

FUNDAMENTALISM ET AL: Conservative Protestants in America

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ABSTRACT

Since the rise of the religious right, scholars have become increasingly interested in studying conservative Protestantism. Not only do conservative Protestants (CPs) make up at least a quarter of the US population; they differ from many Americans in gender-role attitudes, childrearing styles, political orientation, and other ways as well. In fact, religious factors often predict people’s political views better than do either class or gender, even though the latter two have received far more attention in the scholarly literature (Manza & Brooks 1997, Kellstedt et al 1996b). Unfortunately research in this area has been hampered by imprecise measurement and poor understanding of the various movements grouped together as CPs. This has muddied statistical results, stifled theoretical development, and blinded researchers to promising areas of analysis. Thus, in this chapter we first discuss the history and distinctive qualities of the various CP movements, then we use these insights to propose better survey measures, and finally we apply this knowledge to several substantive areas (i.e., gender-role attitudes, childrearing styles, tolerance, the “culture wars,” the religious right, and the reasons for the religious vitality of CP groups).

PARAMETERS OF THIS CHAPTER

Defining conservative Protestantism is difficult because conservative Protestants (CPs) belong to such a jumble of different denominations and movements, and they do not agree on any one label or set of beliefs (Dayton & Johnston 1991, Marsden 1987a, Kellstedt et al 1996a,c). To add to the confusion, many social scientists and journalists use the terms “fundamentalist,” “evangelical,” “born again,” “conservative Protestant,” and “religious right” indiscriminately without considering the differing meanings of these terms (Kellstedt & Smidt 1996). Survey researchers also employ widely varying measurement strategies,

which can create seemingly contradictory results. Even the label “conservative” Protestant is problematic. Although CPs are generally conservative on some theological issues, they are often innovative on others, breaking patterns of classical Protestant thought, creating new worship styles, etc. Their resistance to modernity is highly selective (Oldfield 1996, p. 49, Dayton 1991).

Moreover, not all CPs are conservative politically. A sizable portion are Democrats and economically liberal (Hart 1992, Jelen 1987). If anything, the average white CP is more economically liberal than mainline Protestants. This is especially true for biblical literalists and members of holiness or Pentecostal denominations (though “Baptist-fundamentalists” tend to be more economically conservative) (Iannaccone 1993, Pyle 1993).¹ On social issues CPs are generally more conservative (as measured by their statistical mean) but often also have greater diversity in their views than the general public (i.e., a significantly larger standard deviation) (Gay et al 1996, Gay & Ellison 1993, DiMaggio et al 1996).

To avoid the problem of confusing religious and political “conservatism,” many scholars use the term “evangelical” to describe all CPs. These scholars also argue that “evangelical” and “mainline” Protestantism are identifiably historic traditions, whereas other categorizations have more arbitrary dividing lines. However, using the general “evangelical” category has two problems. First, not all CPs accept the label, and some actively deny it (Dayton 1991). Although there may be a loose affinity between the groups categorized as “evangelical,” it is not clearly the only or best label. Second, the term evangelical is confusing, because scholars simultaneously use it to describe the moderate wing of contemporary CPs, CPs as a whole, and nineteenth century revivalism (often in the same text). Thus, those not familiar with the movements have difficulty determining when the term refers to moderate CPs and when to all of them. To avoid this problem we use “CP” as the general term, and “evangelical” for the moderate wing of CPs which emerged after World War II. In doing this, we are adjusting the terminology of scholars like Kellstedt et al (1996a); we are not challenging their definition of the broad “evangelical” category or their division of Protestant denominations into “mainline,” “evangelical,” and “black Protestant” categories. In the history section we also refer to nineteenth century Protestant revivalistic movements as “evangelical.” This matches the historical literature and is distinct enough in time to avoid undue confusion. Our terminology creates problems as well, but we have not discovered any unproblematic terms.²

¹Conservative Protestants may be becoming more economically conservative (see Kellstedt et al 1996d).

²Alternative solutions would be to call all CPs “traditional Protestants” or “theologically conservative Protestants” or to call all CPs “evangelicals” and moderate CPs “neo-evangelicals.” We do not recommend dividing Protestants into “conservatives,” “moderates,” and “liberals.” Unfortunately, however, our terminology may create some confusion with this alternative categorization.

This chapter focuses on white CPs. Although black CPs are conservative theologically, they are very different politically and are separated institutionally from white CPs. Thus, most researchers analyze them as a distinct group. For good summaries of research on black CPs, see Lincoln & Mamiya (1990), Payne (1995), and Sernett (1991). Scholars have generally ignored Asian-American and Latino/a-American CPs. Fortunately, an edited volume that includes chapters on these is forthcoming (Warner & Wittner 1998).

