

VT-297 Transcription

"The Moral Majority: Threat or Challenge." 1981.

JERRY FALWELL: Right living exalts a nation. Violating God's principles brings a nation to shame. And during the 1980s, we're asking God to help us to play just a little part in promoting Bible morality.

I'd rather be dead than red. They are taking people out of liberal churches. In my opinion that isn't a bad idea. We are putting them in Bible-believing, Christ-honoring churches, where the Bible is still preached in part.

So, too, at other contracts which have been made with the Soviet Union, though not all totally ratified at this time, threaten this nation with a permanent inferiority and places us at the mercy of a godless Communist enemy...

There are those who say, well, you preachers ought to get out of the politics business. And I think we can when the politicians get out of the moral business.

We spent about \$5,000 a minute for television time each week, about \$300,000 a week. In radio, we spend many

thousands of dollars every week. And with the inflationary spiral as it is, I don't see any relief in sight.

The business interests of America have not been that greatly supported by governments of late. If any part of our society has been trodden upon, it is the business community in the last few years, and God knows we need to get government off of the back of business.

But I do believe that America has got to stay free, must stay strong. Because if we go down the tubes, the free world goes with us.

HOWARD REED: The Moral Majority: threat or challenge?

RICHARD NEWHAUS: The religiously Right, Christian Voice, Religious Roundtable, Moral Majority, others, are both a threat and challenge. And to the degree that we don't take the challenge seriously, it will be more threat.

JOSEPH O'HARE: My fear about the new Religious Right is not just that it's bad politics or dangerous for politics. I think it's also bad religion.

PAUL MOORE: It seems to me that most of the things that this group is disturbed about are in the areas of personal morality, very important. Sexual morality and the rest, but very little concern about corporate morality, equal rights,

social programs, survival of the cities. They blame the so-called...

REED: The New Right and its evangelical components: a new and powerful influence on the American scene. It is referred to generally by the name of its most prominent force: the Moral Majority, led by Rev. Jerry Falwell. Is it a threat or a challenge? Four leading theologians met recently to examine this question in a panel before an audience in St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York. Highlights of their discussion are brought to you by NBC News and the United States Catholic Conference. The moderator, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee.

MARC TANENBAUM: Clearly, the issue of the Moral Majority, the entire phenomenon that it represents, has probably stirred more anxiety, in some places even hysteria, certainly in many places concern, than almost any other issue in recent history. At the other end of the response to it, and in some ways that it's its own version of either hysteria or repressed anxiety, before I came here tonight, one of the members of our organization was at our board meeting, had gone out earlier in the day knowing that we were going to meet, and had this made. "God Save Us from the Moral Majority." On the back side, I think it says,

"Onward, Judeo-Christian Soldiers." We are, this evening, in probing this tip of the iceberg which the Moral Majority represents, in fact, beginning to look at the beginning of an enormous process in American life, namely, the emergence -- which really began at the end of World War II, and is now peaking -- the emergence of a major historic development in American life, namely the entry into the mainstream of American life, politics, economics, sociology, education, and religion, of 40-50,000,000 evangelical Christians who have undergone an extraordinary transformation over the past decade. They are bidding to enter into the mainstream of American life in many ways, in a manner not unlike that in which the Roman Catholic community in 1960 began to emerge from the margins of the mainstream of American life, as symbolized and ratified by the election of President John F. Kennedy. And I would recall to your memories that much of the anxiety, then fears, that we are talking about today, in many ways, attending the movement of Roman Catholics into the mainstream. You may recall that the late President John F. Kennedy was compelled, on the eve of his election, to go to Houston to meet a group of Southern Baptist pastors to assure them that if he becomes president of the United States, that the pope would not move into the White House

the next day. And in fact, one of his ways of assuring them was with his graceful humor, to say to them, "And I want you Southern Baptist pastors to know that if and when I am elected, the first telegram I will send will be one to the pope in Vatican City saying, 'Unpack your bags.'" I want to take the privilege of calling first on a longtime dear friend, one of the major personalities in the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, whom I had the privilege to be associated with in a number of efforts. Bishop Paul Moore, the presiding bishop of the diocese of the Episcopal Church of New York City. Bishop Moore.

