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WORKING TITLE:

"THE MYTHS OF A CHRISTIAN AMERICA"

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

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"If we get organized, we could very well determine the next presidential nominee of the Republican Party. We certainly believe that."

Less than four weeks after the landslide election of President Ronald Reagan, that statement of the political aspirations of the "New Right Evangelical Christians" was offered by Gary Jarmin, legislative director of the fundamentalist lobby, Christian Voice. (The Christian Voice is known primarily for its distribution of millions of "Moral Report Cards" on candidates for public office.)

Mr. Jarmin has become the national field director of the American Coalition for Traditional Values (ACTV), a recently-formed coalition of fundamentalist preachers and ultra-conservative political organizers.

The largest umbrella group yet formed of the religious right, ACTV's executive board includes the Reverends Jerry Falwell, James Robison, Jimmy Swaggart, Pat Robertson, and Rex Humbard. It includes, as well, the most conservative leaders of the Southern Baptists Convention (14 million members) and the Assemblies of God.

ACTV claims that it registered "more than a million" new "Christian voters" during the 1984 election season, and that 35,000 "Bible-believing churches" were involved in registering voters, mobilizing volunteers, and influencing the Republican Party at both local and national levels.

Ten days after the November 1984 elections, the ACTV executive board met behind closed doors in Washington, D.C. Afterwards, Colonel Doner, ~~ACTVxxxxxxx~~ Christian Voice executive director, announced that the fundamentalist coalition is demanding that President Reagan appoint "at least two" U.S. cabinet officers who support the religious right's conservative agenda. He said that they are seeking these cabinet posts in return for the political support given by the religious right forces to the President in the recent election.

The White House has felt the heat and now sees the light. In an unusual - perhaps unprecedented - procedure, the Reagan administration has sent the two top contenders for the post of Education Secretary to be interviewed at a weekly gathering of 45 representatives of religious right and conservative groups in Washington.

The authority to ~~xxxx~~ grant a "hechsher" (kosher seal of approval) to cabinet officers and other political appointments reflects the sizeable gains made by religious right groups since 1980. This new political status was symbolized dramatically at the Republican National Convention in Dallas during August 1984 when the Rev. Jerry Falwell and the Rev. W.W. Criswell, a leading fundamentalist Baptist preacher in Dallas, offered prayers for a "Christian America." And, not incidentally, the convention organizers placed a New Testament in the kits to be distributed to every Republican delegate. (The Christian Bible was removed hurriedly following a protest by a national Jewish organizational representative.)

The fundamentalist preachers/politicians coalition is interested in more than symbolic victories. The ACTV umbrella group has announced its plans to form some 300 chapters across the country to lobby on local and national issues and to gear up for voter registration in 1986 congressional elections and then for the 1988 presidential campaign.

To implement this drive, ACTV's author-evangelist chairman, Tim LaHaye, is moving the ACTV operation and his other groups from San Diego to the Capital. He will be joined by the Christian Voice operation, which is moving to Washington from its headquarters in Pacific Grove, California.

Colonel Doner announced that the ACTV and Christian Voice groups will hire full-time directors in at least 12 states. "We're going to teach them how to form party caucuses, how to get elected as delegates, and how to pass resolutions on issues at party conventions. In the short term, we'll teach them how to win elections for pro-Christian candidates," he said.



At the 1988 Republican National Convention, Gary Jarmin predicts, "Between one-third and one-half of the delegates will be brought in through our network."

Buoying the hopes of the fundamentalist preachers and politicians to take over the Republican Party by 1988 as well as to name appointments to high-level posts in the Reagan administration was their stunning success in Texas during the November 1984 election. A coalition of fundamentalist Christians in Texas - many of them new to politics - staged a virtual takeover of the state's Republican Party. The Texas strategy was spearheaded by Ray Allen of Granbury, Texas, who directs the American Christian Voice Foundation. Under his leadership, a coalition was formed consisting of fundamentalist preachers and their churches, "pro-family" and anti-abortion groups. They sponsored seminars throughout the state on how to gain influence in political parties. One of these, sponsored by the Rev. Bob Tilton of Word of Faith Church, in Dallas, attracted 1,000 pastors in February 1984.

"We had Christians that took over the entire Republican apparatus in Lubbock," said Ray Allen. "They dumped everybody; their attitude was, 'Throw out the bums!'" Allen added. In one of the many party races targeted by the religious right, a leading Christian advocate of "home schooling," Donna Compton, unseated the county treasurer and local Republican precinct chairman in Lewisville, Texas.

