

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY
(How the Religious Right Hi-jacked the Republican Party)

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Introduction.

For 40 years – from 1941 to 1981 - the Democratic Party controlled both houses of the Congress. In 1981, the Republican Party captured a majority of seats in the Senate. Fourteen years later, in 1995, the Republicans gained a majority in the House as well. To a large extent, the modern success of the Republican Party has been due to the efforts of the Religious Right. This has been a phenomenal achievement, with profound impact on the political agenda of our Nation. The Republican -dominated Congress and this present Administration have adopted much of the rhetoric and many of the objectives of the Religious Right.

Bill Moyers, speaking before a group at the Union Theological Seminary in September of 2005, said the following:

“True, people of faith have always tried to bring their interpretations of the Bible to bear on American laws and morals... But what is unique today is that the radical religious right has succeeded in taking over one of America’s great political parties. The Country is not yet a theocracy but the Republican Party is; and they are driving American politics, using God as a battering ram on almost every issue: crime and punishment, foreign policy health care, taxation, energy regulation, social services and so on.”

George W. Bush is also deeply indebted to the Religious Right. In an article in the New York Times from July 16, 2004, Jerry Falwell was quoted as saying: “It is the responsibility of ...every evangelical Christian...to get serious about re-electing President Bush.” How effective the Religious Right was in President Bush’s election in 2004 is problematic. Exit polls recorded that 22% of American voters said that “moral issues” were the most important thing in the election, which meant that 78% of American voters were more concerned about other issues, such as “terrorism” (19%) or Iraq (15%).¹ Wherever the truth may lie, vocal members of the Religious Right claimed responsibility for the victory. Rev. Bob Jones, President of Bob Jones University, for example, sent a letter to President Bush to remind him of what the election meant. He wrote:

“In your re-election, God has graciously granted America – though she doesn't deserve it – a reprieve from the agenda of paganism. You have been given a mandate... You owe the liberals nothing. They despise you because they despise your Christ. ... Undoubtedly, you will have opportunity to appoint many conservative judges and exercise forceful leadership with

¹ Altnet website. www.altnet.org/election04/20853/

the Congress in passing legislation that is defined by biblical norm regarding the family, sexuality, sanctity of life, religious freedom, freedom of speech, and limited government."²

Many Americans, not only liberal democrats, but conservative Republicans as well, are troubled by the political and religious polarization in this Country and bewildered by how it came about.

The questions which I would like to consider in this paper are: First, what is the "Religious Right"? What are their avowed goals? How did they accomplish the takeover of the Republican Party and, consequently, the political agenda of the Country? And finally, what is the likelihood of them increasing their influence over the governing institutions of this Country in the future?

The Religious Right and Its Antecedents.

The Religious Right is a general coalition of organized political activist groups that use religious premises and rhetoric. These groups are predominantly Christian, fundamentalist, evangelical, conservative and Republican. Fundamentalism, the dominant characteristic of the Religious Right, connotes a belief in the inerrancy of the bible and its literal interpretation as the revealed word of God. A majority of fundamentalists also embrace "millennialism," which is a belief in the physical return of Christ to establish a 1,000 year earthly reign. Closely related to millennialism is another doctrinal belief called "dominionism". Essentially, dominionism revolves around the idea that Christians, and Christians alone, are Biblically mandated to occupy all secular positions until Christ returns to earth for his 1000 year reign.

Fundamentalist Christianity in this Country has deep roots. Historians have traced the strong nationalism and political activism of these groups back to the Puritans of the 1600's. The nationalist heraldry of the yellow ribbon in America today, ubiquitously appearing on the backs of cars and vans, harkens back to the sashes worn by Oliver Cromwell's puritan army that he led into battle against the forces of King Charles I of England in the 1640's.