MOORE: Thank you, Marc. It is good to be here, because I really think that this is one of the very most important issues. As Marc has already said, this seems to me beyond the particularities of the government cutback on social issues. Foreign policy, which many of us are quite frightened about, which the Moral Majority seems to be behind, militarism and so on, it is a spirit which now seems to be invading our capital. And this new spirit is being clothed by a religious respectability which is generically called by those of us outside the movement, at least, the Moral Majority. I'm not enough of a detailed student of the movement to be able to distinguish between the particular groups within it. So if I say "Moral

Majority" tonight, I am talking in broad terms, not in specific terms about that particular group that calls itself that.

Some of us have been fighting various battles for a long, long time, or so it seems. And in the last ten years since the end of the '60s and the disintegration of the Civil Rights Movement and the peace movement, we have found ourselves in disarray. There has seemed to be a lack of energy, a lack of clear issues around which to rally, a lack of viable organizations with which to coalesce. So we have been in disarray, the old New Deal coalitions having disintegrated. The new coalitions beginning to form -- I've never heard about so darn many coalitions in my life. I get a letter every morning about a new coalition. If we spent all our times coalescing, we wouldn't have time to do anything else. But nonetheless, I think the disarray is beginning to mend, and some of us are so disturbed that we are really taking it more seriously than for almost ten years we have, even though the issues were there. So we can be indebted to the so-called Moral Majority and to the Reagan administration for waking us up and hopefully giving us some new energy, which we seem to have lost.

One thing I think about these coalitions is that we have to agree to disagree on some issues, so that we can be shoulder to shoulder on others. I have to agree to disagree courteously with many of my Roman Catholic brothers and sisters about issues like abortion, freedom of choice, birth control; but on the other hand, am I grateful for the courage, united stand the Roman Catholic bishops have made on El Salvador. And so, let's not worry so much about what we disagree about, but get together on those issues that we do agree about. Because at stake here seems to me the survival of millions of poor people in our land who even presently are on the edge of starvation of body, hand, and spirit. Certainly the survival of the cities of the Northeast and Middle West. Possibly the survival of the world, and certainly the survival of the health and spirit of America as I understand it, and as I love it. Tonight's not the first time I have been with Jewish persons, and Roman Catholic persons, over and against some Protestant persons. I remember in the good old days, as they seem now, the early Civil Rights Movement, I'd go to a meeting in Jersey City, and everybody there would be black except for me and some Jews. And one Jesuit, one Jesuit. I'm always grateful to the Jesuits. And so we are here together again, crossing religious lines for, I think, a deeper religious

principle. We are here tonight to sift, somewhat, the issues behind the so-called Moral Majority, to understand it. To use generalities, there's sort of a selective Bible-quoting fundamentalism, and some part of a flag-waving, militaristic patriotism. They say that America is in deep trouble because of our moral decadence. I would agree, but perhaps my definition of moral decadence would be slightly different. It seems to me that most of the things that this group is disturbed about are in the areas of personal morality, very important. Sexual morality and the rest, but very little concern about corporate morality, equal rights, social programs, survival of the cities. They blame the so-called secular humanism for the fight that we find ourselves in.

But perhaps the thing that disturbs me the most is this resurgence in militarism in our foreign policy, epitomized by the Secretary of State, but seemingly supported by the so-called Moral Majority. I used to worry about John Foster Dulles. Remember that wonderful joke about John Foster Dulles? "Don't just run around; stand there," they would say to John Foster Dulles. He was certainly a religiously motivated man, who was in his day a very dangerous man, but

I don't think nearly as dangerous as some of our present leaders.

Secondly, the Moral Majority seems to see the world divided into two warring camps: on the one hand, the United States and the so-called "free world," and on the other hand, the Communist bloc. A rather simplistic vision. I am more inclined -- and this is no new idea, God knows, to this congregation or audience -- to see the world divided between the North and the South, the nations that more or less have, and the nations that have not. And to see the world not divided in any simplistic division of ideologies, but in a very complicated and complex webbing of material success, nationalistic passion, religious faith, ever-changing relationships, starvation and prosperity, oppression, and revolt. Third World, First and Second World: these things are not clear; they're moving all the time. And if our foreign policy doesn't see that, but rather sees it in old Cold War terms, we are in deep danger, so it seems to me.