A substantial literature also compares “fundamentalisms” around the world [e.g., the five-volume series edited by Marty & Appleby (1991–1995)].³ A number of scholars have criticized these works for conflating conservative religious movements with postcolonial nationalist religious movements and for brushing over the substantial differences between, for example, American Protestant fundamentalism and Lebanese Muslim fundamentalism [see Munson 1995a,b, Billings & Scott 1994, and review symposiums in the *Review of Religious Research* 35(1), (4), 37(4)]. Others contend that as long as proper qualifications are made, comparison facilitates new insights (Appleby 1995). This chapter focuses exclusively on CPs in the United States.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Fundamentalists and Evangelicals

Modern American fundamentalism grew out of the nineteenth century evangelical movement. In the first half of the century, the revivalistic evangelical tradition grew rapidly, outstripping the Congregationalists, old-light Presbyterians, and Anglicans who had dominated the colonial religious map but did not adjust well to the challenges of the expanding frontier (Finke & Stark 1992). Northern evangelicals were active social reformers and provided the major impetus behind abolitionism, temperance, and a number of similar social movements (Carwardine 1993, Marsden 1987a, Smith 1957); they were also early advocates of the separation of church and state (McLoughlin 1971).

Following the Civil War, tensions developed between Northern evangelical leaders over Darwinism and higher biblical criticism; Southerners remained unified in opposition to both (Marsden 1980, 1991). Modernists attempted to update Christianity to match their view of science. They denied biblical miracles and argued that God manifests himself through the social evolution of society. Conservatives resisted these changes. These latent tensions erupted to the surface after World War I in what came to be called the fundamentalist/modernist split.

³Other literature examines the social and political implications of the spread of American CP movements overseas (Hallum 1996, Walls 1996, Brusco 1995, Cox 1995, Martin 1990). For good or ill, these movements are profoundly influencing Asia, Africa, and Latin America; yet social scientists have paid little attention to them (Cox 1995).

Shortly before the war, conservative scholars published a series of monographs called *The Fundamentals of the Christian Religion*, which argued for the authority of Scripture, the veracity of biblical miracles, and salvation through Christ alone. They claimed that these doctrines are so fundamental to the Christian faith that those who deny them are outside the Christian tradition. As a result they were labeled “fundamentalists.” Many fundamentalists viewed the rise of Bolshevism as the natural outcome of modernism, and the barbarity of “civilized” Europe during World War I as a resounding disproof of modernist beliefs in the perfectibility of society and the goodness of human nature. Society was not becoming better, it was becoming worse; social reform and education could not overcome human sinfulness.

Modernists had their greatest strength among Northern denominational leaders and seminary professors; fundamentalists, among pastors and laity. Thus, Northern fundamentalists struggled to wrest control of denominational hierarchies and seminaries from modernists. But when inclusive moderates sided with the modernists for the sake of tolerance, the fundamentalists were defeated. Fundamentalists also experienced a humiliating public-opinion defeat in the Scopes trial of 1925 and increasingly withdrew from the public spotlight to build their own separate institutions.⁴ Some formed separate denominations; others stayed in existing denominations but developed networks of parachurch organizations outside denominational control (Marsden 1980, Carpenter 1997).

However, significant tension still existed within fundamentalism about how much to “separate from the world.” Many fundamentalist leaders were embarrassed by the fractious, anti-intellectual image of fundamentalism and sought to differentiate themselves from the more extreme elements of the movement. They wanted a more open, intellectually engaged version of classical Protestantism, and therefore they called themselves “neo-evangelicals,” in reference to the nineteenth century evangelical movement.⁵ Initially most neoevangelical institutions were in the North and West, although the movement spread to the South as well. Eventually the “neo” dropped away, and these CPs became “evangelicals” (Marsden 1987a, 1987b).⁶

Currently, “fundamentalism” properly refers to a small subset of CPs (although it is often misused to refer to all CPs). Fundamentalists emphasize a strict literal interpretation of the Bible, dispensational theology, premillennial eschatology, and institutional separation from “apostasy” (i.e., liberal Protestants and Catholics) (see Weber 1991, Marsden 1987a, 1991, Ammerman

⁴See Numbers (1993) for a history of creationism from the mid-1800s to the mid-1980s.

⁵The seminal work on fundamentalism between the 1920s and the rise of neoevangelism is Carpenter (1997).

⁶For a list of resources and annotated bibliographies about CPs, see Blumhofer & Carpenter (1990) and Magnuson & Travis (1990, 1997).

1987). Although fundamentalists have some loose national associations, such as Jerry Falwell's Baptist Bible Fellowship, power remains predominantly with individual pastors.⁷

Pentecostals and Charismatics

Conservative Protestantism also contains two other major movements: Pentecostalism and the charismatic renewal. Pentecostals emerged around the turn of the century from the "Holiness" wing of nineteenth century evangelicalism. They emphasized the gifts of the Holy Spirit (especially divine healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues) and spread primarily among socially marginalized groups (i.e., poor whites, blacks, and immigrants) (Anderson 1987, Oldfield 1996). In some early revivals (e.g., Azusa Street), blacks and whites worshipped together, but each soon formed separate institutions (Sernett 1991). Like fundamentalists, Pentecostals have traditionally been separatistic (Anderson 1987),⁸ but fundamentalists and Pentecostals have not gotten along well with each other either. One area of contention is the basis of religious authority. For fundamentalists, miraculous signs (especially prophecy and speaking in tongues) ended when the writing and compilation of the Bible was completed; religious authority is based on a "literal" interpretation of these sacred texts.⁹ Pentecostals, on the other hand, believe that God still continues to reveal his will through prophets. To fundamentalists this seems to challenge the final authority of Scripture. Fundamentalists emphasized doctrine; Pentecostals, experience (also see Wilcox 1996, pp. 28–30).