"Evangelism" has had different meanings at different times. At one time, it simply meant *Protestant*, as opposed to *Roman Catholic*. Modern Evangelicals are marked by an emphasis on proselytism, a personal experience of conversion, a biblically-oriented faith, and a belief in the relevance of Christian religion to cultural issues. Within evangelicalism, there are two major camps: Those denominations that do not stress a literal interpretation of the Bible, and the "literalists," who do. The literalists themselves subdivide into two major groups: the Fundamentalists and the Pentecostals. Both groups emphasize the relevance of the Bible to life's issues. One branch of Fundamentalism, which

² Ibid.

is historically associated with the Baptist Church, teaches that the ability to work miracles and speak “in tongues” ended in New Testament times. Pentecostals on the other hand, believe that the ability to perform supernatural acts, through Christ, such as healing, continues into modern times.

Political Development

In the early part of the 20th Century, evangelicalism constituted a large part of North American Protestantism. But it was not yet a political movement. In part this was because of religious priorities and in part it was a reticence because of the scornful attitude of a secular society. Public derision of fundamentalists reached its peak following the Scopes trial in 1925. The writings of H.L. Mencken in the *Nation* and Sinclair Lewis in his novel *Elmer Gantry* popularized public antipathy toward Fundamentalists, who were associated in the public’s mind with anti-modernism, anti-intellectualism and bigotry.

In the 1940’s and ‘50’s, evangelicals were mostly concerned with “spreading the word,” and converting souls. This was the time of Norman Vincent Peale and the “power of positive thinking,” which reached millions of Americans through his publication, *Guideposts* magazine. It was also the time when Billy Graham was able to draw huge crowds to hear him preach the gospel. However, one political issue on which Evangelicals did speak out was the threat of Communism. Billy Graham founded a bi-monthly magazine, *Christianity Today* in 1956. The magazine featured a number of anti-communist polemics by Billy Graham as well as a series of articles by J. Edgar Hoover, with titles like: “Communist Propaganda and The Christian Pulpit.” The preoccupation with anti-Communism gave the Evangelical movement a significant boost toward mainstream legitimacy, helped by the endorsement of President Eisenhower and J. Edgar Hoover.

It wasn’t until the 1970’s that evangelicals began to think about political power in a serious way. By that time, the movement had a rich supply of organizational resources, including an unparalleled religious broadcasting industry. For evangelical groups, eager to spread the gospel, radio had had an early appeal. In 1921, the first Christian radio broadcast was made from Calvary Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. In 1924 the Lutheran Church Mission Synod founded a radio station and in 1926, the newly-formed National Broadcasting Company began airing a weekly program “The National Radio Pulpit.” By 1939, Charles E. Fuller’s “Old Fashioned Revival Hour” had the largest prime-time distribution of any radio program in the United States, with air time on 60 percent of all the licensed radio stations in the country, and a weekly audience estimated at 20 million.³ With the advent of commercial television, the Religious Right really came into its own. Undoubtedly, televangelism was the single most important factor in the rise of the Religious Right. By 1987,

³ Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare* South End Press 1989, p.3.

religious broadcasting was a \$2 billion dollar industry, (with more than 1000 full-time Christian radio stations) and More than 200 full-time TV stations⁴

Pat Robertson started the trend in 1960 when his Virginia television station became the first station licensed to air religious programming more than 50% of the time. Robertson's stations were also the first to raise money through telethons. By 1979, Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network grew to be a \$50 million- a- year operation, with a national audience of 5 million for his "700 Club" talk show. Although there was considerable in-fighting among televangelists competing for souls or dollars (depending on your point of view), the industry enjoyed tremendous growth and popularity in the 1980's – until January 4, 1987. That was the date on which Oral Roberts announced that if he did not receive \$8 million dollars for his medical missions scholarship program by the end of March, 1987, God would "call him home." The media had a field day with this event. Satiric political cartoons and ridiculing editorials appeared everywhere. Many evangelicals were deeply embarrassed by the death-threat ploy, and began to re-think the honesty and integrity of the televangelical mission. Robertson did get his \$8 million dollars (more than \$1 million from a wealthy dog track owner), but, ironically, not one dime was used for the intended purpose of medical scholarships.