I guess I disagree with most of what the Moral Majority says. But at least what I understand they stand for is not what I stand for as a Christian and as a Bible person. I do

not believe we can use isolated texts, but we must take the whole Bible as our criterion for behavior and our posture in the world. The Old Testament sense of justice, and the New Testament continuation of that sense of justice and the personal concern for the poor epitomized in Jesus Christ. Whenever a particular text disagrees with the overall message, then you are in trouble. Secondly, I do not think, as some of them have been quoted as saying, that any nation is ever rewarded in material terms for being a good Christian nation. And I think that the Old Testament could give some texts against that one. I also feel, to go back to foreign policy for a moment, that even before the coming on of our present administration, that the Carter administration was also at fault, but the new administration much more so, in seeing foreign policy in such primarily military terms. Have we not learned from Vietnam, have we not learned from Iran, that long-range security -- quite apart from morality -- long-range security for the United States of America and the so-called free world, cannot ever depend upon the arming of repressive nations. It never has worked, and it never will work. Long-range security will depend upon the respect with which the Third World holds us as people. That respect will be gained by economic aid, and not by military aid; by a

consistent standing up for human rights, and by the kind of nation conducting its inner affairs, which they would seek to emulate and admire. This is where our ultimate security (inaudible), not in military arms. And I think this is another point where I would disagree with our Moral Majority people.

But lest our criticizing of their political activism should undercut our own, let me say that there's no question in my mind, now or ever, that religious persons of the Jewish/Christian tradition must be active, and vigorous, in the concerns of social justice. We cannot love our neighbor individually alone. We have to continue to work for justice and for peace. But I do take issue that the church should not back a particular candidate, or [zap?] a particular candidate, nor back a particular party or be against a particular party, but rather come out on the issue. Some of our people may think that one candidate is better than another in carrying out our ideals. That is their prerogative. So I, in my own life, have always made it a rule of thumb officially never to come out behind a particular candidate, or against a particular candidate, or a particular party. However, the attacking of the liberal senators during the last campaign is something that I think

was done with at least some of the Moral Majority's consent, and I felt that was rather over the line, in terms of religious and social activism, and indeed was a use of religious funds for political ends in a way which I think is not good, not the way it should be.

Some people say that this so-called conservatism is a healthy swing of the pendulum back from the '60s. But let's examine this word "conservative" a little more carefully. Historically, the Catholic churches, most of the Protestant denominations, and the mainstream of Judaism in the United States have been involved in social and political life. But up until now, very recently, the evangelicals have been more concerned with saving individual souls from the world than of trying to be an instrument of redemption of the world. Now there's been this sudden switch, and the evangelicals, calling themselves conservatives, have come on with great strength. Apparently there are 25,000,000 of them, 137,000 clergy. Who would have thought? My goodness. They apparently can get 200,000 pieces of mail on a given congressman's desk on a particular issue within two weeks. That is a lot of strength that has been put together in two years. And frankly, it frightens me. The so-called which they embrace seems to me to put together chauvinism and

fundamentalism, which has been a devil's mix down through history.

What is a true conservatism of an American citizen, or of a mainstream Christian or Jew, from our point of view? A true biblical conservatism throws us into the arms of the prophets, who constantly speak of freedom, justice, and peace, and concern for the poor. True political conservatism should throw us into the arms of the Founding Fathers, our national scripture of the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, and even the pledge of allegiance to the flag, with liberty and justice for all. In this country, we preserve the sparse liturgy of our national life. The inauguration of a president, and the national holidays of Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, and Independence Day, and throughout all of these national liturgies, these national celebrations, run the themes of a democratic polity from the nation founded upon the concept of freedom, and justice, and equal opportunity. I want to recapture the flag. You know that old game we played as children, "capture the flag"? They've got it. [How do we?] get it back? I happen to love the flag. I'll never forget a moment in my life when I was in the Marine Corps in Guadalcanal, going to the front lines,

and passing the flag flying over Henderson Field, the enormous emotions felt of passionate love for what that flag stood for. I don't want to give that away. I am deeply patriotic. I believe in what the flag stands for, and I hate to see a travesty on those beliefs cloaked in, as they call it, Old Glory. These symbols, these words, these frail bits of cloth concern our faith and the principles upon which our nation was founded. True conservatism, and the preservation of such principles and such structures, has allowed the pluralistic life of our nation and of our church, to flow free and unhindered to the glory of God and love for all his people. This is not the kind of conservatism, however, which I find in the New Right. Thank you.

