Laws, editor of a conservative newspaper, who coined it to describe those who were willing “to do battle royal for the Fundamentals.” Soon after, the term became one to describe all American Protestants who were ready “to wage ecclesiastical and theological war against modernism in theology and cultural changes that modernists described” (*op. cit.*, p. 57).

Hence, in the 1920’s, this militant wing of conservatives emerged and called themselves fundamentalists. These were evangelicals who were ready to fight the liberal theology that was becoming stronger due to the changes in the dominant values and belief in the culture. By the middle of the decade, they had gained wide national prominence. Their ranks included Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Disciples, Episcopalians, holiness groups, Pentecostals, and a variety of other denominations. Yet by the 1930’s fundamentalism had

lost its initial appeal, and it began to take a more limited meaning. Many fundamentalists sought further radicalization, and started to leave mainline Protestant denominations. Following this, separation from church denominations became a test of true faith. In the coming decades, and especially since the 1960's, "fundamentalist" came to mean those conservatives who were separatists and who no longer belonged to any of the mainline denominations, except for Baptists. (*op. cit.*, p. 3).

Still, as is the case with evangelicals, "there is no generally accepted authoritative body to define what fundamentalists are or believe." Yet modern fundamentalism can be said to have three characteristics: a high view of biblical authority and inspiration; a powerful will to protect the historical Protestant faith from the Roman Catholic and modernist, secular, and non-Christian influence; and the conviction that believers should separate themselves from the non-Christian world. In addition, resemblances between evangelicals and fundamentalists is not limited to the ambiguities one faces when attempting to categorize them. They both see great importance in the doctrinal tenets of Christianity. Accordingly, men can only redeem by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, and that humanity by itself is incapable of "any moral law whatever." Therefore, by admitting one's sinful nature and accepting Christ's sacrifice, one gets "born again." Also, fundamentalists, like evangelicals, are careful in separating those who are "saved" and those who are not. Both believe that human beings who die without accepting Christ are sentenced to eternal separation from God. Similarly, they argue that the ones who have not been "saved" are incapable of doing good deeds by their own. And finally, most evangelicals share the fundamentalist conviction with regards to the end of the world; namely, that the biblical prophecies will be fulfilled, that Christ will return to establish a thousand years-long peace, and that, therefore, all human efforts to build a peaceful world are to no avail (Mead, 2006). This twofold belief becomes more significant considering the American support for Israel (the place where, according to Biblical teachings, Christ will be

reborn), and Americans' distrust towards the United Nations; an organization known for its peace-building initiatives.

However, along with their similarities, fundamentalists and evangelicals also have their differences in the ways they see the world. On the issue of who can be "saved", fundamentalists tend to have a more strict position, seeing the world as divided into two camps with little in common, and that some will not be saved before their death. Through Christ's sacrifice and crucifixion, God intended to save only a small number of souls; the remaining ones have no chance of salvation. Evangelicals, on the other hand, have a softer outlook, arguing that salvation is available to everyone, because God loves each soul and suffers a great deal of sorrow when any of them are lost. So, he seeks to save them all, not only a small caste.

Most conservative American Protestants attach a great deal of importance to spiritual experience, and therefore fundamentalists are generally known as un-intellectual and emotional in their beliefs. However, the fundamentalists are in fact more prone than the evangelicals to follow their ideas to their logical conclusion. They are more willing to create a "consistent and all-embracing 'Christian Worldview'" and to apply it to the world. This attitude finds its most explicit form in their approach to the issue of evolution. Most evangelicals disagree with the proponents of the theory of evolution on grounds that their personal experience drives them to recognize Bible as the infallible guide. But they stop there, and in general do not oppose the teaching of evolutionary science in public schools and universities. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, not only argue that the theory of evolution is a sham, but they take on to devise a brand new theory of theirs, called the "creation science." They write textbooks about it, and try to force schools to teach this theory instead of Darwin's, or otherwise, they withdraw their children from those schools (Mead, 2006).

And finally, fundamentalism, like evangelicalism itself, is "quintessentially modern, offering responses to contemporary conditions and events, including perceived threats from

other religions.” It affirms the centrality of holy books to day-to-day activities and aims at regulating all aspects of social and individual behaviour. American Christian fundamentalists’ reaction is not only against usual suspects like evolutionary theory or communism, but it is also against unwanted social changes that are direct results of modernization. And the threat emerges not only from the change, but also from the pace of change, as long established traditions, habits, beliefs, cultures, and communities are under the threat of being forgotten unless they adapt to a state of quick and perpetual changing. At the core of Protestant Fundamentalism, lies the idea of “an American nation forsaken by God, and turned into Babylon, a world beyond redemption in this dispensation until the Second Coming⁵” (Hayes, 1998: 29). Therefore, according to fundamentalist belief, all outside forces that drive Christians to lead ungodly lives must be diverted, and daily life has to be arranged in accordance with the guiding principles laid out by the Bible. Because of such strictness, most fundamentalists choose to separate themselves as much as they can from the rest of the society, unlike most evangelicals, who do not seek such separatism.

⁵ “Second Coming”: Rebirth of Jesus Christ.

2. THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT and ITS SORROWS

One focus for American fundamentalists is “the Rapture”- the moment when true Christians, it is believed, will be taken up to heaven. This is based on a passage in Thessalonians: “First the Christian dead will rise, then we who are still alive shall join them. Caught up in clouds to meet the lord in the air.” Fundamentalists see this not as a metaphor, but as an imminent fact. In Florida you come across bumper stickers warning that the car may become driverless should the rapture arrive (Micklethwait and Woolridge, 2005: 310).

Most of those people who use such bumper stickers with a sense of cautiousness (along with others who are not as strict) also believe that the Second Coming will take place on Israeli soil, that a fetus’ life is sacred and its mother does not have the right to take it from it, that a big-time criminal can be and should be killed by the state, that the theory of evolution is make believe, and that America has a responsibility to fight with poverty in Africa, along with a variety of other beliefs. On all these issues, they volunteer to take part, make sacrifices from their personal lives, devote money and time to whatever cause they follow, and on some of these causes, though not all, they generate enough political clout to make the authorities decide on a certain manner. Yet, in order to understand how they became so powerful on such controversial subjects, we must first analyze how the Christian right is organized.

2.1. The Organization of the Persecuted

One of the biggest complaints of American conservatives is the “liberal overreach”. Liberals, with their hold of media, business, and other sources of power, are persecuting the rest of the country, which has no other desire than to live “the American way of life” free from all forms of oppression. To express their agony, they rely on their own channels of communication, which, in their perspective, is not nearly as powerful and wide ranging as those of the liberals. However, this feeling of victimhood also breeds a strong sense of social and political responsibility, and results in the masses of conservative Christians who mobilize to help

realize their ever-lost causes. Combined with the (contrary to the popular belief among conservatives) immense strength of Christian right network, the persecuted are becoming one of the most powerful political forces in the United States, if not the strongest.

2.1.1. The Cruel Liberals vs. the Poor Red American

The mass of evangelical organizations that determine modern right-wing Christian agenda has a reactionary nature. And this reaction is aimed at two threats: The vast cultural and economic changes that America went through since the 1960's; and the liberal elite who not only perpetrate the change but also persecute the underdog, the faithful, the Christian. As discussed in the previous chapter, the first of these threats is very real. The second one, however, is to a large extent imaginary.

The idea that there is a liberal clique composed of journalists, scholars, Supreme Court judges, officials in the various departments of the administration begins with the premise of “the two Americas” on the map. According to Frank, the great dream of the conservatives since the 1930's has been a working class movement “that for once takes their side of the issues, that votes Republican and reverses the achievements of the working-class movements in the past.” After the 2000 elections, the electoral map of United States was such that would give the conservatives ground for their claims on the working-class people. At one side, there were the vast plains of inland “red” states where people voted republican, at the other, there were those little spaces where people lived in big cities and voted for Al Gore (red and blue were the colours designated for Republican and Democrat victories, respectively). On this map, conservatives saw a Democrat constituency “restricted to the old-line, blueblood states of the Northeast, along with the hedonist left coast.” The small number of Midwest states that voted democrat was not taken into consideration in this scheme as they would disrupt the rhetoric of an America divided between elites and layman (Frank, 2005: 14).