"The net effect was that Christians gained a dominant influence in the state Republican Party," said Allen, who also directs the ACTV operation in Texas..

During the state convention in the summer of 1984, the ACTV coalition sponsored a "Christian rally" held at the same time as the GOP's main social event. The Christian event attracted more than 1,300 of the 4,000 party delegates. When leaders of the rally asked for all "first-time" delegates to stand, about 1,000 of the Christian delegates responded.

"We did voter registration <sup>aggressively</sup> in ~~the~~ churches. Many pastors gave out registration forms in church and asked people to return them the collection baskets," Allen reported. "One pastor in Lubbock registered over 5,000 people. He'd go on the radio and say, 'Christians,

get ready to vote!"

One Republican Congressman-elect, Richard Armey - an economics professor who campaigned on a platform of abolishing food stamps and phasing out Social Security - has openly attributed his narrow upset to the campaigning of the religious right. He said his win over incumbent conservative Democrat Tom Vandergriff was due, in large part, to the 160,000 "Christian Voice" report cards" which saturated the Congressional districts. He also was ~~xx~~ aided by the new conservative Christian voters who, according to Republican Party officials, accounted for most of the estimated 400,000 new Republican voters in the state.

"Our agenda is to export this model," Mr. Allen said triumphantly. And to show that he means business, he announced that he is moving to Washington with the ACTV and the Christian Voice to head up their national drive to take over the Republican Party state by state.

"If the establishment really knew what is happening in the Christian community, they would be in abject shock. There is a groundswell building that hasn't even come close to cresting," Ray Allen declared.

Their goals and priorities are clear - they are determined to mobilize local conservative Christian fundamentalist coalitions to gain control of Republican Party organizations. If they succeed, and might they will if the rest of America remains ignorant/or apathetic of their strategies, we may live to see the emergence in the not distant future of a Christian Republican Party whose vision is the creation of a "Christian America."

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This book unmasks one of the major threats to American democracy - the covert as well as public efforts mounted by Fundamentalist preachers and ultra-conservative politicians to "Christianize" America.

It documents the alarming extent to which that Fundamentalist-ultraconservative campaign has begun to realize its Christianizing of America in the following crucial areas:



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- Politics - "Born-again" white Christians gave President Reagan 81% of their votes to 19% for Walter Mondale. They can be expected during the next four years to cash in on their credit cards with the White House on their "moral and social issues" - prayer in the public schools, access of religious groups to public school facilities, abortion, ERA, family values, an aggressively militaristic foreign and defense policy.

The focus of these campaigns will be on a national level - the U.S. Congress, the White House, the Supreme Court. Much less perceptible to the American people is their carefully-orchestrated strategy - described earlier in the "Texas Plan" - to "take over" state legislatures and municipal councils. The importance of these drives on state legislatures is that under President Reagan's "New Federalism," billions of dollars in block grants formerly allocated by Federal agencies, are now being spent by state legislatures. And as an old folk expression has it, "He who has the money ~~maxxxx~~ makes the judgment."

As Fundamentalist preachers and politicians proclaim in their journals to their constituents (to be documented in this book), what they are blocked from getting on the national level, they will try to get through political pressures ~~max~~ state-by-state. They are counting on the fact that most state legislatures are dominated by rural conservatives politicians whom Fundamentalists see as their natural allies in the recapture of America as a "Christian nation."

- Government - This book details their influence on President Reagan's Armageddon ideology and apocalyptic rhetoric which shapes his foreign and military policies, as well as his domestic church-state relations policies.

- The Courts - The Fundamentalist preachers/politicians coalition have gotten some 23 pieces of legislation introduced into the U.S. Congress calling for the limiting of the powers of the Supreme Court to decide on "social-moral" issues. They will mount a relentless campaign to assure that the next Supreme Court justices conform to their ideological views, as elaborated in the 1984 Republican Party platform

("anti-abortion" and "anti-ERA" are among the criteria.) What the courts will not give them, they plan to realize through political lobbying in the U.S. Congress.

The implications of court decisions and congressional legislation that weaken the First Amendment guarantees for church-state separation and individual liberties will be examined in terms of the potential erosion of America's religious and ethnic pluralism.