These antipathies have had important implications for recent political mobilizations. For example, even though Jerry Falwell (a fundamentalist) and Pat Robertson (a charismatic/Pentecostal) are both Southern, Republican, theologically conservative, and politically conservative, both have had difficulty gaining support among the others' constituencies (Oldfield 1996, Wilcox 1996, Green 1996). Traditionally neoevangelicals have distanced themselves from both fundamentalists and Pentecostals because of disagreements about how much Christians must separate themselves from the world (although class and regional differences probably also play a role). Most evangelicals also tend to feel uncomfortable with the more exuberant aspects of Pentecostal worship and with claims of prophesy, healing, etc. Politically, Pentecostals are

⁷Fundamentalists are further divided over the strictness of separation; strict separatists are a very small group, less separatist groups are larger (see Marsden 1991).

⁸Some Pentecostals have become more ecumenical and joined the National Association of Evangelicals (e.g., the Assemblies of God).

⁹Fundamentalists tend to be "dispensationalists." According to this theory, God interacts with his people in different ways during different phases of history (i.e. different dispensations). Miracles were necessary in biblical times to establish the authority of the apostles and prophets who wrote the Bible, but in the current dispensation ("the age of the church"), they are not.

the most conservative on abortion and other social issues, the most liberal on welfare spending, and statistically the least likely to vote, even when socioeconomic status is controlled (Kellstedt et al 1996c, Smidt et al 1996, Pyle 1993).

In the 1960s a fourth movement developed within conservative Protestantism—the charismatic renewal. Like Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement emphasized speaking in tongues and miraculous healing. But unlike Pentecostalism, it spread among Catholics and members of mainline and evangelical denominations. Charismatics were also more middle-class and Northern (Wilson 1984) and probably as a result were less separatistic (Anderson 1987). Thus, unlike Pentecostals, charismatics generally stayed within existing denominations and became a bridge among evangelicals, Pentecostals, mainline Protestants, and Catholics. Pentecostals have increased in socioeconomic status to levels similar to those of charismatics and share many beliefs with them, but still most charismatics do not identify as Pentecostals and vice versa (Smidt et al 1996).¹⁰

Charismatics and Pentecostals comprise approximately 12% of the US population¹¹ and have had a profound impact on African, Latin American, and Asian Christianity. They are the fastest growing segment of Christianity worldwide, and yet social scientists have paid little attention to them (Smidt et al 1996, Anderson 1987). Most research surveys don't ask even a single question that would identify them (e.g., questions about speaking in tongues, or religious movement identity, or detailed denominational categories). Thus, most scholars and journalists did not realize that in the 1988 presidential campaign Pat Robertson's political support was limited almost exclusively to the "Spirit filled" (Green 1996, Oldfield 1996, Smidt & Penning 1990).¹²

Although these distinctions within conservative Protestantism may not seem important to many contemporary social scientists, they are important to adherents, and they have important social and political implications (Smith et al 1998, Green et al 1996b, Kirkpatrick 1993). Moreover, in the United States, each of these four groups is probably as large as all non-Christian religious groups combined and none shows any sign of declining. Thus, presumably they deserve a similar amount of scholarly attention.

Regional Variation

There are also important regional variations among CPs. Southern CPs have their own unique religious style and distinct networks of institutions. They also

¹⁰The major theological distinction between the two is that Pentecostals believe that those who do not speak in tongues have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit; charismatics disagree.

¹¹Many of the estimates in this paper are based on phone polls. Phone polls oversample regular church attenders and thus may oversample some religious groups as well (Woodberry 1998).

¹²For annotated bibliographies and resource lists on charismatics and Pentecostals see Mills 1985, Dayton 1985, Burgess & McGee 1988, and Jones 1983, 1995.

tend to be more separatistic and socially conservative than Northern CPs (Shibley 1996, Ammerman 1990, Carpenter 1984). This is the result of the South's distinct historical experience.

During the colonial period, evangelicalism was weak in the South. Most white Southerners were Anglican or nonpracticing, and they viewed evangelicals with suspicion. Initially, Northern evangelical missionaries to the South openly condemned slavery, had mixed-race meetings, and emphasized more egalitarian gender roles. The Methodists even attempted to bar all slave holders from membership. However, these practices caused such opposition that evangelicals moderated them to avoid alienating potential followers (Heyrman 1997). As the movement became indigenous, Southern evangelicals increasingly defended slavery based on a literal interpretation of scripture. Southern evangelicals also resisted Northern evangelical social reform movements and perfectionist theology because they were associated with abolitionism (Cardwaine 1993, Smith 1957). As the Civil War approached, most evangelical denominations and mission boards split over slavery (Northerners dominated national-level organizations because of their larger population), and a number of separatist religious movements swept through the South that rejected church organization beyond the local level as unbiblical. These movements had a lasting impact on Southern religion (Ammerman 1990, pp. 33–34, 343).