TANENBAUM: Father O'Hare is the editor of the distinguished magazine of the Jesuit community of America, this publication, which has probably one of the longest records of thoughtful and reasoned discourse over the most pressing issues facing American society on every level of politics and economics, social concerns, as well as profound spiritual statements from a Catholic point of view. Father O'Hare's editorials I would commend to your attention as a cameo of reason, and civility, and thoughtfulness. And if I speak much longer, I would have to tell you what the

subscription rate is for the annual purchase of this magazine. It's a very great privilege to present to you Father Joseph O'Hare.

O'HARE: Thank you very much, Rabbi Tanenbaum. I had brought this particular issue of *America*, ostensibly because it has an article on the New Right by Monsignor George Higgins, longtime spokesman on social issues for the American Catholic Bishops. That was the ostensible reason. Actually, what I hoped to weigh you before you once or twice in a discreet fashion and tell you about the subscription rate. But I was very happy I didn't have to make such a gesture, since Marc anticipated it.

TANENBAUM: How much is it? (laughter)

O'HARE: I'm glad you should ask. (laughter)

TANENBAUM: (inaudible)

O'HARE: I would like to thank the American Jewish Committee for sponsoring this meeting. It's also being sponsored by the (inaudible) ecumenical commission of the New York Roman Catholic archdiocese. Tonight, at St. Patrick's Cathedral, they are having a special liturgy commemorating the assassination of Archbishop Romero of San Salvador a year ago. Shortly before coming over here, I had the opportunity of talking at some length with one of our houseguests, who is the superior of the Jesuits in Central America, and is

resident a good bit of the time in El Salvador. And as a mark of the difference in our two societies, and as a reminder of how real religious persecution can become, sometime I think our fears of religious persecution in this country might become a little fanciful and a little overheated. We asked him whether he would be one of the principal celebrants at this liturgy at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and he said, "Well, Cardinal Cook asked me, but I would prefer not, because I don't want my picture taken at any of these liturgies, because this would be dangerous when I would return to El Salvador." So I think that that's a disturbing, and yet in a way salutary reminder to us of the difference in the conditions of religious freedom in this country, and in other, less fortunate societies in the world.

Well, the first observation that I would make about the Moral Majority might be cautionary. I think there is a great danger in exaggerating the significance, or more precisely perhaps in exaggerating the danger that the Moral Majority poses to American political process, and more particularly to the relationship between religion and politics in American society. I think, for example, that some of ads -- the counter-ad put out by the American Civil

Liberties Union, are a little overheated. That's the ad where you have that hulk of a figure in the background that's supposed to be the Moral Majority, the beast lurching towards Bethlehem. I think at this stage of the game, that is exaggerated, and can be a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. If we inflate the importance of these people, we are making them more of a danger than they really are, perhaps.

I commend to you what I have found to be a very formidable article in another distinguished publication, I think with some relationship to some of the people here tonight. The article by Seymour Lipset and Earl [Ravenal?] in the current issue of *Commentary* on "The Election and the evangelicals," in which, with sociological data, the two authors confirm what had been a suspicion of mine from the beginning, that it is quite premature to attribute the decisive conservative victory last November to any particular political influence of the evangelicals, or of the Moral Majority. And I should say right at the start that I join Bishop Moore in this disclaimer. I think we will be using the term "Moral Majority" this evening in a rather broad sense. This, perhaps, is unfair to the specific organization that is called the Moral Majority,

headed by Jerry Falwell. But in another sense, perhaps there is some legitimacy. Certainly the name has been used as a convenient rubric to cover a wide variety of groups for the new Religious Right. And the question behind that is, to what extent are these issues of personal morality, these concerns about family values, to what extent have they exploited these issues of personal morality?

Let me quote from Paul Weyrich, one of the most important organizers of the new political Right. He said, "The New Right is looking for issues that people care about, and social issues, at least for the present, fit the bill. We talk about issues that people care about, like gun control, abortion, taxes, and crime. Yes, they're emotional issues. That's better than talking about capital formation. But we may not be quite so comfortable with some of the issues on the hidden agenda of the new political Right, which seized on these family issues and the legitimate resentment or indignation behind them, to bring these groups into a larger political coalition whose objectives might include some things we would not be so comfortable about. This was the burden, in particular, of George Higgins's article that we published some months ago, because he feared that Catholic opposition to abortion, pro-life groups sponsored

by Catholic personalities, that they perhaps too quickly associated themselves with other groups whose positions on social issues would be quite at variance with the tradition of the Catholic community.