Then, just as the Roberts fiasco began to die down, the religious television industry was hit with a series of scandals. PTL's Oral Roberts resignation as leader of the PTL network, after a lurid public confession of sexual indiscretions with a secretary, coupled with subsequent revelations of massive financial impropriety at the network became one of the biggest stories of 1987. Pictures of the tearful Jimmy and the mascara-laden Tammy Faye were all over the tabloids. The PTL organization first began to unravel when televangelists, Jimmy Swaggert and Jerry Falwell confronted Bakker about his affair, in order to extract a confession. Bakker promptly resigned from PTL, claiming he was being blackmailed over his affair with Jessica Hahn as part of a "hostile take-over" effort by another televangelist, not identified. Jimmy Swaggert publicly denied that he was the evangelist who was attempting to take control of the PTL, with its \$130 million in assets; but he did go on the Larry King show and condemn Jimmy Bakker, saying he was a "cancer" that needed to be removed from the body of Christ. Bakker resigned and was eventually convicted and served five years in prison. The PTL went into bankruptcy.

Soon after the Bakker-PTL furor died down, the TV evangelical industry was hit by another scandal. Jimmy Swaggert - the same righteous defender of the faith who had less than a year earlier denounced Bakker as a "cancer" - was exposed as a man obsessed with soliciting prostitutes to perform "pornographic acts". Swaggert appeared live on television, weeping and begging forgiveness from his wife, his son and the 8,000 members of his Louisiana congregation. The

⁴ Id. at p.1.

series of back-to-back scandals humiliated the Religious Right, and dealt an almost mortal blow to the televangelist industry, from which it took years to fully recover.

The success of the Religious Right's infiltration into American politics did not depend on its radio and television empire alone. The broadcast media gave them the soapbox from which to launch their movement. But there was more to it. In a way, the story of the Religious Right's political movement can be said to have begun with the resounding defeat of Barry Goldwater in 1964. Republican leaders were worried that the base of the Republican Party (primarily southern segregationists and the very wealthy) was too narrow. So they set out to expand the base by focusing, not on individual candidates, but on issues.

Corporations, and their affiliated charitable foundations, fund political endeavors in two ways; in electoral politics through political action committees (PACS) and in ideological politics via think tanks. One such think tank was the Heritage Foundation, founded in 1973 by Paul Weyrich. It was actually Weyrich who coined the term "Moral Majority", although it was Jerry Falwell who assumed its leadership. Weyrich also founded The American Legislative Exchange Council ("ALEC") to coordinate the work of Religious Right state legislators. ALEC gives businesses a direct hand in writing bills that are considered by state assemblies nationwide. Funded primarily by large corporations, industry groups and conservative foundations, including R.J. Reynolds, Koch Industries and the American Petroleum Institute, the group mass-produces proposed bills and hands them out to legislators. In 2000, according to ALEC, members introduced more than 3100 bills based on its models.⁵

At the same time the Republican Party was looking to expand its base, the Religious Right was looking for an *entre* into the field of politics. You could say it was a marriage made in Heaven. The catalyst for the melding of these two groups was three events which occurred in the early 70's. The first was the approval of the Equal Rights constitutional amendment by the Senate in 1972. The second was the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, in 1973, and the third was the passage of various gay rights initiatives. These were developments which, in the view of religious conservatives, threatened family stability. The current economic trends and international issues were perhaps beyond common understanding, and certainly beyond the control of average people. But reproductive and family issues resonated deeply among them. Each issue, in its own right, evoked profound concerns about proper roles for men, women and children.

The ERA was very disturbing to the Religious Right. By 1973, thirty-one states had ratified the Amendment. The result seemed inevitable. Then the opposition kicked in. Phyllis Schlafly, a Catholic, an attorney, and a veteran of the anticommunist movement of the '60's, led the charge. She claimed that the ERA would make gay marriages legal and would prevent the reversal of *Roe v*

⁵ www.theocracywatch.org/taking_over.htm

Wade. Senator Sam Ervin, of North Carolina became a strong ally of Schafly, permitting her to use his franking privilege to mail out anti-ERA packets to state legislators. Schafly's organization, called the Eagle Forum, with considerable help from the religious right, ultimately defeated the constitutional amendment, just three states short of the thirty-eight states needed for passage.