- Economics - The Fundamentalists are pressing for classic free enterprise policies, regardless of their destructive effects on the domestic poor, the homeless, the disabled, and the minorities. They also oppose generous foreign aid to the developing countries which have massive populations of hungry, diseased, and dying peoples.

- Education - The religious right is ~~pressing~~ already responsible for the three-fold increase since 1980 in book-banning and censorship in public schools and libraries across the nation. A network of Fundamentalist Christian organizations are seeking to break down the wall of separation of church and state through intensive advocacy of mandatory school prayers; access to public schools of proselytizing evangelical youth groups; the teaching of "creationism" and other sectarian religious doctrines in tax-supported public schools. They also seek to prohibit any form of sex education in the schools. This section documents each of these "crusades."

The Rev. Jerry Falwell, president of the Moral Majority, gave it away when he declared that he will work for an end to the public school system - "a hotbed of secular humanism" - and in its stead, seek to have American education dominated by "Christian private schools." Tuition-tax-credits are conceived of as a first step to realize that objective.

- The Media - A large Fundamentalist ~~network~~ grassroots network - mobilized by the "Coalition for Better Television" - carries out a vigorous boycott campaign against the major TV networks and their sponsors as a means of censoring broadcasts that they find objectionable. This section describes a number of case histories where Fundamentalist intimidation of the media has succeeded. It also examines the implications of these boycotts for the future of freedom of expression in the media.



The Electronic Church - While seeking to curtail the freedoms of the "secular humanist media," the Fundamentalist preachers have been actively building up their counter-media networks. There are now more than 950 Fundamentalist or Evangelical Christian broadcasters in the United States. Through their energetic promotions, electronic church media audiences grew from 9.8 million in 1970 to 22.5 million in 1978.

The annual income grossed by the Fundamentalist preachers is impressive: the Rev. Jerry Falwell (\$70 million), the Rev. Oral Roberts (\$60 million), the Rev. Pat Robertson (\$58 million), and the Rev. Jim Bakker (\$51). (Sources of figures will be cited.)

Since the emergence of the "Electronic Church" in the 1970s, Fundamentalist preachers have had access to millions of Americans to whom they address regularly their religious-political appeals and their vision of a "Christian America." No previous generation of Fundamentalist preachers have had access to such large sectors of the American population on a sustained basis, nor the availability of so many millions of dollars for political organizing purposes.

One of the consequences of this new Fundamentalist media phenomenon, is that they have virtually displaced ecumenical or religiously pluralistic TV programs from all the major networks.

This section will profile the Electronic Church and evaluate its impact on the religious pluralism of America.

-POPULAR CULTURE - The Fundamentalist ideology of a "Christian America" is subtly, creepingly pervading many layers of America's popular culture. In sports, there are numerous "Christian Athletes" groups on college campuses who have excluded Jews and some Catholics from playing on their football or basketball teams because they are not "born-again Christians." In business and commerce, "Christian Yellow Pages" have been published in many parts of the country, suggesting "Buy Born-Again Christian Only. These Christian Businessmen Can Be Trusted." There are networks of "Born-Again" Christian Businessmen's Leagues; Christian Lawyers' Guilds; Christian Physicians Groups; all of which are exclusivistic in their purposes.

It is one thing for religious, racial and ethnic groups



to come together to celebrate their distinctive religious or cultural heritage; it is altogether ~~another~~ another matter when groups assemble to demonstrate their religious or ethnic narcissism - namely, we are the superior community (the saved) and all those outside us are the inferior community ("the unsanctified" or "the damned".) That is the psychodynamic, as Dr. Erich Fromm has written, for the Balkanization of America.

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#### THE MYTHS OF A CHRISTIAN AMERICA

A clearcut ideological vision infuses this cluster of Fundamentalist strategies - political, social, educational, economic, cultural, and media. It is the widely-propagated notion that America is a "Christian nation."

That Fundamentalist conviction is composed of several interrelated convictions:

1) America is a Christian nation and has been so from its very beginnings;

2) Religious pluralism and tolerance are heretical deviations from that "sacred" history foisted on America by secular humanists;

3) When America was "truly" Christian in the good old days, it was a highly moral nation;

4) The Founding Fathers established American democracy as a "Christian Republic;"

5) The First Amendment - the separation of church and state - was composed by the Founding Fathers to enable Evangelical Christianity to flourish as the "Religion of the Republic."