In the imagination of the Great Backlash, America is always in a state of quasi-civil war between the millions of simple, plain Americans, and the intellectual, omnipotent liberals who run the country but who also show disdain for the way of life of the rest of the country (*op. cit.*, p. 13). This categorization helped conservatives build the stereotypical liberal. According to this model, liberals are identifiable by their tastes and consumer preferences. They drive Volvos, they eat imported cheese, and they drink lattes, all of which indicate to their “essential arrogance and foreignness.” In this analysis, the economic interests of each party are left aside, because they are irrelevant compared to lattes. The liberal elite; the columnists, the sitcom writers, academics, film makers, and artists are against everything that the “heartland America” stands for. The only thing they feel about the red America is contempt.

Frank argues that leaving aside all of its huge errors and massive exaggerations, even an argument as biased as this has its points, even if much less telling than it appears to be. Accordingly, there are many aspects of American life that does not reflect on the culture industry’s products; also, vast reaches of the country have moved towards conservatism, leaving behind their traditional democratic roots; and finally, there really is a small fraction of “cosmopolitan” upper-middle class that sees itself as socially enlightened, that has no idea of what’s happening in the inlands of America, and that consumes lattes. Still, this in no way alters the fact that the conservative pundits are exploiting their created image of the liberal to make the poorer heartland Americans reflect their anger on this, instead of the real economic sources of their decline (*op. cit.*, p. 19).

American liberals are puzzled by why so many American workers, farmers and shopkeepers have, due to cultural affiliation, moved towards conservatism and voted for Republicans. After all, the radical capitalism espoused by the Republican Party is directly contrary to their economic interests. What’s missing here is the fact that these voters belong to a world of long-standing and immensely strong religious and cultural codes, which is

constantly under attack from the social, cultural, and economic changes. This phenomenon is not peculiar to the United States. In Western European societies, too, as long as religious belief remained important, it had decisive effect on the direction of political affiliations. But in America, the laissez-faire capitalism that the religious right supports is also the main factor that undermines its well-being (Lieven, 2005: 127).

2.1.2. The Web: The Interdependent Conservative Network

Liberals' shock on how so many people voted against their economic interests is in fact the result of a lack of careful observation on their part. Conservatism has long been seen by liberals as a movement that lacked intellectual basis. However, such an idea couldn't be more wrong about today's conservatism.

Every year, during the Conservative Political Action Conference (an event organized by the American Conservative Union), nearly five thousand conservative activists come together to listen to leading conservative figures, such as Dick Cheney. Sessions during the 2003 conference include: "Islam: Religion of Peace?" and "Myths, Lies and Terror: The Growing Threat of Radical Environmentalism." All those activists who run from one hall to another to listen to speeches with such interesting topics are in fact the footsoldiers of the movement, along with hundreds of thousands of others who think like them. They are the ones who knock on doors, sign petitions, telephone radio shows and attend precinct meetings. They are, also, "the muscle-bound body" on which conservative think tanks sit (Micklethwait and Woolridge, 2005: 310).

Most notable among these think tanks are the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation, each of which has several hundred thousand contributors. Another one, the Hoover Institution, was once home to thinkers such as Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice. In addition to that, those members of the Bush administration known as neocons are almost completely from conservative think tanks. And in America, think tanks are so effective

in influencing the decision makers that they are becoming “America’s shadow government” (*op. cit.*, p. 161). Surely, in such an environment, it is nothing but short sightedness to claim or assume that conservatives lack a popular intellectual basis.

Conservative organizations virtually know no limits when trying to reach possible supporters. For example, the “Focus on Family,” an organization that has 1400 employees, claims to have a global audience of 20 million people through its television and radio shows, books, mass e-mails and counselling. In 2004, Focus set up a political action committee that spent \$9 million on the election, obviously to be used in Republican Party’s propaganda. Another organization, the Arlington Group (a coalition of 60 pro-family groups), started its initiatives quietly in 2003. However, when the Massachusetts court decided to uphold gay marriage the same year, its activities gained momentum. Now the group is housed in the building of “Family Research Council” in Washington, and its issues of focus expanded to include abortion (*The Economist*, 2005, No: 8432).

Another strength of the Christian right is its use of mass media. In order to show that they have no excuse for failing to get their message out, Republican activist Paul Weyrich told a group of White House advisers; “There are 1500 conservative radio talk-show hosts. You have Fox News. You have the Internet, where all successful sites are conservative. The ability to reach people with our point of view is like nothing we have ever seen before” (Wakefield, 2006: 16). Obviously, with such a grip on media, the conservatives have no chance to fail on getting their message heard.⁶ And the message is one of victimhood, one of call to arms (as when Geraldo Rivera, the renowned anchorman of Fox News bought a gun and declared his determination to kill Osama Bin Laden (Micklethwait and Woolridge, 2005: 310)) on both the domestic front where the heartless liberals must be challenged and on the

⁶ Still, the perception of victimhood and being the losing side seems to be at work, as Joseph Bottum, editor of the conservative journal *First Things* argues that: “We’ve been warned by the media, over and over again, that Republicans are reshaping America into a Puritan’s paradise. But, at the end of the day, the media mostly won and the Republicans mostly lost. Social conservatism is in little better shape now than it was when Bush was first elected. In many ways, it is in worse shape” (Bottum, Novak, 2007: 31).

international front where terrorists have to be eliminated. The idea that the plain American is under attack from more than one sources is transmitted, heard, and echoed.

The sorrow and the strength of the Christian right go hand in hand, in a state of mutual dependence. The more powerless they feel, the more organized, the more effective they become. Having the liberal elite as a scapegoat for the deterioration of their economic situation and the degeneration of their culture, they find fresh meaning and ground for battle in gathering around issues such as abortion, evolutionary theory, gay marriage, and any other area of conflict where they feel persecuted and/ or ignored by the liberals. And as a principle of this outlook, no matter what the outcome of the conflict is, they are the losing side; a perception that, again, strengthens their will to fight.

2.2. The Sorrows

2.2.1. Abortion: Right to Life

Janice Learned is a “post-abortive” woman, meaning, she had an abortion. She was a participant in the two-day event organized by the Pennsylvania Pro-Life Federation, and the event was “dedicated to the 46 million children who have died from legal abortions since 1973⁷ and the mothers and fathers who mourn their loss.” Learned runs a pregnancy counselling clinic in a small town in Pennsylvania, where she contacts young girls and women in an attempt to talk them out of abortion. She speaks at local schools in order to promote the idea that sexual abstinence is a better method for contraception than birth control. In the fight against adoption, she found meaning and purpose that had previously remained unseen to her.

As a teenager, she had an abortion. A few years later, she started taking classes at Pacific Christian College, where she saw an anti-abortion film called *The Silent Scream*. The movie, accordingly, was showing an abortion process from inside the mother’s womb, where

⁷ 1973 was the year in which the Supreme Court decided on the Roe vs. Wade trial, which proclaimed abortion as a constitutional right.

one could see the baby trying to dodge the suction tube. After having seen the film, Learned sought redemption and joined the fight to make abortion illegal. Her activism became a manner to redeem for her “sin” (Hedges, 2007: 33-34).

Learned is one of those Americans who want abortion to be banned. Their proportion to the overall population is 46 percent. Every year, tens of thousands of them come together in Washington, D.C., in order to mark the anniversary of *Roe vs. Wade* of 1973. Since that date, nearly seventy-five other countries have liberalized their abortion laws, and the debate was more or less settled in those places. Yet this was not the case with America. Pro-life supporters frequently appear on television and compare abortion to Holocaust or slavery. The issue has, even if for a while, taken a somewhat terrorist manner, when pro-life extremists would blow up clinics and shoot doctors who performed abortion. Politically, some of their most prominent gains were the 2003 Congress voting to ban partial-birth abortion, and conservative state legislatures enacting laws that prevent minors from having abortions without parental consent.