I recognize -- so my first word, then, is a word of caution, that we should not engage in a self-fulfilling prophecy of too quickly inflating the importance, the political significance, of the new Religious Right. I recognize that, in a sense, the defeat of those liberal senators like Frank Church and George McGovern is more significant in assessing the power of the New Right than the victory of Ronald Reagan. But I think even those defeats cannot be clearly ascribed to the influence of the new Religious Right.

I think there's a danger, too, in overreacting too prematurely to the Moral Majority, that we would fail to recognize the very legitimate grievances that have given birth to the movement. I think that a number of the things -- I think first of all, a lot of people in this country showed in the last election that they were angry about a number of issues. And I think they have a reason to be angry about certain issues. The danger, I think, in the new

Religious Right is that legitimate moral indignation can sour into a kind of resentment, and resentment is a different -- it's an emotion of a different quality than indignation, and it can have very negative and destructive effects in the political debate in a pluralistic society.

I think, though, that the phenomenon represented by the Moral Majority is an important one and an interesting one, even if its dangers perhaps have been exaggerated. It's interesting because it forces us to review the proper relationship between religion and politics in a pluralistic society like the United States. I assume that we all recognize that as legitimate and even necessary that religious beliefs inform our consciences concerning political and social questions. There are aspects, though, of the way this relationship of religious beliefs and political decision, the way this relationship is embodied in the new Religious Right, that I find quite disturbing. Let me just mention two.

The first is the practice of clustering a series of different issues together as the moral, or even more precisely, Christian agenda for America. In fairness to Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority, Inc., their issues,

according to their own self-description, concentrate on issues of family and personal morality. They do not take a position, for example, on the Panama Canal Treaty or the recognition of Taiwan. But in other groups within the new Religious Right, we see a whole series of issues, funding of the MX missile, gay rights, the traditional family unit, relationship with Taiwan, the Panama Canal Treaty, all of these lumped together, and individual legislators rated according to a Christian report card of the Christian -- I think this was the advice of the Christian voice. Now, I think many of these issues have no logical connection. I happen to be opposed to the kind of militarism that Bishop Moore warned about, but I also happen -- and therefore I am opposed to the so-called Christian -- that item on the Christian agenda. But I mean also opposed to permissive abortion and the development of the abortion industry in this country, which puts me on the side of -- so I would score on those two issues, I am 50% a Christian, according to that way of looking at a Christian agenda. Not only is there no necessary logical connection among these issues, there is no authoritative Christian judgment that binds them all together.

Now, a second problem, a second source of misgiving, follows from this. On many issues, informed citizens who share the same religious convictions can come to different conclusions. Just to cite two of the more prominent of my co-religionists, Robert Drinan, erstwhile member of Congress, and William F. Buckley, I think it's safe to say that on almost no issue in the public debate today would Bob Drinan and Bill Buckley agree. But I don't think -- at least I hope not -- I don't think either one of them would accuse the other of being a lapsed Catholic because they disagreed on something like the Equal Rights Amendment, or even federal funding for abortion. And I think that the tendency to label those who disagree with us, by implication at least, immoral, or even un-Christian, is a very, very dangerous tendency, and does distort the way religious convictions should inform the necessary public debate about public morality in the United States.

And that, I think, would be the convergence of these two problems on what is, I think, the most serious danger of the Moral Majority, or the new Religious Right, and that is the assault that can be made -- implicitly at times, sometimes quite explicitly -- on the very conditions of possibility for a public debate about public morality in a

pluralistic society. Now, pluralism does not mean a sort of bland, watery soup where we try to arrive at the least common denominator, that which would be inoffensive to all. In this regard, I think of a remark that one of my professors, Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray made one day back in the late '50s, when he returned from a discussion on prayer in public schools, an issue very dear to the hearts of the new Religious Right. Father Murray had participated in the classic ecumenical discussion, the point of which was to devise a prayer that could possibly be acceptable to all the different religious groups in the Baltimore public schools. And he came back somewhat wearied by it all, and he, "Oh, I told them, gentleman, perhaps they could begin, 'To whom it may concern.'"