This book contends that these Fundamentalist assertions are myths, a distortion of historic facts and truths. It argues that these ideological lies represent a massive assault on democratic pluralism. Every citizen has a stake in countering these "Big Lies" before they become established (with the unrelenting propaganda aid of the Electronic Church) and imperil the freedoms and tolerance of this still free and open society.

The second section of this book is devoted to demythologizing these Fundamentalist claims:

1) "America is a Christian nation" - This part describes the early history of America, from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1629, through the struggles for disestablishing churches from states, climaxed by the adoption of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. It documents from leading church and secular historians the fact that the only time America was a truly "Christian nation" was during the theocracy of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The colony lasted no more than 60 years, mainly because its established orthodox could not cope with toleration and dissent.

The established churches in nine of the thirteen colonies, which were based on European models, denied first-class citizenship to Catholics, Jews and others. The growth of the multiple religious ~~establishments~~ denominations and sects rendered the established churches unworkable and they were all disestablished by the early 19th century.

To describe ~~in~~ that period of fierce struggle to disestablish the churches from the states as a period of the triumph of "the Christian Republic" is to deceive the American people with a monumental falsehood.

2) "Religious pluralism is heretical" - It is one of the trenchant ironies of the present debate that it was the spiritual ancestors of the Rev. Jerry Falwell and those associated with him who launched the historic struggle to disestablish church from state and who forged the keystone doctrines of freedom of conscience and religious pluralism.

It was in Virginia - the home of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson - that evangelical Baptist preachers, Methodist circuit-riders, and dissident Presbyterians petitioned in the late 18th century the Virginia House of Burgesses (the State Legislature) to disestablish the Anglican Church and to permit religious liberty for all believers, not only Evangelicals.

Many of the Baptist farmer-preachers, the Methodists, and Presbyterians were beaten, harassed, or hung in their battle for religious freedom. They would have found the present Fundament-



alist drive to Christianize America through political blocs incomprehensible, and, I am persuaded, would have regarded Jerry Falwell's gospel for a reborn "Evangelical Empire" a betrayal of the central doctrines and ethos of the Baptist traditions in America. (The book will cite quotations from Roger Williams and many other Baptist churchmen on religious liberty and contrast their views with those of Falwell and his allies.)

3) "Christian America" was a moral nation - All major and recognized church historians - Drs. Martin Marty, Robert Handy, Sidney Ahlstrom, Sidney Mead, Winthrop Hudson, Timothy Smith, William Warren Sweet - concur in asserting that "the great majority of Americans in the eighteenth century were outside any church, and there was an overwhelming ~~air~~ indifference to religion."

Dr. William Warren Sweet wrote (Revivalism in America) that "taking the colonies as a whole, the ratio of church membership was one to 12." Dr. Robert R. Handy states, "No more than ten percent of Americans in 1800 were members of churches." (A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada.)

As a result of the vast labor

## CLOSING SECTION - RELIGION, SOCIETY, AND STATE

The final section of the book will examine the controversial issues that have emerged regarding the relationship of religion to state and society.

Citing historical, theological, and social ethics sources, the book will make the point that power, wielded in the name of God, is subject to special perversions. The only corrective for either religious fanaticism or the secular fanaticism of political religions, as Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out, "is an open society, as it has developed in the last three centuries, which grants no immunity from criticism or review to any authority proclaiming the truth, whether in the political, the religious or the scientific realm."

There will be an examination of the moral dilemma emerging out of the exercise of corporate power by religious institutions: ~~on~~ on the one hand, those committed to the prophetic tradition cannot escape the responsibility of moralizing power; on the other hand, they must resist all temptations to make a bid for direct power. The religious groups - Fundamentalist as well as Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish - should seek to make effective use of indirect methods of pressure, namely, motivation of the moral will and persuasion. Of ~~the~~ all the steady contributions which religion makes to American life, its creating a moral atmosphere and consciousness, within which social and political decisions are made, is more significant than that of supplying political proposals for these decisions. It is more a policy of religious institutions indirectly shaping a whole pattern of national thinking than of supplying precise doctrines.

It will be shown that mainstream Evangelical Christians pursued this path of consciousness-raising, transforming the individual attitudes and behavior rather than resort to the naked, direct use of political power. It is essential that we help all Americans understand that the ~~Moral Majority~~ Moral Majority is a radical deviation from the historic course of Evangelical Christianity and that its present trends constitute not only a betrayal of its own church but a genuine threat to the viability of a fragile democratic society.