The third issue was homosexuality. By 1977, the anti-gay rights movement was gaining momentum. Remember Anita Bryant? She successfully led the fight to overturn a Miami antidiscrimination ordinance. Then in 1978 she joined forces with the sponsors of a state ballot initiative in California to ban homosexuals from teaching in the public schools. The initiative was defeated at the polls. But sponsors of the initiative used the network they had built up to start Christian Voice, the organization that later created the concept of "moral report cards" to rate political candidates.

So, "sex," you might say, gave the Religious Right the issues, televangelism gave them the voice, and conservative corporate coffers contributed to their economic muscle. But the last and certainly not least piece of the success story was the dedicated, patient and assiduous efforts of evangelists to take over the Republican Party at the grass-roots level. The Religious Right enjoyed their greatest successes in those states in which evangelism was strongest. To a large extent, that meant the South: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida and Texas were Religious Right strongholds. By carefully placing evangelicals in key state Republican positions, the Religious Right was able to have many of their members elected as representatives to state and national conventions, where they were able to shape Republican party platforms. Eventually, the Religious Right was able to exert influence on the Republican Party agenda in a way far in excess of what might have been expected, based solely on its numerical membership in the party.

A brief diversion occurred in 1976, when Jimmy Carter won the presidency, with large support from evangelical groups. He was, after all, a "good ol' boy," and a Sunday school teacher as well. But he soon lost that support after he became President, when he refused to back a constitutional ban on abortion. (Carter's Playboy interview in which he admitted to having "lust in his heart" probably didn't help either.)

In 1980, the white, born-again Christians who had voted for Carter in 1976 now went two-to-one for Reagan. This was a watershed for the Christian Right in National Politics. In 1981, the Republicans captured control of the Senate, with considerable help from the Moral Majority. However, it was not all smooth sailing for the Religious Right from there. Despite Reagan's campaign pledge to implement a "moral majority" agenda, his administration was never zealous about the Religious Right's two principal agenda items: abortion and school prayer. Impatient with the White House's lack of movement, the Evangelicals looked to the new Republican majority in the Senate for help. Two

Republican Senators, Orrin Hatch from Utah and Jessie Helms from North Carolina, introduced anti-abortion bills, but neither of them was successful.

On the school prayer front, the Religious Right scored a little better; but it was more a symbolic win than a real one. In 1981, Congress overwhelmingly passed an act which barred the Justice Department from blocking school prayer in schools. But school prayer was never on the Justice Department's radar screen anyway. In 1982, Reagan himself proposed a constitutional amendment to return voluntary prayer to the schools, but the bill languished in committee and disappeared.

Undaunted by its meager successes during Reagan's first term, the Christian Right backed him again for a second term in 1984, this time with George H. W. Bush as his running mate. With a vast network in place, the Christian Right was prepared to obtain and deliver thousands of new voter registrants for the Reagan-Bush ticket. Rev. Tim LaHaye, a prominent televangelist, was assigned the task of coordinating these efforts. He had established the American Coalition for Traditional Values (ACTV or "active"), consisting of and funded largely by televangelists. A prominent theme of the ACTV was "religious persecution" in the 1984 campaign. Many of these same preachers who were allied with ACTV were also part of the Coalition for Religious Freedom. The Coalition was established by the Unification Church in response to its leader, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, having been imprisoned for tax fraud, perjury and obstruction of justice. Moon's followers spent millions of dollars in 1984-1985 to enlist the support of ACTV and other Christian ministers to support the effort to free Moon, who was characterized as a victim of religious persecution. This became an embarrassment to some Christian leaders after the press reported LaHaye's acceptance of "Moonie" money from what they considered to be a heretical cult. Nevertheless, despite the Moon incident, the Religious Right delivered the vote in 1984 for Reagan's successful campaign for reelection.