In America, abortion embodies the battle between liberals and conservatives, “between the America of the courts and the America of the Evangelical churches.” Since the *Roe vs. Wade* decision, it became an example of liberal overreach. European countries have liberalized abortion through legislation and referenda, and therefore generated popular consent for the legalization. But in America, the Supreme Court (or, as the conservatives describe, “five unelected liberally minded judges”) decided that reproductive rights are included in a fundamental right to privacy. This right, in turn, is guaranteed by the constitution, like freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The decision not only made the legalization look like an imposition, but also, the Court’s interpretation has been provocative to the conservatives, as the right to abortion is not defined nearly as clearly as, say, the freedom of speech. The Christian right has been trying to change the composition of the

Court's members ever since, putting pressure on every administration to appoint more conservative-minded judges (Micklethwait and Woolridge, 2005: 309).

According to the conservative perception, what made matters worse was the fact that with regard to the issue of abortion, the liberal elite was interfering with the very definition of human life. As they saw that the jurisdiction over such a philosophical matter as such was claimed by doctors and lawyers, the anti-abortionists decided that degradation would not stop there. The pattern here is similar with the other issues that conservative backlash suffers from. Namely, "overweening professionals, disdainful of the unwashed and uneducated masses, force their expert (i.e., liberal) opinions on a world that is not permitted to respond (Frank, 2005: 200). As long as the Roe vs. Wade decision is concerned, the conservative argument seems to have a point. It still is, after all, a highly unpopular decision among 50% of the public. Yet as the point of the argument gets exaggerated, it integrates itself into the myth of liberal omnipotence and therefore loses validity.

Consequently, abortion is a real moral issue, one that has helped forge the alliance between Southland and Heartland Protestant conservatives and (even) Catholic conservatives. So it is an issue that spreads beyond Protestant evangelicalism and fundamentalism, and is therefore cherished by the wider Christian right. Furthermore, anti-abortionist sensitivity reflects wider anxieties and serves as a rallying call for a mass political mobilization against "a wider set of political and cultural enemies." These enemies, naturally, are the liberals, and dangers that supposedly stem from their presence in American cultural and political life ring sounds of national decadence and weakness. This is reflected most evidently in fears of, if such degradation persists, God will even forsake or smite America. Jerry Falwell, co-founder and leader of Moral Majority, gave voice to these fears in the aftermath of September 11 attacks when he claimed that America had the attacks coming for its continuous murder of unborn children and its tolerance for homosexuality (Lieven, 2005: 131).

2.2.2. Theory of Evolution: Darwin's Theory against the Word of God

The first encounter of Christian evangelicals with Darwin occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period, many Christian leaders had attacked the theory of evolution on grounds that it was inconsistent with Biblical teaching on creation. For evangelical fundamentalists, this was all too disturbing and offensive, as they literally interpreted the Bible as the sole source of guiding principles. Also, Darwinism was reversing the positions of science and Christian faith in relation to each other. According to American Christians of the mid-nineteenth century, the scientific revolution of the past two centuries had helped affirm that such an intricate and complex design could not have emerged by pure coincidence, as Darwinism was seen to suggest. Rather, according to their rationale, such a system could only underline the existence of an intelligent designer who put things at work (Reichley, 2002: 206; and Marsden, 1991: 36).

By the 1920's, however, the more rationalistic or liturgical branches of Christianity had begun to integrate evolution within their doctrines, even if the theological strains remained. But for the fundamentalists, any concession towards accommodation was unacceptable. Therefore, they proposed legislation to forbid the teaching of Darwinian theory to their children, a campaign that drew harsh reaction from religious and civil humanists. Such a ban would infringe on science, a phenomenon that most humanists and many regular citizens had come to see as authoritative on certain issues. Furthermore, if the government would endorse a religiously-driven version of truth, this would represent a massive breach on the wall of separation between the church and the state. Thus, with their uncompromising attitude on the issue, the fundamentalists were taking their place outside the American tradition of pluralism, as laid out by the First Amendment and state constitutional guarantees of religious liberty.

Due to fundamentalist pressure, several southern states banned the teaching of evolution in the early 1920's. When in 1925, a Tennessee high-school biology teacher, John

Scopes, violated the law by teaching the theory, the issue came to a head. He was defended by Clarence Darrow, the famous liberal trial lawyer of the time, and the most notable figure in the prosecution was William Jennings Bryan, populist, fundamentalist, and presidential candidate. Bryan's inclusion gave the event the air of a "dramatic showdown between fundamentalism and modern scepticism." The amount of press coverage on the trial was monumental. Yet such attention only made the fundamentalists appear ridiculous in the eyes of the most of the public. The rural setting and the press' caricatures of fundamentalists as hicks and hillbillies prevented fundamentalism from gaining any further strength as a movement. And from that year on, the fundamentalists began to gradually lose ground, until when, in the 1930's, they faded into a marginal movement with little political effect, if any (Marsden, 1991: 60).

Yet, as noted in the previous sections, since the 1960's there has been a resurgence of traditional Christian values, especially in terms of evangelicalism and fundamentalism. This obviously found its reflection on the debate of evolution, with the rebirth or resurfacing of the creationist/intelligent design movement. Recently, fundamentalists struggled for the enacting of laws that would legalize the teaching, or at least mentioning of Biblical accounts on creation along with evolutionary ones. But in 1987, the Supreme Court ruled that a Louisiana law that required the teaching of "special creation" was unconstitutional (Reichley, 2002: 207).

In the idea of intelligent design, we can see another facet of fundamentalism that reveals its inherently modern character. "Fundamentalists have the confidence of Enlightenment philosophies that an objective look at 'the facts' will lead to the truth." Their view of the Bible is that of an inerrant source; one that delivers flawless knowledge on how the universe came to be. But the crux of the argument is that they see those facts as historical

and scientific facts.⁸ To the fundamentalists, the Bible is a collection of true and precise positions. In their arguments, they insist on their reliance on reason. But unlike theoretical disciplines of social science, in the fundamentalist way of thinking, reason cannot lead to loose ends, ambiguities, and leaves no question unanswered. Therefore, it resembles more to the technological strand of contemporary culture (Marsden, 1991: 118), where ambiguities are (theoretically) easily overcome by a glimpse at the user's manual, or whatever book one has at their disposal.⁹

Mainline evangelicals, on the other hand, have a much softer outlook on the issue. They, too, like fundamentalists, reject the evolution theory. But even in states like Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina, which have large actively Christian populations, state universities go on teaching such disciplines as astronomy, genetics, geology, and palaeontology with no worries about conflicting biblical account. To most evangelicals, there is nothing wrong with this setting. And unlike fundamentalists, they do not wish to change it. "The pragmatism of U.S. culture combines with the somewhat anti-intellectual cast of evangelical religion to create a very broad public tolerance for what, to some, might seem an intolerable level of cognitive dissonance." What evangelicals cannot stand, however, is what they call "scientism": the effort to teach evolution or any subject in such a way as to leave no room for God's existence or activity (Mead, 2006).

The modern intelligent design movement, much like its predecessor in the 19th century holds that, there are certain features of the universe and of living things that cannot be explained as work of pure luck or as a result of an undirected process, such as natural selection. Therefore, Darwinian theory cannot explain in entirety either the origin of life or

⁸ In his call to the "American Atheist Forum" to discuss the relationship between faith and reason, Dr. Ergün Caner (a Turkish muslim-origin US citizen who converted to evangelicalism in his youth, and who also happens to be the "President of Theological Seminary" in Jerry Falwell's (see p. 42) Liberty University), says: "You asked for Christians to prove what we believe. So we accept this challenge. If you want answers, we'll give them to you. Invite your most brilliant colleagues and we'll bring ours. We only ask three things: 1) *that we all follow the rules of logic* 2) *that we agree that the Bible is an old book* and 3) that we treat each other respectfully" (<http://www.liberty.edu/academics/religion/seminary/index.cfm?PID=13278>) (emphasis added).