The toll of the Civil War on the South was enormous and left deep resentments against Northern cultural impositions. In the cultural crisis that followed defeat, Southerners struggled to regain the honor and identity they had lost. Many believed that their unfaithfulness to God's law had caused their defeat; for God to bless them again, they needed to uphold his law more diligently than ever before. The result was a series of revivals that swept through the South. Southerners emphasized that they were not morally inferior; on the contrary, it was the Northerners who had become increasingly involved in secular social reform, while the South upheld the true faith (Hill 1980, p. 106, Ammerman 1990, pp. 38–39).¹³ Southern denominations perpetuated distinctions from their Northern counterparts and successfully lobbied Southern states to block authorization of Northern home missionaries in the South (Ammerman 1990, pp. 37–38). Thus, many denominations remained organizationally disconnected from the fundamentalist/modernist split and the later neoevangelical movement. Meanwhile, the North was becoming increasingly diverse, while the South stayed more religiously homogeneous and CPs maintained a dominate position in society (Hill 1980). Because of this homogeneity, few Southerners objected to prayer or Bible reading in public schools (Shibley

¹³Not only did these experiences influence Southern symbols and schema, they influenced Northern ones as well. Even today Northerners often associate Southern religion with racism and backwardness.

1996, Ammerman 1990, p. 55); laws against such practices easily appeared as further examples of Northern cultural domination.

As Southerners migrated to the North and West in search of opportunity, they often felt uncomfortable with Northern churches and set up churches similar to those back home (Shibley 1996, Ammerman 1990).¹⁴ These migrations occurred in several waves (i.e., after the Civil War, during the Great Depression, and after World War II). In the 1930s, impoverished Dust Bowl farmers migrated from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas to the agricultural regions of California and the Pacific Northwest (Shibley 1996, p. 34). Today nearly one eighth of Californians, and nearly half of those who reside in the San Joaquin Valley, can trace their ancestry to Oklahoma (Haslam 1989). Other Southerners migrated to the factories of Ohio, Indiana, and southern Michigan. Many Pentecostal, fundamentalist, and Southern Baptist churches in the North and West were planted as a result of these migrations. By 1990 there were over 7300 Southern Baptist churches outside the South with over 2.8 million members (Shibley 1996, Ammerman 1990, pp. 50–51).¹⁵ Although many of the members of these churches do not have Southern ancestry, these churches remain in contact with their roots through the seminary training of pastors, networks of relationships, denominational bulletin inserts, Sunday school material, etc. These networks facilitate the flow of new theological, social, and political ideas between the North and the South.

In spite of the differences described by historians and ethnographers, few social scientists have analyzed differences between Northern and Southern CPs. Strangely, even students of politics in the South have largely neglected religious factors (Green et al 1988a). Yet many of the political leaders of the religious right (RR) are Southerners, and some of the issues associated with the movement seem strongly influenced by regional identity (Woodberry et al 1996).¹⁶ Moreover, the massive movement of Southerners from the Democratic to Republican party may be central to the rise of the New Right.

There is important variation among Southern CPs as well (e.g., Jimmy Carter, Billy Graham, and Al Gore are all Southern CPs), and the RR has gained

¹⁴The reverse has also happened more recently with Northerners moving to the South.

¹⁵Dozens of Southern CPs have also become famous as televangelists—e.g., Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell (Shibley 1996, Oldfield 1996, p. 135).

¹⁶Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Oliver North, Donald Wildmon, Ralph Reed, James Kennedy, and Jesse Helms are all Southerners; many RR organizations are/were headquartered in the South (e.g., the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, the American Family Association, *World Magazine*, the Christian Action Council, Operation Rescue); and many of the most conservative leaders of the Republican revolution in Congress are also from the South (e.g., Newt Gingrich, Trent Lott, Dick Armey, Strom Thurmond, Tom DeLay, Jesse Helms), although many are not part of the RR (Nixon 1996). The areas of California, Oregon, Washington, Michigan, and Ohio with the strongest RR activism seem to coincide with areas of high Southern migration, although establishing this connection would require further research.

support among non-Southerners. However, it seems plausible that the historical Southern experience of defeat and ridicule could have shaped the political beliefs of Southern CPs differently than Northern CPs, just as the African-American experience of oppression has shaped the political beliefs of black CPs differently than white CPs. Some (although not all) of the issues associated with the RR seem to be influenced by this experience. The concerns of the RR cannot be reduced to class and regional conflicts, but they may be accentuated by them.¹⁷

MEASUREMENT

Contemporary sociological research about CPs is generally not as developed as historical research. Few social scientists or journalists are religiously active—especially in CP denominations (Wuthnow 1985, Lichter & Rothman 1981, Thalheimer 1973)—and perhaps because of this lack of familiarity, religious factors are frequently ignored or measured poorly (Kellstedt et al 1996a, Woodberry 1997, Hart 1996, C Smith 1996, Larson et al 1994, Thomas & Cornwall 1990, Wuthnow & Hodgkinson 1990, Gorsuch 1988, Hood 1983).