George Herbert Walker Bush never enjoyed the popularity among the Religious Right that his predecessor, Ronald Reagan, did. Born in Massachusetts, and educated at Andover and Yale, Bush had the aura of northern aristocracy about him, which never resonated well with the southern lower and middle classes, which were the core of the Religious Right. Pat Robertson saw this as an opportunity and decided to run for the presidency in 1988. Unfortunately for him, before his campaign ever got off the ground, the Bakker-Swaggert televangelist scandal hit, which adversely impacted on Robertson's chances to be taken as a serious candidate. Nevertheless, Robertson did surprisingly well. He received about 1 million votes, or about 9% of the total vote, which was better than Jack Kemp did. He did particularly well in caucus states, where the Christian Right dominated the Republican Party.

After Bush was elected, the Religious Right's wariness about his

commitment to their issues proved accurate. They were disheartened, for example, when Bush appointed Louis Sullivan as Secretary of Health and Human Services. Sullivan was known to be in favor of fetal tissue research. The Christian Right leaders hoped that Vice-President Dan Quayle might establish the liaison with the White House that would enable them to advance their agenda; but it never worked out. Undaunted, the Religious Right turned their attention to state politics. After Pat Robertson's failed run at the presidency, he turned his campaign apparatus into what became the Christian Coalition, which grew rapidly during the 1990's.

Clinton's victory against Bush in 1992 was somewhat problematic, given the trend toward increasing Republican power in the three previous presidential elections. The conventional wisdom blamed Bush's defeat largely on economic fears. Paradoxically, some attributed the loss to the Republican Party's over-zealous adoption of the Christian Right's "family values" issues; while others blamed Bush for having run as a moderate. But no one could dispute the Christian Right's success as a faction within the Republican Party. An estimated 47 % of the delegates at the 1992 Republican Convention were self-described born-again Christians.⁶ They dominated the formulation of the party platform, which became a wish list of Christian Right goals. Over the objections of Bush himself, the platform called for a constitutional amendment to ban abortions — with no exceptions. Other planks included opposition to any civil rights law for homosexuals; a call for legislation to ban the sale of pornography; prohibition of public funding for "obscene" art; endorsement of home schooling and of school prayer; and opposition to contraceptives being made available in the schools.

After Bush came the tumultuous Clinton years. First, there was the Whitewater matter and then the Lewinsky affair. Clinton nevertheless enjoyed great personal popularity, which got him elected twice. He was the first Democratic President in sixty years to be elected to two successive terms.⁷ At the same time, it was only the third time in the history of the Country that the House voted to impeach a President. This paradox is explainable, at least in part, by the fact that in 1995, the Republicans had again captured a majority of the seats in the House; and it is the House which decides whether or not to impeach. You may see the impeachment as a political vendetta, or as an appropriate response to Clinton's blatant perjury, depending on your political point of view. But what was clear was that the Republican Party, dominated by the Religious Right, was again in control of the House, and Clinton was anathema to the Christian Right. In his first term, Clinton had increased taxes, eased abortion restrictions and modified the ban on homosexuals in the military. His persistent reputation as a philanderer also was repugnant to those who were promoting "family values." When the opportunity presented itself, the Christian Right howled for Clinton's

⁶ Sara Diamond, *Roads To Dominion* (The Gilford Press 1995) p. 296

⁷ The last had been Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Harry Truman served almost eight years, but was elected for only four.

scalp. The Republican-controlled House voted for impeachment; but there was no way that Clinton's enemies in the Senate could muster the 2/3 vote required for "conviction." So, after countless hours and untold millions of dollars spent on the process, Clinton was acquitted.

This brings us to the two-term presidency of George W. Bush, and the flowering of the Religious Right. Bush himself is a unique blend of wealthy, aristocratic heritage, comfortably socializing with the rich and famous, combined with the mannerisms and Christian beliefs of a "country boy" from west Texas – which, of course he is. As such, Bush is the darling of the Republican rich as well as the Religious Right. Bush is obviously, and I believe sincerely, a religious man. Certainly, the word "God" is never very far from his lips. Many people, however, are made uneasy by the fact that he, and those around him, exude an attitude of triumphalism, reminiscent of 19th-century "manifest destiny" imperialism. Bush clearly seems to believe that his election was "God's will," and that he is on a mission that is divinely inspired. In Bob Woodward's new book, *Plan of Attack*, he quotes from taped interviews with President Bush, in which Bush describes himself as a "messenger of God" who is doing the "Lord's will." With this kind of messianic view of himself, Bush fears no evil, and apparently believes he can do no wrong. If his God-appointed mission was to bestow democracy on the Middle East by bringing down Saddam, then whether or not there were weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq is a petty irrelevance.