⁹ More revealing is the fact that many of the leaders of the creation science movement are engineers or work in various fields of applied science (Marsden, 1991: 119).

the emergence of species. To do that, one needs to understand and accept that such a complex system cannot have been established by itself.

Orthodox scientists dismiss intelligent design as “upmarket creationism.” But this did not prevent the movement from obtaining several victories against what some call “neo-Darwinists.” For example, in October 2002, Ohio state legislature passed a law that established “science standards” that required students to “know how scientists continue to investigate and critically analyze aspects of evolutionary theory.” In Cobb County, Georgia, a school district now urges teachers to let their students know the “disputed views” about evolution. Furthermore, the conservative republicans managed to attach a passage urging, though not forcing, schools to teach “the full range of scientific views” (Micklethwait and Woolridge, 2005: 159).

Once again, this attitude on the Christian right’s part can be linked to its growing willingness to fight against their persecutors; the liberal “science establishment,” which has so far given little ground to conservatives especially on the issue of intelligent design (*op. cit.*, p. 160), so much so that they are subject to constant mockery.¹⁰ And yet again, the radical faction of the religious right finds itself degraded, its ideas refuted, its values ignored by the liberal establishment.

¹⁰ In 2004, the Kansas Board of Education decided to hold debates on evolutionary theory and on which alternative theories may be included to the curriculum. As response to the decision, a physics graduate named Bobby Henderson established the “Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster” and wrote an open letter to the Board, parts of which include:

“I am writing you with much concern after having read of your hearing to decide whether the alternative theory of Intelligent Design should be taught along with the theory of Evolution [...] Let us remember that there are multiple theories of Intelligent Design. I and many others around the world are of the strong belief that the universe was created by a Flying Spaghetti Monster. It was He who created all that we see and all that we feel. We feel strongly that the overwhelming scientific evidence pointing towards evolutionary processes is nothing but a coincidence, put in place by Him” (<http://www.venganza.org/about/open-letter/>).

The mockery attracted many who oppose the Board’s decision. Still, in June 2005 the board put out a set of new science standards that required critical analysis of Darwin’s theory, along with evidence that disproved it. However, in early 2007, new science standards were agreed upon, and those did not contain any reference to creation science (<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=144>).

2.2.3. Various Other Issues

As noted in the previous sections, decisions taken by the Supreme Court on religious issues are widely unpopular among the conservatives. And especially since *Roe vs. Wade*, the issue has stayed on the top of their agenda. Their aim on this matter, along with various others linked to the Court, is to replace those judges they perceive as liberals with more conservative ones (Rosenberg and Sinderbrand, 2004).

The Supreme Court may have put Bush in the White House after the 2000 elections, but since then, it has also stroke down bans against gay sex, and agreed to hear a case brought by the prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay, two decisions which are both very “liberal” (Micklethwait and Woolridge, 2005: 386). But looking to the past, the Court has a much more liberal record: In 1962, it barred prayer from public schools; in 1964, it made the prosecution of obscenity much more difficult; in 1965, it legalized the sale of contraceptive devices and medicines; and in 1973, it established abortion as a constitutional right (*op. cit.*, p. 65). Naturally, with the presence of such a powerful institution which apparently keeps a certain distance between itself and the hard line conservatives, the Christian right sees no option but to help like-minded judges to get appointed. In its current form, the Supreme Court constitutes one of the pillars of the “liberal establishment”, arguably the strongest one. And since the late nineteenth century, whenever fundamentalists tried to alter things considered fundamental, it keeps on smashing their cases.

Another issue that the Christian right cherishes is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Above we had touched upon two creeds that the evangelicals hold: that United States of America is the “new Israel,” that is, a brand new Holy Land (see p.20); and that the rebirth of Jesus Christ will take place in the area where we now know as Israel (see p.23). Therefore, evangelicals are experiencing a two-fold identification with the Israelis. The latter are a nation of settlers and newcomers, just like the former. And the Israelis, furthermore, should be protected, their well being must be ensured, for they occupy the lands where the Second

Coming will happen. It must be noted here that the Israeli lobby, too, affects the conduct of American foreign policy in the Middle East to a certain degree. But it isn't as much as its exaggerated in theories about a Zionist conspiracy, and is surely less than the role played by evangelicals' pressure on the formation of foreign policy attitudes towards Israel and Palestine (*The Economist*, 2006: No: 8495).

Evangelicals' influence on foreign policy does not stop there. Currently they are also actively pursuing international humanitarian causes like sex trafficking, the civil war in Sudan, North Korea's oppression of its own citizens, international debt relief, and AIDS. To many, this recent interest on foreign issues on evangelicals' part came as an anomaly, since they were so far known for their isolationist attitude. The main thing here is that as the evangelical formulation climbed up to include middle class Americans, and those new megachurch members wanted to deal with problems that are more dramatic than abortion or evolution. Also, while at the beginning of the 20th century, 80 percent of world's Christians lived in Europe and in America, today 60 percent of them are in the developing world. "More Presbyterians go to church in Ghana than in Scotland." America's evangelicals, as their faith preaches, are eager to gather souls in these new places. For example, in 2002, the Southern Baptist Convention spent \$290 million abroad. With that sum, it established 8369 churches and baptized 421,436 souls. Meanwhile, the missionaries who visit those places return home shocked because of the poverty and diseases they have encountered (*The Economist*, 2005: No: 8433).

Today's American conservatism is a strong one, and this strength derives mainly from two sources: its immense network of organizations; and the masses of volunteers who summon people to vote, hand out flyers, go to far places of the world to evangelize, donate time and money, and basically, devote themselves to the cause and fight. The evangelicals and the fundamentalists may be a minority compared with the overall population. Yet they make up

for their relatively small numbers with their absolute superiority on political awareness and eagerness to struggle. On all the causes they embark, eventually they become the losing side. Because, apparently, winning or losing do not constitute ends in themselves. Actually, being the losing side seems to work much better for evangelicals since, obviously, it's the struggle that keeps them going. If someday, they were to win, and therefore turn America into a much more religious country, or a plain theocracy (as the fundamentalists would have it to be), they would probably be much worse than losers-they would be lost. As is the case with utopias, the American Protestant evangelical utopia will never be realized, and its elusiveness will push the Christian right to struggle even more. And presumably, they will continue to whine and utter their victimhood and be happy about it, because it seems to be the struggle itself that makes their lives meaningful.

Following September 11, this utopian understanding of the world has been intensified with the overuse of the words "good" and "evil" both by the conservatives and the head of the American administration.

3. SEPTEMBER 11 and DIVINE INTERVENTION

The radical nationalism of the religious Right naturally emerged particularly strongly after 9/11 and fused with religious hostility to Islam as a religion. Bush himself was bitterly criticized by sections of the religious Right for his speech of September 17, 2001, at the Islamic Center in Washington Praising Islam as a “religion of peace.” Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, called Islam “very evil and wicked, violent and not of the same God.” Jerry Falwell described Mohammed as a terrorist - remarks from which Bush officially distanced himself and the administration. Hal Lindsey (author of the best-selling book in American history after the Bible) produced a strikingly hate-filled work which combined Christian and radical Israeli sources to vilify Islam in general. The effect of such rhetoric on the outside world has been severe (Lieven, 2005: 143).

Such was the dominant, or rather, outspoken aspect of the religious atmosphere in America right after the September 11 attacks; one of intolerance and hatred against Islam. Though some were reactive to the president for his friendly attitude towards Muslims, others were complaining of his frequent use of the word “evil” and his apparent understanding of people as good vs. evil, or white vs. black, leaving no room for grey zones.

Before investigating religion’s role on George W. Bush’s domestic and foreign policies, we must first analyze the effect that the 9/11 attacks had on American people, for this was the event that marked his presidency.