TANENBAUM: Did God hear his prayer?

O'HARE: The -- he found the line was busy.

TANENBAUM: He was talking to a rabbi.

O'HARE: So I don't think pluralism means this kind of bland dishwater. I think it does mean, though, an acceptance, as a fundamental principle, that there is a distinction between morality and legality, that everything that I believe immoral should not necessarily be also declared illegal. I think in framing legislation in a pluralistic society, you have to take into account social realities as

well as religious beliefs, as well as the different religious beliefs of other communities. And it's not quite so simple as taking one vision of morality and embodying it in specific legislation.

I also think that pluralism means that the virtue of civility in no way contradicts a passionate commitment to one's own particular tradition. Tolerance, in other words, I think remains a civic virtue, even if it might be a religious liability. You know, G. K. Chesterton had little respect for the virtue of tolerance. He said it's the quality of someone who doesn't believe in anything. And I think my own -- Father Robert [Eigann?], a distinguished Jesuit who used to give a lot of talks in this town, he said, "Tolerance is" -- what did he say -- "it's the uncomfortable, [inhabitable?] house between hatred and love." So it is true that tolerance can be confused with indifferentism. I don't think that is necessarily the case, too. I think one can be passionately committed to civility.

And I think, in fact, if we are going to engage in a debate about public morality in the United States, we have to have men and women who are very much in their own tradition, very much committed not to some bland, all-purpose deity,

but to the God, the living God of their own revealed religion, but then they also have to bring that kind of conviction into the public debate, but bring with it also the essential virtue of civility, of respect for the beliefs of others. Balancing religious commitment and civil tolerance can sometimes be a tricky business. But I think it's one of the skills that's necessary for the art of citizenship, and I think it's a very, very important value that the Moral Majority does not understand, and does not respect, to our own detriment, I think. Thank you very much.

TANENBAUM: Thank you, Father O'Hare. Our wind-up pitcher this evening is Pastor Richard Neuhaus, who has been a longtime friend and colleague, and many social justice concerns, human rights concerns over many years. He served for a time as editor of *Worldview* magazine, a major publication dealing with religious perspectives on international affairs. And he is presently the editor of the *Lutheran Forum*. And it's a great personal pleasure to present to you Pastor Richard Neuhaus.

NEUHAUS: Thank you, Marc. The title on the brochure tonight said "Major Majority: Threat or Challenge?", question mark. And the gist of what I'm saying is that the Religious New Right, Christian Voice, Religious Roundtable, Moral

Majority, others, are both threat and challenge. And to the degree that we don't take the challenge seriously, it will be more threat. So I want to emphasize in my remarks the challenge part of it.

Now, I think the Religious New Right represents a very deep and long-term change in American culture, and religion, and politics, for better and for worse. Moral Majority, as an organization, Religious Roundtable as an organization, they may not be around five years from now. That's quite possible. Jerry Falwell may not be around five years, seven years from now. But I do believe that what they represent is going to be with us for a very, very long time, indeed.

To date, the reaction to the Religious New Right has, I think, been very disappointing and probably self-defeating. There's been a lot of mutual name-calling. One side screams "secular humanist" and the other side screams "bigoted reactionary." And one side screams "communist" and the opposition returns the favor by calling them fascists. And it doesn't get us anywhere. If they're reactionaries, then I would say that liberals who are simply reacting to their reaction are reactionaries twice over. It's very complex.

They are not yahoos, and rednecks, and Ku Kluxers, and Neo-

Nazis. We blind ourselves by the caricatures that we use in order to dismiss them. I am convinced that the leadership of the Religious New Right is, for the most part, sincere, and therefore perhaps more intimidating, very shrewd, and utterly convinced of the need and the possibility to correct what they view as the moral rot of American life. The secular media and a lot of the religious media sniff around the Jerry Falwells and the Jim Robertsons and so forth, trying to find out if they can't confirm, once again, the Elmer Gantry syndrome. That's the only way they can think about these rednecks from the South, these fundies. And so they have all kinds of investigative reporters out there, hoping they're going to find Jerry Falwell, you know, sleeping around with little girls, preferably little boys. Preferably little black boys, on whom he's indulging masses of embezzled funds, and so forth. No, no, these are people of impressive and sometimes insufferable moral rectitude. They're not going to go down by the Elmer Gantry syndrome.