Further, distinguishing fundamentalists, evangelicals, charismatics, and Pentecostals is complex. Researchers can divide denominations into mainline, CP, and black Protestant denominational families. They can also distinguish Pentecostal denominations. However, they cannot easily identify fundamentalists, evangelicals, and charismatics in this way. Some denominations are clearly part of each of these movements, but these movements cross-cut denominations and even denominational families. They are better understood as loosely connected networks of ministerial associations, parachurch organizations, schools, seminaries, magazines, etc. Only recently have scholars begun developing measures to differentiate these groups (see Green et al 1996b, chapters 10–13); most research focuses only on identifying CPs as a whole.

The three major approaches to identifying CPs are denomination, beliefs, and self-identification. Although these approaches overlap, they have important distinctions as well. These differences cause many of the apparent contradictions in the literature. Indeed, whether “fundamentalists” are less educated than the general population depends on whether they are identified by denomination or doctrine or are self-identified (Kellstedt & Smidt 1996). Without multiple measures these distinctions are impossible to identify. However, this

¹⁷Unfortunately Southern identity is usually measured poorly on surveys. Given the mobility between the North and South, the differences between black and white Southerners, and the great variation in the strength of people’s regional identity, merely controlling for state of residence does not seem sufficient.

type of detail is extremely rare. On most surveys, it is fortunate if there is even one good measure.

Another weakness is that scholars do not generally connect qualitative interviews with quantitative survey data. Thus, scholars have difficulty determining how representative case studies, "insider documents," or interviews are, and they have difficulty deciphering the rich contextual meanings of isolated survey responses. This increases the danger that scholars will either overgeneralize the views of small, unrepresentative groups and leaders or project alien meanings on respondents' statements and practices. For example, some of CPs' positions on government intervention seem contradictory but make more sense once scholars understand the moral metaphors that motivate them (Lakoff 1996).

Denominational Affiliation

The most commonly available measure of CPs is denominational affiliation. Unfortunately it is seldom measured with sufficient care or precision.¹⁸ For example, Northern Baptists (i.e., American Baptists in the USA and General Conference Baptists) are more moderate than Southern Baptists, Missionary Baptists, and Independent Baptists. Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod Lutherans are more conservative than the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.¹⁹ The generic categories Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc, mask these distinctions and muddy statistical results. Without detailed denominational categories and specific follow-up questions, valuable information is lost and scholars have difficulty recoding respondents into CP, mainline, and black Protestants (let alone into Pentecostal or Northern- and Southern-based denominations). When respondents say they are "Lutheran" or "Presbyterian," researchers need to ask, "Which kind?"

The next problem is separating this jumble of denominations into useful categories. Perhaps the most commonly used categorization is that of Roof & McKinney (1987). However, their denominational categories are broad and incomplete and can cause significant measurement error. Major denominations like the Nazarenes are not even listed. One advantage of their approach, however, is that black Protestant denominations are separated from white ones.

The General Social Survey (GSS) coding is more complete but also has problems (especially before 1983). It recodes all denominations into the categories "fundamentalist," "moderate," and "liberal" (see T Smith 1990). This applies the category "fundamentalist" to over 30% of the US population, a label most would actively deny. This also assumes that all respondents can be

¹⁸Indeed, most surveys record only whether a respondent is "Protestant," "Catholic," "Jewish," or "Other." These categories are too broad to be of much use (Demerath & Roof 1976, Kellstedt et al 1996a).

¹⁹In this case "Evangelical" refers to the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

categorized along a single continuum based on the fundamentalist/modernist split of the 1920s, which is questionable even among Protestants, let alone Buddhists and Hindus (Kellstedt et al 1996a). The GSS codes all Catholics as “moderates” and all nonaffiliated as “liberal.” Political views also seem to influence how some denominations and religious groups are coded. For example, many black CP denominations are coded as “moderates,” although theologically they probably belong in the “fundamentalist” category, and all Jews are coded as “liberal,” even those who are theologically conservative (Regnerus et al 1997).²⁰ The GSS also lumps “nondenominational” Protestants in the same category as those with no denomination. This is unfortunate because the growth of nondenominational Protestants is one of the most important and least documented religious changes taking place in the United States. The overwhelming majority are CPs and do not belong in the “moderate” or “liberal” category. Those who claim “no denomination” do not resemble them either socially or politically (Smidt et al 1996, Shibley 1996).

Fortunately, political scientists have developed some excellent tools to distinguish CP denominations. Kellstedt et al (1996a) is probably the most thorough published version, but similar categorizations are available on the American National Election Studies 1996 cumulative file, the fall 1996 Southern Focus Poll, and several Pew data sets.²¹ Interviews with those who conducted these surveys suggest that detailed denomination questions take little survey time and create little respondent or interviewer burden. Developing CATI skip patterns and recoding denominations into useful categories are complicated, but these can be copied from existing surveys. These detailed categorizations also allow scholars to distinguish Pentecostals, black Protestants, and Northern- and Southern-based denominations.