With Karl Rove as Bush's supreme political strategist in the 2000 campaign, the Bush-Cheney team pulled out all the stops in courting the Religious Right. Churches opened their doors to Bush, and ministers endorsed him from the pulpit, even though that was probably a violation of the IRS rules affording the churches tax-exempt status. As a result, Bush came into office feeling deeply indebted to the Religious Right.

With no clear mandate from the American people in the first election, Bush nevertheless quickly set out to accomplish his agenda. He appointed many prominent members of the Religious Right to positions in his administration, such as John Ashcroft as attorney General. Twenty-two days after taking office in 2001, Bush re-instituted the so-called "global gag rule" to restrict foreign NGO's that receive U.S. family planning funds from using their own non-U.S. funds to provide legal abortions. Between 2001 and 2004, the Bush Administration quietly installed dozens of far-right Christian fundamentalists in key positions within the Department of Health and Human Services, the Federal Drug Administration and various commissions and advisory committees. The result has been to establish one of the most rigid sexual health agendas in the World.⁸

⁸ The Christian Taliban, by Stephan Reed, March 28, 2004. www.alternet.org/

Always at the top of Bush's list of legislative initiatives were tax cuts. It is interesting to note, parenthetically, that the 2002 Republican Party platform of Bush's home state, Texas, called for the abolishment of the IRS, and the complete elimination of corporate and personal income taxes, inheritance taxes and property taxes.⁹ Bush hasn't gone that far, but tax cuts, including the elimination of the estate tax, have been the signature piece of Bush's presidency. Disgruntled Democrats, of course, have pointed to increased unemployment, rising costs associated with the Iraqi war, and unprecedented deficits. Bush's answer to ballooning deficits has been to eliminate welfare and educational benefits and substitute "faith-based initiatives."

Pledged to appoint judges who would not be in his view "activists" Bush has consistently nominated conservative ideologues for federal judgeships. In March of 2001, to reduce possible opposition to his choices, Bush ended a fifty-year practice of submitting judicial nominations to the American Bar Association. Bush was also responsible for restrictions on stem cell research, and the easing of restrictions on environmental pollution.. This does not exhaust the list of controversial measures passed during the Bush years; however, my purpose is not to turn this paper into a screed against the Bush Administration, but simply to point out how the Bush Administration's agenda has meshed so perfectly with the issues which are near and dear to the Religious Right.

The Future.

That brings us more or less current on how the Christian Right got to where it is in American politics. The remaining question is: What can we expect from them in the future? The Religious Right is by no means a monolithic organization, but its various component groups do seem united in one purpose: to take control over the political and social institutions in the United States. D. James Kennedy, a prominent televangelist, and the pastor of Coral Ridge Ministries in Ft. Lauderdale, speaking at a conference in February 2005 said the following, on the goals of the Christian Right:

"Our job is to reclaim America for Christ, whatever the cost. As vice-regents of God, we are to exercise godly dominion and influence over our neighbors, our schools, our government, our literature and arts, our sport arenas, our entertainment media, our news media, our scientific endeavors – in short, over every aspect and institution of human society."¹⁰

The Reverend Kennedy, like many evangelicals, is a dominionist. This theology, I mentioned earlier, is a belief that Christians are uniquely ordained by God to

⁹ www.yuricareport.com/Dominionism/RPTPlatform2002.pdf

¹⁰ Quoted at website *Rise of the Religious Right in the Republican Politics*, www.theocracywatch.org/

occupy all secular positions of authority until Christ's second coming. Many evangelicals embrace the same view. It's impressive how far they have come: from a backwater religious movement, content to preach the word of the Lord in the 1920's, to a formidable political force today, seeking not only to save men's souls, but the political structure of society itself.