They are people who, as has been suggested, whether they've ever heard the word, or know the history of populism in American political life, they have picked up on many of its dynamics and are very self-consciously exploiting deep-

seated resentments among millions and millions of Americans. They and their followers believe that in the past, they have been excluded from, and despised by, the leadership elites of America. And you know why they feel that way, is because, in general, they have been excluded and despised. It is necessary, I think, to understand a little bit of the history of fundamentalism in America to know how, in the 1920s particularly, the fundamentalists were drummed out, with great scorn and ridicule, from the respectable circles of American cultural and religious life. What has happened now is that certain developments over the last 50 years, and particularly since the Second World War, among evangelicals and fundamentalists, and how those two worlds go together -- which is a very complex subject in itself -- developments there, theological, cultural, and otherwise, combined with the mushrooming of the electronic church, as it is called, have met up with the New Right in politics. And they have discovered a marriage which they believe to be of enormous mutual advantage, and which, I think, they have already been thoroughly vindicated in believing that they were right. They are convinced that this is their moment, this is their time in American life.

The Moral Majority, as you know, defines its platform basically with four positions: pro-life, pro-family, pro-morality, pro-America. I'm sure there is nobody here who want to say they disagree with any of those. Jerry Falwell has said many times, on a majority of the issues, a majority of the American people is with us. I think he is probably right, and thinking about this phenomenon requires that we very soberly begin there. In the past two decades, liberals have made the enormous mistake of letting the so-called social issues, which the New Right loves to exploit, and letting the juices of patriotism gravitate to the reactionary Right. Paul Moore touched on this; we remember the time in the '60s when simply to wear an American flag on one's lapel was to identify oneself with a rather small and frequently far-right part of the American political spectrum. And we remember the ways in which the quest for social justice in the Civil Rights Movement, and for peace in Vietnam, got bogged down in the convulsions of the counterculture of the late '60s, in which in the liberal consciousness, the trial of the Chicago Seven in '68, '69 was permitted to upstage the continuing trials of the poor in America, and liberalism was largely discredited.

The conflict that we are facing now is not between the Moral Majority and the immoral minority. We are witnessing, rather, a conflict of moralities, of quite different moralities, different ways of putting the world together, in terms of right and wrong. In view of the minority of people who think through any questions in a very coherent, systematic way, what we are facing is a conflict of moral minorities. Tim LaHaye, who is a president of Christian Heritage College out in California and a prominent leader of the New Right, says, "85% of the people go along with the tide, and it's our purpose to set the direction of the tide." That's a pretty cynical, elitist statement for someone who pictures himself as a representative of the little people, and a populist leader. But there's a lot of truth to that. It's a conflict of moral minorities. The Religious New Right and its allies seem to me to be threatening in a number of different ways. Let me give you basically six brief statements.

It is superficial, generally, in its analysis of what is wrong with society. God knows there's a lot that's wrong, but it focuses on the symptoms of moral degeneracy, condemns them vigorously, but its causes, the causes of

this degeneracy in a materialistic and individualistic society, are seldom traced.

Secondly, the Religious New Right fails -- as a generality, fails to understand how problems must be solved in a pluralistic society. It is impatient of compromise. It is indifferent to the need for a public argument, a public way of carrying on public discourse, that does not depend upon everybody subscribing to the same ultimate norms, or subscribing to the same way, in this case, of reading the Christian epic.

Third, it lacks a prophetic backbone. It's gutless in one very key way: its issues are all safe, middle class issues that threaten neither the pocketbook, nor the lifestyle, of the people to whom it appeals. It panders, in short.

Fourthly, it violates a fundamental part of the Judeo-Christian ethic, by showing no believable concern for the poor and the socially marginal, and the role that they have in the divine economy.

Fifth, the Religious New Right is hostile to the legitimate determination of women to play a larger leadership role in

church and society, often outrageous in its attitudes on this score, and it's an issue on which I confess I feel very strongly. At the same time, the Religious New Right is obsessively, almost hysterically, negative about homosexuality and about other departures from what it believes is a divinely ordained normality.

Six, it promotes a narrow nationalism. It comes very, very close at times to identifying America's national interests with the purpose of God in the world.