3.1. American Reality, (Un)Interrupted by the Intrusion of the Real

Aside from personal shock, the immediate response of the Americans to the attacks was to assert their patriotism and solidarity. As happens at times of big national troubles, most people went to church. Most major faith communities agreed with the government that some degree of military force had to be used to bring the perpetrators to justice and to prevent possible future attacks. However, most of these also warned that military action, if applied,

should be done so with limitations and in order to “restore peace and uphold justice” but not in a “spirit of vengeance.”

Yet among those faith communities that spoke out in the face of a US attack on Afghanistan, the evangelical leaders, both white and black, were the most powerful denunciators of terrorists and most ardent supporters of military action. Richard Land, the director of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, declared on September 21, 2001, that “This is a defensive war. We’ve been attacked, and our citizens have been slaughtered, and they will continue to die in the hundreds if not thousands unless we attack these terrorists and remove their safe havens and places of refuge.” Similarly, on September 16, the black Pentecostal bishop T.D. Jakes preached: “Let Osama bin Laden and whosoever shall rise against this nation understand that we have not dropped to our knees because we are defeated, but [...] because we are armed and dangerous and ready to fight the good fight of faith” (Reichley, 2002: 347).

During the first couple of months after 9/11, the American public not only showed overwhelming support for the administration’s war, but also expressed confidence in the nation’s overall moral conduct. According to a Fox News poll in December 2001, 59 percent of the respondents thought that the nation was morally on “the right direction,” as opposed to a half as big 29 percent who thought that the nation was on the wrong way. Similar results were obtained from other polls. This sense of moral rejuvenation was to a large extent linked to religion. In November, the Pew Research Center found that the proportion of people who believed that religion was increasing its influence in America had risen from 40 percent to 78 percent. The president apparently was responsible for this change, as he repeatedly identified the war against terrorism with religious terms, as when he stated in early 2002 and “the God of the universe struggles with us.”

Later in 2002, the share of the public “satisfied with the way things are going in this country” dropped to 50 percent from 65 percent in January. And the ratio of those who

believe that religion's influence was increasing had fallen to 37 percent. Yet the indications were telling that almost half of the population thought that the decrease in religion's influence was not good on its own (as among the 55 percent who believed that religion was losing influence, 84 percent said that this was "a bad thing"). And while 67 percent believed that America was a "Christian nation," 84 percent also believed that "a person can be a good American even if he doesn't have a religious faith." And finally, after the attacks, only a small 22 percent said they held an unfavourable opinion of Muslim Americans (*op. cit.*, p.349).

Apparently, after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Americans' growing inclination towards the (religious) right of the political spectrum gained strength. With this catastrophe that came out of nowhere, it is also possible that the evangelical and fundamentalist religious right found a base on which to display its militancy and willingness to act, while, as argued above, mainstream denominations gave messages that are more moderate and reserved. As a result of this, the evangelicals' "good vs. bad" echoed perfectly with parts of the American people, which was, following the attacks, going through a traumatic phase, as any other nation would. It should also be noted here that this absolutist language was also discovered by the Neo-conservatives, who, after 9/11 had finally persuaded top officials of the administration, including the president, to give ear to them (Kepel, 2004:5).

In understanding what September 11 might mean to the American people, Slavoj Zizek offers a different approach. His argument starts with the observation that in today's market, "we find a whole series of products deprived of their malignant properties: coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol." The list, accordingly, could even be extended to multiculturalism, where the other gets deprived of its otherness. The same is being done to reality here: just like decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like coffee, but is not *real* coffee, virtual reality is experienced as reality without being so. And the virtualization of the collapse

of WTC towers through the oft-repeated shots of airplanes crashing into the buildings and of the people running in havoc towards the camera is “reminiscent of spectacular shots in catastrophe movies, a special effect which outdid all others, since [...] reality is the best appearance of itself.” From here follows the logical conclusion that the aim of the perpetrators was indeed this spectacular effect, not to provoke material damage (Zizek, 2002:11).

Americans were in no way alien to scenes of catastrophe or appalling destruction; they’ve been reproducing such images (along with contextual scenarios) for some decades now through big-budget Hollywood movies. By the time the attacks took place, those artificial images from movies, along with the context in which they were represented had already taken their place in the collective American memory. In other words, in September 11, 2001, “the unthinkable which happened was the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and that was the biggest surprise.” The surprise effect, on the other hand, largely stemmed from the fact that in the reality that the Americans were living in, all these horrific images they fantasized about could not have taken place in America. They could happen in a movie, or in a news report from a troubled Third World country – but not here in the States. Hence, when the attacks came, it was not as if the Americans had experienced a rude awakening from their long dream, but quite the opposite: it was fantasy that came smashing into their reality and disrupted it (*op. cit.*, p. 16).

America had two choices in the aftermath of the attacks. Either, it would “finally risk stepping through the fantasmatic screen that separates it from the Outside World, accepting its arrival in the Real World, making the long-overdue move from ‘A thing like this shouldn’t happen *here!*’ to ‘A thing like this shouldn’t happen *anywhere!*’” In order to come to terms with the realization of its most horrible fantasies, America would also have to accept that its vulnerability is a part of its reality, and enact “the punishment of those responsible [of the attacks] as a sad duty, not as an exhilarating retaliation.” Or, alternatively, it would stay within the limits of its real world of fantasy, where disaster can only happen in the movies or

the Third World. To protect this “fantasmatic screen” then, it would also have to be much more aggressive towards the threatening Outside World, and swift and merciless in its punishment of the attackers (*op. cit.*, p. 49).

Seeing the nightmarish state of Iraq, and the continuously inconclusive fighting in Afghanistan, one tends to think that America has chosen the second way. The question here is, why. Part of the answer could be found in the conditions of the period. In 2001, George W. Bush had almost completed a year in presidency, but the reforms he had promised prior to the elections had not yet gained momentum. Also, he was the man seen by the conservatives as Bill Clinton’s antithesis. He had mass support from the religious right, along with its two distinctive leaders, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson (Benen, 2000). Furthermore, as we have seen, within this new religious right, the social and cultural visibility and influence of the evangelicals was on the rise. As they are much more literal and diehard followers of Protestantism than mainline believers, in the aftermath of the attacks, they were trying to understand how come such “good people” as the Americans could be attacked, and therefore reasoned that this must be an act done by truly “evil” people. Meanwhile, in the need to retaliate, George W. Bush found a purpose for his presidency, a much greater mission of bringing freedom to the persecuted and wiping out evil from the face of the earth (Singer, 2004). Part of the responsibility for such an understanding of foreign policy surely goes to the neocons, who, from very early on had the idea of bringing democracy to the oppressed of the world, particularly those in the Middle East. After the attacks, they found a president in crisis, and persuaded him to listen to their plan of actions; while on the level of the people, they had a religious right with whom their rhetoric and political aims resonated almost perfectly (Micklethwait and Woolridge, 2005).

The nature of Americans’ reaction to 9/11 (mainly, an outburst of patriotism and jingoism), therefore, is rooted in the fusion of a number of phenomena. As the attacks stroke the WTC towers and the Pentagon (two pillars of American power, the third being the White

House), the rising religious right, along with most Americans perceived this as the work of a bunch of evil men, without considering the possible underlying causes of terrorism, and therefore, chose to stay within their reality as composed of the idea of an invulnerable America. The attacks, on the other hand, gave the president a much larger purpose than petty issues of domestic policy, namely; the eradication of evil in the form of terrorism from the earth. And finally, this atmosphere was very suitable for the neocons to sell their aims at both foreign and domestic policies, which had this idealistic and utopian taste both in rhetoric and content.

Within this process, the role played by the president was highly influential and effective on the shape of the outcome. In order to have a deeper understanding of the problem, further analysis of faith's weight on his policy choices and the nature of his personal relation to religion is required.