Does it seem likely that the Christian Right movement will succeed in converting America into a theocracy? I believe the answer is no. Despite the combative rhetoric, heard on both sides of the aisle in Congress, and despite the narrowness of the 2002 presidential election, I don't believe the Country is as deeply divided on the issues as the extremists are telling us.

The Terri Schiavo imbroglio is a case in point. The law on right-to-die issues in Florida was very clear: If a patient is in a persistent vegetative state, and had previously made known his or her wishes not to have his or her life extended on a life support system, then the life support system could be withdrawn. Terri Schiavo was diagnosed as being in a permanent vegetative state. A Florida Court determined that she had expressed her desire not to be kept alive on a machine. But before anyone could take Terri off the ventilator, members of the Religious Right decided to make a *cause celebre* of the case; thinking they could successfully challenge Florida's right-to-die law; possibly in the courts, but if not, then in the forum of public opinion. They were wrong on both counts. Religious Right foundation money poured in to pay for the legal expenses of Terri's parents. The case became a shameful spectacle, hyped by the media and exploited by radicals on both sides. There were no less than 14 appeals, numerous motions, petitions and hearings in the Florida courts, five suits in Federal district court and four denials of certiorari by the United States Supreme Court. The challenges to the right-to-die law were consistently denied by every court. At one point the Florida legislature hastily passed a bill, aimed at thwarting the decisions of the courts. Labeled "Terri's law" in the press, it was worded in general terms, but was so bounded by conditions that it clearly had application only to Terri Schiavo's case, and moreover, was expressly set to expire 15 days after its passage. The law was blatantly unconstitutional and was so held by the Florida Supreme Court. Then the United States Congress shamelessly got into the act, issuing a subpoena aimed at getting Terri Schiavo into the witness protection program. That ploy didn't work either. Finally, Terri was allowed to die quietly, and with dignity.

Listening to the rhetoric, the charges of "murder" and "immorality", the minute-by-minute television coverage, and all the bombast, a foreigner to our shores might have believed the country was on the brink of civil insurrection, with the populace being deeply divided and bitterly angry over the affair. The fact is that the consensus in this country was in favor of the right-to-die law, or at least very much opposed to the government's intrusion into a very private matter. Polls conducted by Fox News, ABC News, CBS News and CNN/USA Today/Gallup produced these revealing statistics: On the question of whether

Terri's feeding tube should be removed, the people overall said yes—by a margin of almost 3 to 1. By religion, the ABC poll had Catholics favoring removal of Terri's tube by 63% to 26%, Protestants by 77% to 18%; even Evangelical Christians were for removal of the tube by 46% to 44%. By political party, ABC News had Democrats favoring removal of the tube by 65% to 25% and Republicans by 61% to 34%.¹¹ On the question of whether it was wrong of Congress to intervene in the matter, according to the ABC poll, 70% said yes.

The same thing holds true for other supposedly divisive issues, such as abortion, separation of church-and – state, and gay rights. The majority of people favor *pro-choice* on abortion and *free choice* on religion. They also favor – if not gay marriage – then at least the right of gay union. An article in the January, 2006 issue of *The Atlantic*,¹² I think, gets it right. About 15-20% of the Country is devoutly religious and staunchly conservative and 15-20% is profoundly secular and doggedly liberal. The majority of people, 60 -70%, are in the middle, with often mixed or ambivalent views. Like a gyroscope, they may lean to the left at one point or to the right at another, but they never completely lose their balance. Democracy is a messy and noisy business. The Religious Right will no doubt continue to be a significant factor in American politics for years to come; but, so long as the second part of the First Amendment (that is, freedom of speech and freedom of the press) remains strong then the first part of the First Amendment (separation of church and state) will survive also.

Thank you.

¹¹ Jon B. Eisenberg, Using Terri, (Harper Collins, 2005) p. 80.

¹² E.J. Dionne, Jr., Why The Culture War Is the Wrong War, *The Atlantic* (January/February 2006) p. 130.