Beliefs

Although many surveys have questions about religious belief, few of these are useful for distinguishing CPs. “Biblical literalism” or “biblical inerrancy” are the most common beliefs used, but these are usually measured poorly. First, the conservative response categories are generally too broad. About 35% of the US population claim the Bible should be interpreted “literally,” and many more say it is true but should not always be interpreted literally (both of these are theologically appropriate responses for CPs). However, there are major differences in what people mean by “literal” or “without error” (Bartkowski 1996, Shibley 1996). The limited response options mask these differences.

²⁰Controlling for race does not solve the problems caused by the lack of a black Protestant category.

²¹Melton (1989) describes the origins and beliefs of almost every religious group in the United States. It is helpful for more detailed categorizations of denominations. Many small denominations are not coded on most surveys, including the GSS.

Second, many better-educated evangelicals are not literalists or inerrantists. They prefer to say the Bible is “trustworthy for all matters of faith and practice.” As a result, biblical literalism is more strongly correlated with education than either CP movement identification or denominational affiliation (Kellstedt & Smidt 1996). Thus, when scholars use these measures to identify CPs, they influence CPs’ demographics and attitudes.

Moreover, using a single belief to categorize a complex group like CPs causes substantial measurement error; thus coefficients are no longer BLUE (i.e., unbiased and consistent) (Bollen 1989). When possible, it is better to measure conservative Protestantism as a latent variable using several beliefs. Generally CPs emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, believe in the importance of converting others to their faith, have a strong view of biblical authority, and believe that salvation is through Christ alone.²² Unfortunately, few surveys have such detailed belief questions. Almost none ask respondents whether they think it is important to convert others, whether they speak in tongues, or about their views on Jesus Christ, biblical prophecy, or separation from the world. Yet historians use many of these exact measures to distinguish different types of CPs (see e.g., Marsden 1987a). This makes connecting historical and social science literature difficult. Moreover, many of these beliefs predict people’s behavior better than the more typical questions about whether they believe in God or the afterlife (about 70–90+% say they do—too many to be very useful), and certainly more than the many detailed questions the GSS asks every year on how people view God or heaven (e.g., “Do you see God as more a savior or redeemer?” “More as a creator or healer?”). Even when surveys have multiple indicators, most researchers use them separately or additively (e.g., CPs are biblical literalists, who are “born again” and have shared their faith with others). This also causes measurement problems because, for example, CPs may be biblical literalists and “born again,” but too shy to share their faith. Measuring conservative Protestantism as a latent variable avoids these problems. Still these problems are minor in comparison to the typical single measure approach.

Movement Identification

Until recently, few surveys asked respondents whether they identify with particular religious movements (e.g., fundamentalism, evangelicalism).²³ Yet

²²For a more detailed discussion of identifying CPs with belief measures, see Green et al 1996b, chapters 10–13. They also discuss ways to identify subgroups within conservative Protestantism.

²³Some surveys ask if respondents are “born again,” but this has several disadvantages. First, it provides less detailed information than a movement ID question; second, the number of people who are “born again” varies significantly based on context and definition; and third, many avoid the label because they cannot pinpoint the time of their conversion or because of negative connotations (see Schumm & Silliman 1990).

movement ID generally predicts people's attitudes and political behavior better than denomination or generic religious beliefs (Smith et al 1998, appendix B, Kellstedt et al 1996c). Among Protestants, we think the most useful categories are "theologically liberal," "mainline," "Pentecostal," "charismatic," "evangelical," and "fundamentalist."²⁴ Surprisingly, given the widespread use of the term "mainline-liberal," almost no one chooses both of those self-IDs. Few people also choose both the charismatic and Pentecostal IDs (also see Smidt et al 1996).

Despite the predictive power of movement IDs, there are some potential problems with using them. First, people can be part of a religious movement without knowing it. Second, some people have multiple IDs. Third, the terms may mean different things to different people. For example, some may choose the label "fundamentalist" because they believe the fundamentals (e.g., the virgin birth of Christ, the authority of the Bible) and not because they are separatistic, premillennial dispensationalists, or connected to ministers like Jerry Falwell, Bob Jones, or Jack Hyles. Some politically liberal CPs may also avoid using the term "evangelical" because of its association with fundamentalism and the RR (see Kellstedt et al 1996c, p. 259, Johnston 1991). Even those who identify themselves as evangelicals do not always feel close to them, presumably for these same reasons. Fourth, the meaning of the terms is gradually changing as people try to associate themselves with particular groups (or distance themselves from them). Since the late 1970s, journalists and scholars have applied the term "fundamentalist" to Muslim religious movements, some of which use terrorist tactics. In the 1990s, Ralph Reed and the Christian Coalition began to use the term "evangelical" (Jerry Falwell was a fundamentalist and Pat Robertson a Southern charismatic/Pentecostal). Journalists covering the RR use a variety of terms, often indiscriminately. In time, these public uses of the terms may change who is willing to use them.