3.2. Messenger of God: George W. Bush

George W. Bush angered many for the tone of the rhetoric he used after the 9/11 attacks. Following certain remarks that he made, he had begun to be widely seen as an arrogant figure who thinks he is doing God's will on earth. As argued below, his "crusade" gaff (see p 53.) made Muslims throughout the world feel extremely uneasy, while his prayers for being "God's messenger" (see p.57) was deeply disturbing to seculars. Whether or not his religious faith played a role in his administration's decision to attack Iraq, too, was an issue on which he was faced with harsh criticism.

It is to his rhetoric and relation with faith we shall turn to now.

3.2.1. Bush the Second

George W. Bush rises ahead of the dawn most days, when the loudest sound outside the White House is the dull, distant roar of F-16s patrolling the skies. Even before he

brings his wife, Laura, a morning cup of coffee, he goes off to a quiet place to read alone. His text isn't news summaries or the overnight intelligence dispatches. Those are for later, downstairs, in the Oval Office. It's not recreational reading (recently, a biography of Sandy Koufax). Instead, he's told friends, it's a book of evangelical mini-sermons, "My Utmost for His Highest." The author is Oswald Chambers, and, under the circumstances, the historical echoes are loud. A Scotsman and itinerant Baptist preacher, Chambers died in November 1917 as he was bringing the Gospel to Australian and New Zealand soldiers massed in Egypt. By Christmas they had helped to wrest Palestine from the Turks, and captured Jerusalem for the British Empire at the end of World War I (Fineman, Lipper, Brant, Smalley, Wolfe, 2003).

Those reading sessions were taking place a couple of weeks before the launching of the Iraq War. What was it that led the American President to read that particular book in that particular time and context? Why did he seek advice in that kind of a source, which ultimately preached that "When you are up against difficulties, you have no power, you can only endure in darkness," and then you should "go right out of yourself, and deliberately turn your imagination to God" (*op. cit.*).

There are three main accounts as to how Bush's faith evolved. The first of these refers to a speech he had with long time family friend reverend Billy Graham in 1985. Graham is a famous and widely admired Baptist evangelist whose name is frequently cited with reference to Bush's religious creed. According to Bush, Graham had planted a "mustard seed" in his soul that eventually led him to "recommit my [his] heart to Jesus Christ." With regard to evangelical understanding, this account does not fully reflect the "drama of a single moment when Bush accepted Jesus as his savior, a true born-again experience" (Cooperman, 2004). Bush, too, did not call himself a "born-again," arguing that, to him, being so refers to a particular moment, whereas he sees himself as being on a journey. He doesn't identify with the word "evangelical" either, a term which, he argues, implies a duty to proselytize, which would not be acceptable for a public officeholder. Also, he claims that his faith was "reconfirmed," or that he experienced a "renewal of faith" (Cannon, 2004). Obviously, he

tried to distance himself from the idea that his reunion with or tighter embrace of faith was one that could be explained by evangelist terminology.

The second account involves another evangelist called Arthur Blessitt, an original figure who is known for dragging a 12-foot cross around the world. According to this version of events, more than a year before the meeting with Billy Graham, Bush wanted to talk with Blessitt. The two men met in a restaurant, and Blessitt explained Bush how his soul can be saved. At the end of their conversation, they held each others hands, and prayed for Bush's salvation. Evidently, this sounds much more like a "born-again" sort of experience than his talk with Graham. But this experience did not appear in Bush's autobiography, and he has not referred to it since. It appears that Bush carefully avoids giving any hint which could make it easier for others (both the religious right and the left) to label him as evangelist. Still, this does not stop evangelical leaders from calling him one of their own (Cooperman, 2004).

The last and arguably the most reliable account refers not to any specific contact with a revered evangelical figure, but to a period in Bush's life. In 1977, George W. Bush married Laura Lane Welch. Together, they joined Laura's Methodist church. Soon after, Bush became a "respected member of the congregation." But he was also notorious for his drinking problem, which predated his marriage. It didn't take long for his wife to see that he was determined to keep this reputation. By 1985, they had had two children –twin daughters- and Laura Bush had run out of patience with her husband's drinking problem.

At this period, a close friend of his, Don Evans (also secretary of commerce from 2001 to 2005), enters the scene. He introduced Bush to a nondenominational Bible-study group called Community Bible Study (CBS). This small convention was in fact a "scriptural boot camp," where a group of 10 men would study intensively a single book of the New Testament for a year long. So for two years, Bush and Evans delved into detailed reading and discussion, each week going through a new chapter. This dense relationship with Christian faith would affect Bush in several ways. It gave him, for the first time, something to focus on

intellectually. Though he had studied in Yale and Harvard, he was “a jogger and marathoner for years,” and he had stayed relatively far from the intellectual environment that surrounded him. The Bible study group provided him with the mental and spiritual discipline that he had probably never experienced and needed desperately to quit drinking. Finally, in 1986, and thanks largely to CBS, he broke the habit. Bush never sought rehabilitation to get rid of his addiction, and therefore he never called himself an alcoholic. But as it turned out, the CBS had been something of a support group for him, where he concentrated on an inspiring text with a group of other men who were also seeking shelter in their hard times. And from then on, it was “Goodbye Jack Daniels, hello Jesus” (Fineman, Lipper, Brant, Smalley, Wolffe, 2003).

In 1987, Bush went to Washington to help run his father’s campaign. There, he took on the job of being the “liaison” to the religious right. While his father was uneasy with religious types, George W. was much more comfortable with them, Doug Wead who worked with him on the evangelical outreach said “George knew exactly what to say, what to do” (*op. cit.*). This “one of us” kind of attitude would prove to be useful also later in his life, when he ran for presidency. During a Republican primary debate in 1999, Bush was asked which “political philosopher thinker” he most identified with. “Christ,” he replied, “because he changed my heart.” Meanwhile, Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention was watching the debate at home on tv. He had his wife and daughter along with him; both having little interest in politics. But when they heard Bush’s reply to the question, they both stopped what they were doing and said “Wow!” According to Land, they were not alone, because “most evangelicals who heard the question probably thought, ‘That’s exactly the way I would have answered that’” (Cannon, 2004).

Bush and Karl Rove (his long time campaign manager) built their careers on this base of faith, with Rove making the policy and Bush doing the talking. A year before he ran for governor, in 1993, Bush told a Jewish reporter that only those who believed in Jesus

could go to heaven. Although this produced a stir, it also helped him gather a constituency in the rural and so far primarily Democratic Texas. As a candidate, Bush got advice from pastors, leaders of nondenominational megachurches in the suburbs. His ideas for governing had connotations of faith, and were designed to draw vote from evangelicals. Yet in the same time, secular voters saw him as a moderate. Therefore, George W. Bush had been successful where his father had failed, and achieved to “reach the base without threatening the rest.” In the Republican primaries in 1999, while other candidates tried to win evangelicals by pledging alliance to issues such as abortion and gay rights, Bush used a different tactic that one of his rivals, Gary Bauer, calls, “identity politics.” According to Bauer, “Bush talked about his faith, and people just believed him – and believed in him.” He was “one of them” (Fineman, Lipper, Brant, Smalley, Wolffe, 2003).

However, Bush’s emphasis on religious faith during his presidential campaign should not be seen as an attitude unique to him, or to the republicans, for that matter. During his own campaign, Al Gore did not refrain from proclaiming himself a “born-again Christian.” He also told to Washington Post that he often asks himself “W.W.J.D.” – a motto popular among Christian youth meaning “what would Jesus do?” This rhetoric of faith was also used by the Democratic vice president candidate. Joseph Lieberman, Gore’s running candidate and an orthodox Jew, surprised the audience when he opened his first campaign address in Tennessee with a prayer and a quotation from the biblical Book of Chronicles. Lieberman made use of these religious themes throughout the campaign. In Detroit, he told an audience, “As a people, we need to reaffirm our faith and renew the dedication of our nation and ourselves to God and God’s purposes.” And finally, a month after this last statement that seemed to come from Bush, as he was addressing an audience of university students, he argued that “the constitution guarantees freedom of religion, not freedom from religion” (Benen, 2000).