Having said that, let me say that there are some things about it that are rather encouraging. First of all, the Religious New Right represents a recovery of social concern among fundamentalist Christians. For years and years, liberals have been blasting fundamentalists for lacking social concern. We should now welcome this changing, instead of engaging in a lot of self-serving talk, which some people have, I'm afraid, about their violating the separation of church and state.

Secondly, the Religious New Right represents a Christian confidence that God is indeed at work in the world, and that the church must combat social sins as well as personal

sins. I think that's a very important shift. They do focus on systemic, social, structural evils. We may disagree with their analysis, but the point is that they take them on.

Thirdly, the Religious New Right recognizes that Western culture is indeed in a state of moral decline. And anybody who doesn't recognize that, who doesn't see that the basic points of reference by which life is ordered, morally, that these basic points of reference are collapsing all around us, I think is looking at a quite different Western world than the one I read about and experience every day.

Fourthly, the Religious New Right emphasizes that the Jewish people and the state of Israel have a particular, a most particular, and a most powerful claim upon Christian conscience.

Fifth, the Religious New Right alerts us to the fact that this nation, and all nations, are ultimately accountable to God. As odd as it may seem, let me suggest to you that there are similarities between Jerry Falwell and Martin Luther King, Jr. Their analysis of what was wrong with America could hardly be more different. Their prescription as to what needs to be done to correct it could hardly be

more different. But there's one thing that they're doing. That is, just as Dr. King did, Jerry Falwell is moving into this, what I call, naked public square, this public space that has been bereft of religious symbolism, and is insisting that a religiously based, moral, transcendent referent be brought to bear upon the shaping of public life. Dr. King used to say very often, "Whom you would change, you must first love. Whom you would change, you must first love." Millions of Americans out there believe that liberals are basically contemptuous of them and of their values. And those millions of Americans are painfully close to the truth. We will have the chance again to lead in changing America when we convince the American people that we love them, that we share their noblest aspirations. And when that happens, then we will not be called upon to surrender to the Radical Right. But we, like Dr. King, will be able to dream a more persuasive dream for America. And at that point the present squatters in the public square, so to speak, will be forced to let us back into the game of defining what America is all about. Thank you.

TANENBAUM: We are grateful to each of you for those excellent presentations. I want to bridge over to a question to Father O'Hare. Last October the 8th, Reverend Jerry Falwell came to visit me, and we had an extended

discussion on all of the important things that we talked about here today. During the course of our conversation, it also became clear that there is a very real intention on the part of leadership in the New Right evangelicals, who are approaching traditionalist Roman Catholics in the right to life movement, inviting them to form a new ecumenical movement around those personal issues, family issues, as well as Orthodox traditional Jews, an effort to create an alliance. Is that a matter of concern to you, Joe?

O'HARE: Yes, Marc, I think that that is -- as someone has pointed out, back in the early days of the ecumenical movements, you generally had what could be called the liberal wings of the denominations meeting. It was only your liberal Catholic who was going off and chatting with your liberal Lutheran. But now, part of this phenomenon of the New Religious Right is a kind of right-wing ecumenism, where people are, as Marc says, finding a certain sympathy, in a concern that I would recognize as genuine, on -- for the issues of family life. I think that part of the difficulty, from a Catholic viewpoint, is that our -- what I understand to be the Catholic tradition on social ethics includes support for a number of issues that aren't so neatly put together in terms of the New Religious Right. We would -- the Catholic commitment to the unborn is clearly

on the record, but so is the -- but less, perhaps, recognized is also the growing consensus in the Catholic community against capital punishment. The American bishops have been very strong on both. A whole series of Catholic issues, and concerning what both Richard Neuhaus and Bishop Moore have alluded to, as a kind of a narrow nationalism, the jingoistic concerns of the New Religious Right, run completely counter to something that is very Catholic, and that's the sense of our international -- of the international community, the Catholic fraternity of the peoples of the world. My fear about the New Religious Right is not just that it's bad politics, or dangerous politics. I think it's also bad religion.

_: Yeah, right, right.

O'HARE: I think that, you know, the wrong kind of theist is, in some ways, more a danger to authentic religion than the passionate atheist.

TANENBAUM: I want to thank our panelists, who, I think, have given us more light than the usual heat that comes in these discussions. Thank you, and God bless you.

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