However, despite these possible problems, our analysis suggests that IDs work relatively well. As part of the Religious Identity and Influence Survey, we selected a sample of Protestant respondents from the phone survey and conducted qualitative face-to-face interviews with them. Their explanations of what they meant by "evangelical," etc., generally matched our expectations (although many "fundamentalists" are not as separatistic as expected). For all measures, this type of checking is important because respondents often do not mean what researchers assume.

²⁴"Mainline" is probably not a religious movement per se, but it allows respondents to avoid choosing one of the other movement labels.

Religiosity

Although some surveys have multiple measures of religiosity, few researchers use more than one. They generally do not analyze the multiple dimensions of religiosity or combine identifiers to measure latent religiosity variables. Many also analyze religiosity without analyzing religious affiliation or any other aspects of religion (Thomas & Cornwall 1990). This assumes that religiosity is generic, that it does not matter what people believe or what the social context of their worship is. However, sometimes denomination strongly influences the impact of church attendance. Why people attend is also important. For example, those who attend for personal or religious reasons tend to be less prejudiced against ethnic minorities; those who attend for social reasons are more prejudiced (Gorsuch 1988). However, when researchers put multiple measures of religious involvement in the same regression, they must carefully decipher what the individual religion variables represent. For example, it is not clear what conservative Protestantism net of the impact of religiosity is.

Using Multiple Measures

Green et al (1996b, 1997) have found even stronger results by combining all the above measures. For example, those who attend a CP denomination, identify with a CP movement, have conservative religious beliefs, and have higher religiosity have more conservative abortion attitudes and are more Republican than those who are missing some of these CP identifiers. However, this type of analysis works better with crosstabs and multiple classification analysis than with regression. In structural equation modeling, these multiple measures could be used to identify an underlying latent variable or variables.

SUBSTANTIVE AREAS

Gender and Family

Evangelical and Pentecostal groups were the first to ordain women, and some Pentecostal denominations still ordain higher proportions of women than any other denominations (Dayton 1991, Chaves 1996, Lindley 1996). Still, most CP groups have resisted this and limit the participation of women in church leadership. Lobbying by certain CP groups also effectively prevented the bestselling New International Version of the Bible from changing its translation to use gender-inclusive terms. Moreover, CPs are generally more supportive of traditional roles for women (Gay et al 1996), and a higher proportion of them are full-time homemakers. A vast literature has developed about this. Yet little of it contemplates why, in spite of this, women are more active in CP churches than men (Pevey et al 1996) and also more active in missions and evangelism for these groups (Hutchison 1987, Neill 1986, Ryan 1978; also see Brusco 1995).

Recently, several scholars have begun to examine the complexity in prescribed women's roles among CPs (Bartkowski 1996, 1997, Ingersoll 1995) and to interview CP women about their experience and acceptance of these roles. These studies show that CP attitudes and practices in the area of gender and family life (e.g., household division of labor, female employment, marital decision making) are more nuanced and negotiated than previously recognized (Brasher 1997, Ellison & Bartkowski 1997, Gallagher 1996, Pevey et al 1996, Ozorak 1996, Demmitt 1992, Rose 1987, McNamara 1984) and that there is significantly more disagreement about gender-role attitudes among CPs than in the general population (i.e., their standard deviation is significantly larger) (Gay et al 1996). This complexity is often missed in survey analysis because of distinct subcultural usages of terms like "headship" (Gallagher 1996, Pevey et al 1996).

Many scholars also theorize that CPs are more patriarchal and therefore more likely to physically or verbally abuse their wives (e.g., Straus et al 1988, pp. 7–8, 21). However, both self-report and spousal-report suggest that CP men are not more likely than other religious groups to physically abuse their wives and are significantly less likely than the religiously nonaffiliated (Ellison et al 1996, Brinkerhoff et al 1992; also see Straus et al 1988, pp. 128, 138).²⁵ Neither are they more likely to use verbal or symbolic aggression (Brinkerhoff et al 1992). Moreover, most available evidence suggests that regular church attenders are significantly less likely to abuse their spouse (Ellison et al 1996, Ferguson et al 1986), although in one Canadian study the relationship is curvilinear, with irregular attenders being the most abusive (Brinkerhoff et al 1992).

Although few scholars have analyzed CP family involvement (Wilcox 1997), research does show that "biblical literalists" are more likely to value obedience in children and to use corporal punishment (Ellison & Sherkat 1993a,b, Ellison 1996).²⁶ Some researchers suggest that as a result, CPs may legitimate and encourage child abuse (Maurer 1982, Capps 1992). However, Ellison (1996) argues that the available evidence does not demonstrate this. According to Ellison, most studies on the negative impact of corporal punishment are seriously flawed, especially as it applies to conservative Protestants. These studies combine spanking, beating, threats, and assault with weapons, and they do not control for attenuating factors like parental involvement, affection, and communication. Definitive conclusions are difficult because almost no research analyzes the impact of mild-to-moderate corporal punishment. Generally, CP authors carefully delimit how and when corporal punishment

²⁵The exceptions to this rule are the relatively few cases in which the husband attends church far more or is far more theologically conservative than his wife. In these cases husbands are more likely to use violence (Ellison et al 1996). Studies disagree about whether CP women are more or less likely to use violence against their husbands (Brinkerhoff et al 1992, Ellison et al 1996).