Meanwhile, Bush was also keeping on with his campaign, which he had kicked off in the Bob Jones University in South Carolina. This was a fundamentalist university whose

leadership had banned interracial dating, called the Pope “the Antichrist,” and labelled the Catholic Church as a “satanic cult” (*op. cit.*). Although this wasn’t exactly a moderate move, he didn’t stray from his strategy of not to identify with the evangelicals. During his address at Bob Jones, when a student asked him whether he had been called by God, he became “visibly irritated,” and said, “I don’t know what God’s will is, and neither do you” (Baker, 2000). Yet his moderate mood did not stop him from proclaiming June 10 as “Jesus Day” in Texas (Benen, 2000).

In an interview with U.S. News and World Report, Bush is quoted to say, “I’m not all that comfortable describing my faith, because in the political world, there are a lot of people who say, ‘Vote for me; I’m more religious than my opponent.’ And those kind of folks make me a little nervous” (Cannon, 2004). Then during the 2000 campaign, Gore must have made Bush nervous, as he made more campaign appearances in churches than the future president. Yet all the talk of religion on the Democratic candidate’s part was to no avail. Bush had already ensured the backing of the evangelical leaders, by quietly assembling a “values defense team,” which included prominent people of the religious right. So when the election day came, ABC’s exit poll showed that 14 percent of voters identified themselves as members of the religious right, and 80 percent of these voted for Bush (Benen, 2000).

The rise of the religious right, and having established their backing, after all, helped George W. Bush win the election. What is to be remembered here, however, is that Bush has continuously sent messages of moderation and refrained from identifying with neither evangelicals nor fundamentalists. This carefully designed balance made him beat Al Gore (who was widely seen as the “next president”) on the ballot box. Come 2004, he had angered and offended many, but the religious right did not pull its support, and helped him win again. In the last election, almost 60 percent of Bush’s votes came from the hard-line section of the religious right. However, after the 2000 election, they were waiting something in return;

banning abortion, gay marriage, letting intelligent design into the curriculum, etc. Now we must turn to how much Bush paid them back (*The Economist*, 2006, No: 8495).

3.2.2. The Battle of Good vs. Evil: Rhetoric and Policies in the Post-9/11 Period

And we understand. And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while (Davison, 2005: 133).

When he used the word “crusade,” it was not the first time that Bush made a speech with religious connotations. The remark triggered harsh reaction and criticism from around the world, and not only from Islamic countries, but also from liberals and moderates in the U.S. and Europe. The administration lost no time in playing down the remark, arguing that the president’s purpose was “to cultivate patience for what he was calling ‘the new wars of the 21st century’” (*op. cit.*, p. 133). But no matter what the White House said, Bush’s blunder was perceived to be the first sign of his desire to launch an all out war against Islam. This was especially worrying for Muslims. And Bush did not hesitate to do whatever he deemed necessary to reassure them that he admires Islam. He hosted Ramadan dinners, met with prominent Muslim leaders, and continuously criticized evangelical figures who denounce Islam as a corrupt religion (Fineman, Lipper, Brant, Smalley, Wolffe, 2003). When highly influential evangelical fundamentalist figures that supported Bush before and after the elections such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson made comments that scorned Islam, Bush put a distance between them and his administration. At the anger of many of his supporters, he said that Muslims worship the same God as the Christians. Right after September 11, he visited a mosque as a show of goodwill, and said, “We do not impose any religion; we welcome all religions [...] We do not prescribe any prayer; we welcome all prayers” (*The Economist*, 2004, No: 8406).

By looking at what the president has done to ease the minds of Muslims, an alternative interpretation on the use of the word “crusade” could be mentioned here. According to the

Oxford dictionary, the word, as a noun, has two meanings: 1) “any of a series of medieval military expeditions made by Europeans to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims,” and, 2) “an energetic organized campaign with a political, social, or religious aim: *a crusade against crime.*”¹¹ It could be argued that in his infamous remark, the president may have aimed at using the word in its second meaning, in order to emphasize the enormous size and lengthy duration of the fight that he was going to make the nation embark upon. It seems illogical that someone like Bush who carefully sold himself as a moderate would in a glimpse turn fundamentalist and make remarks that would obviously antagonize not only the Muslim voters who had campaigned for him before the 2000 election (Benen, 2000), but also make him lose the support of liberals and moderate conservative throughout the country. Yet, the obvious criticism to this interpretation would be that if that remark is a result of carelessness on the president’s and/or his speechwriter’s part, how can they be so careless in writing such an important speech that to use a word which will clearly have very disturbing implications to many people, especially considering the context of September 11’s aftermath.

Another disturbing aspect of Bush’s rhetoric, and arguably the most disturbing, is his frequent mention of “good” and “evil,” and his definition of the “war against terror” as a battle between good and evil. Even among evangelicals there were some who criticized this language (Lamp man, 2003). Since 9/11, he has spend barely if ever a day without using the word “evil.” His “axis of evil” was not one of evil initially. When David Frum, one of his speechwriters, came up with the term “axis of hatred”, he sent it to chief speechwriter Michael Garson, who wanted to use “the theological language that Bush had made his own since September 11.” So, “axis of hatred” became “axis of evil” (*Progressive*, 2003, No: 2). Frum argues that the “language of good and evil” came by naturally. Accordingly, the president used the term “evildoers” for the terrorists from very early on. At the period, some commentators were wondering aloud whether the U.S. in some way could have deserved the

¹¹ Emphasis in the original. Source: http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/crusade?view=uk

attacks. But the president wanted to “cut that off right away”, because he didn’t want the American public to think not even for a second that they could have some relation to the breeding of terrorism. Another reason why he used that word was to imply that he saw no moral equivalent to the September 11 attacks. Osama Bin Laden and his followers were “evil.” And in November 2001 in an interview with Newsweek, he declared for the first time Saddam Hussein was evil, too (Fineman, Lipper, Brant, Smalley, Wolfe, 2003).

While this rhetoric of the war between “good and evil” aims at silencing the view that America may have any responsibility in the emerging Al Qaeda as a destabilizing actor, on the other hand, it damages Bush’s argument that the war against terror has no religious meaning. “Evil” certainly has many secular meanings, too, but the president’s usage of it look distinctly religiously conceived. At the Pentagon memorial service, he claimed that they, the Americans “cannot fully understand the designs and power of evil. [...] It is enough to know that evil, like goodness, exists. And in the terrorists, evil has found a willing servant.” On November 10, 2001, as he addressed to those gathered at UN, he said “We’re confident that history has an author who fills time and eternity with His purpose. We know that evil is real, but good will prevail against it. This is the teaching of many faiths, and in that assurance we gain strength for a long journey” (Davison, 2005: 135). The last sentence here is particularly important, whereby Bush bluntly backs America’s war with purely theological arguments. Also, he’s making out of the terrorists almost a supreme being whose capabilities, methods and motives we cannot understand. Such an outlook doubtlessly declares any effort to understand why the attacks took place as a struggle in vain; terrorists are evil people who work and think in ways good people cannot understand, and their only aim is to harm good people. Additionally, in Bush’s words where he says that his argument is “the teaching of many faiths,” there is an all-knowing, inter-religions statement. In saying that he speaks for many religions, he not only claims comprehensive knowledge on these faiths, but he also implies that the war against terror is not sacred only to the Americans, but to most of the

world's population, because according to their faiths, too, fighting terrorists is a cause for goodness.

A theological criticism of the idea of opposing the evil argues that in aiming at ridding the world of evil, Americans' consideration of themselves as the "good side" in the fight is problematic in two ways; first, it adopts the line of thinking that the Al Qaeda seems to have in its hatred of America, and second, "it completely neglects the teaching of Christ that only one can properly be called good which is God. A Christian account of the good can never simply identify this or that particular polity, or set of actions, let alone a national strategy of pre-emptive warfare, as unambiguously good". Therefore, from a Christian theological perspective, claiming pure "good" upon one's actions, or policy choices is simply arrogant. Also, the war on terror does not qualify to fit the standards of Christian doctrine of "just war," for this doctrine requires that the ruler that declares the war must ensure that the "war will not bring about a greater evil than the avoidance of war" ((Northolt, 2004). Although it is open to debate whether a ruler can make such commitments as requested by the doctrine, still, from a just war perspective and judging by the situation in Iraq, the war on terror is arguably among the least just of all wars.

Frequent criticism of Bush's religious rhetoric also pointed at his tendency to see his actions as doing God's work on earth. When he says that he prayed "for the strength to do God's will" in Iraq, and adds that he will not justify the war based on religious arguments, he contradicts himself. He also prays to be "as god a messenger of his [God's] will as possible." (Cooperman, 2004). And this contradiction gives way to interpretations that the president claims "divine political backing" for the war on terror." (Braun, 2006). And he only adds weight to these suspicions when, asked if he had consulted his father before invading Iraq, he says; "There's a higher Father that I appeal to" (Dunmore, 2005).

Still, emphasis is also put upon the idea that Bush is not as radical as he seems to be;

Bush has spoken publicly of being "on bended knee" in prayer. So did Wilson. Bush said he consults the Bible regularly. Jimmy Carter did it nightly. In a speech to the troops on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, Bush asked for God's blessing on the enterprise. Franklin D. Roosevelt, who once instructed a speechwriter to make sure to include "the God stuff," led the entire nation in prayer on the occasion of D-Day. Bush seems to find God's hand in the war he is waging; Lincoln told his Cabinet that he considered the victory at Antietam a sign from the Almighty telling him to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Bush addresses the National Prayer Breakfast each year (and has added the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast), but so has every president since Dwight D. Eisenhower (Cannon, 2004).

With regard to the invasion of Iraq, in late April 2003, he said that the decision to go to war "is a decision I made based upon what I thought were the best interests of the American people. I was able to step back from religion, because I have a job to do. And I, on bended knee to the good Lord, asked him to help me to do my job in a way that's wise" (*op. cit.*).

Even though it did not withdraw and maybe even widened its support for him, the religious right did not really get so far what it asked from the Bush presidency. For example, while he frequently used the term "culture of life" (a catch phrase that signifies the anti-abortion campaign), unlike evangelical leaders, he never said that abortion is plain murder. According to his aides, he never said that it should be illegal, and he certainly did not try to ban the practice. By using terms such as this one, Bush may be giving the conservatives the message that he is with them, while avoiding to take radical steps that would alienate moderate voters. On the issue of gay marriage, Bush says that he opposes it because marriage is an institution so fundamental to society that it should not be altered. Evangelicals, on the other hand, want to ban it, on grounds that "it is against God's will." Bush never said that, and did not stray from the secular argument. He also carefully avoided to choose between creationism and Darwinism. In 2000, he suggested that creationism should be taught together with the theory of evolution since "religion has been around a lot longer than Darwinism."

But he added with a rather vague fashion that he believes that God created the world, and that everyday we're getting new information as to how he created it" (Cooperman, 2004).

In relying on less divisive evangelical figures after Falwell's and Robertson's notorious remarks (Rosenberg, Sinderbrand, 2004), in showing enthusiasm for a trade agreement with China (whom the evangelicals oppose of persecuting Christians), and in visiting an Islamic religious center just within a week of September 11 attacks (The Economist, 2004, No: 8495), Bush did not hesitate in clashing with the religious right. Some conservatives have begun to realize that the president does not always (and maybe even rarely) follow the religious rights' agenda. That's why Paul Weyrich from the conservative Free Congress Foundation says, "We'd better be very careful not to think that the president owes us anything and it's payback time" (Rosenberg, Sinderbrand, 2004).

Bush's frequent reliance on religious rhetoric in an age where, especially in most of the remaining developed countries, the power of Christianity wanes, is surprising to many. Combined with the rise of religious right in the U.S., his "god-talk" becomes frightening to secularists everywhere, leading to interpretations that he is going to start a clash of civilizations. But analysis shows that, in spite of his speeches that are heavily decorated with religious themes, he seems to be careful not to cross the limits which the liberals and moderate conservatives are eager to protect, and his alignment with the religious right stays, in many issues, limited to his speeches. Furthermore, he doesn't hesitate to differ with evangelicals and fundamentalists where he sees fit, as is evident with the various instances where he praised Islam. Consequently, as long as his faith is concerned, it seems that he carefully tries to avoid being labelled with any denomination or religious group, while at the same time aims at satisfying his base with the use of religious rhetoric. Whether he succeeds or not, however, is matter of perspective.

Conclusion: Modernity vs. America

If the religious right could sum up all the issues that disturb them and take it to the Supreme Court, the trial would probably have a name like this. As we are continuously surprised, and even shocked on how the world's richest democracy can be so religious compared with other developed economies, self-identified members of the religious right continue to worry on a variety of issues from abortion to gay marriage, from pornography to Bible reading at school. At first, it may seem as if they don't have any considerations on economic issues. Yet they do, as when they press for tax reductions. The problem here is that those reductions they so ambitiously crave for are in fact against their economic interests. This is precisely what Thomas Frank means when he says that "People getting their fundamental interests wrong is what American political life is all about" (Frank, 2005: 1). Thus, the primary contradiction of the "Great Backlash" is that "it is a working class movement that has done incalculable, historic harm to working-class people" (*op. cit.*, p. 6). What they perceive as cultural and social degradation is a direct result of laissez-faire capitalism, of modernity- not to mention the decline of their economic status. And the anti-liberal rhetoric used by the Republicans resonates perfectly with their agony, leading them to reflect their grievances toward an all-powerful liberal elite, which exists largely in their imagination.

Religion here acts as a cohesive factor. It gets people together around a group of issues; it gives their somewhat solitary and hollow lives meaning. It makes them volunteer, donate, work hard and sweat. And the meaning that had so far escaped them is suddenly found. Struggle becomes an end in itself, and the distant dream of a perfect America where moral values are respected to the highest degree keeps the struggle going on. They use the tools of modernity with marvellous skill, just in order to get back at modernity. *Modern* evangelicalism and fundamentalism, therefore, tries to put faith at the heart of politics as it cries out for lower taxes for the genuine elite who itches on their cultural sorrows.

President Bush, meanwhile, makes perfect use of religious rhetoric to ensure the support of his base. This is not to say that he is insincere in his faith: as seen in the episode where he tries to quit drinking alcohol, his devotion to Jesus Christ is essential to his life. Yet this does not stop him from making political moves that most of the religious right would not concur on religious grounds. Nevertheless, his language is perceived by most as one of faith. His remarks on the “war between good and evil” and being the “messenger of God” makes the evangelicals feel that he is one of them. When it comes to his policy choices, however, especially on domestic policy issues where the American nation seems to be divided, he talks conservative but does not act nearly at all.

The religious right -especially the evangelicals and fundamentalists- and the Bush administration seem to be in a state of mutual dependency. In spite of all, evangelicals want to see one of them in the White House, and they seem to be content of having him in there. Bush, in turn, needs them as a base constituency. Also, he seems to get inspiration from his faith, if not direction, and arguably it makes him more confident to have the support of so many people with whom his religious language echoes so fittingly.

Ultimately, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the rise of religion in America has overwhelming effect on politics. After all, evangelicals (including the fundamentalists) are still a minority. Yet, a year and a half before the next presidential elections, one can see that the issue of faith is gaining importance. At the time of this writing, in June 6th, 2007, at 02:17 with local time, the CNN International channel broadcasts a special program called “Faith and Politics”, where Democrat Primary candidates Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John Edwards answer questions about their faith and how it would affect their politics. The host of the show, Soledad O'Brien, explained the nature of the program as one where “the candidates’ faith will be put to test.” This is dangerous ground for what is widely seen as world’s most advanced nation. Religious right and Bush may not have placed faith at the heart of American politics, but it surely stands somewhere in the chest.

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