²⁶They are not less likely to value intellectual autonomy (Ellison & Sherkat 1993b).

can be used (i.e., only for willful disobedience by pre-teens, not when parents are angry or feel loss of control, and only when the reason for the punishment is carefully explained and followed by “a period of loving intimacy”) (Ellison & Sherkat 1993a, Ellison 1996, Bartkowski 1996). However, ordinary people may not necessarily follow these injunctions. Still, recent research on fatherhood by W Bradford Wilcox (1997) suggests that CP fathers are more likely to hug and praise their children, less likely to yell at them, and are among the most involved in their children’s daily lives.²⁷ This may or may not attenuate the possible negative consequences of corporal punishment.

Thus, CP women may be willing to accept more traditional roles in order to get men to be more committed to their marriage and child-raising. Qualitative research suggests that CP women use biblical injunctions to hold their husbands to higher standards of emotional intimacy and support (Gallagher 1996, Pevey et al 1996). In any case, both regular church attenders and CPs report greater life satisfaction and greater commitment to and dependence on their marriages (Larson & Goltz 1989, Wilson & Musick 1996, Ellison 1991, Ellison et al 1989). The more religiously active also have greater marital stability and report higher levels of marital satisfaction (Call & Heaton 1997, Thomas & Cornwall 1990, Lehrer & Chiswick 1993, Filsinger & Wilson 1984, Hunt & King 1978). Studies disagree over whether CPs have higher or lower marital satisfaction and stability than other religious respondents (Call & Heaton 1997, Schumm et al 1989, Wilson & Filsinger 1986, Chi & Houseknecht 1985, Hunt & King 1978). Much of the difference seems to depend on how conservative Protestantism is measured, what is controlled for, and to whom CPs are compared.

Tolerance

Much research suggests that CPs have selective tendencies toward greater intolerance than do other Americans (e.g., Gay & Ellison 1993, Wilcox & Jelen 1990). CPs are not more anti-Semitic than other Americans. Two studies commissioned by the American Jewish Committee show CPs are stronger supporters of Israel, feel closer to Jews, are more likely to view Jews as God’s chosen people, and have high social and political acceptance of Jews (e.g., 96% would vote for a Jewish president). Their major “intolerant” attitude is that they generally believe Jews must accept Jesus to be saved (although they believe this for all non-Christians, not just Jews) (T Smith 1994, 1996, Whalen 1996, Guth et al 1996a,c, Abrams 1997). CPs are also not more racist than other Americans.²⁸

²⁷However, religiosity is not controlled in this analysis; thus greater religiosity rather than CPism may be the important factor.

²⁸Some extremist-right groups use Christian rhetoric. However, these have little support or recognition among CPs. For example, of politically/socially conservative white CPs who know David Duke, only 5% “admire” or “somewhat admire” him, compared to 6% of the rest of the white population (T Smith 1994, 1996).

They differ little from other Americans on attitudes toward blacks, Asians, Catholics, Hispanics, or immigrants (T Smith 1996, Davis & Robinson 1996, also see Guth et al 1996c, pp. 308–9).²⁹

Conservative Protestants do hold less tolerant views of militarists, racists, atheists, homosexuals, feminists, and Moslems (Wilcox & Jelen 1990, Tamney & Johnson 1997, T Smith 1996). They are also more likely to think “dangerous” books should not be in the public libraries. These kind of findings are reflected in most tolerance scales.

However, some scholars argue that much of this tolerance research is flawed (e.g., Sullivan et al 1982, Smidt & Penning 1982, Davis & Robinson 1996, Jelen & Wilcox 1990, Hood 1983). First, some studies do not have adequate controls. Second, they have no measures of behavior. Some “tolerance” items may measure attitudinal “moral relativism” rather than actual behavioral graciousness toward those with whom one disagrees. Third, most studies treat tolerance as a single unidimensional attitude that people either possess or do not, despite the fact that different groups may be tolerant to some target groups but not others. Fourth, Smidt & Penning (1982) argue that most tolerance scales (e.g., the GSS tolerance scale) are biased against CPs (also see Sullivan et al 1982, pp. 137, 249–50).³⁰ A better method of measuring tolerance is to let respondents choose the group they dislike most. This methodology eliminates the difference in tolerance between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews and greatly reduces the difference between liberals and conservatives (Sullivan et al 1982, pp. 135–39). Unfortunately it is difficult to determine what happens to CPs’ tolerance level because the measures of religion in Sullivan et al are so crude.

However, even if scales were less biased, on average CPs would probably be less tolerant. The fact that CP intolerance does not appear to be ideologically selective—they are as intolerant of militarists and racists (Wilcox & Jelen 1990, Tamney & Johnson 1997) as of atheists and homosexuals—suggests that the distinction between CPs and others may ultimately derive from competing moral visions. Standing in the old tradition of political conservatism (à la Burke), CPs appear to prioritize the conservation of what is in their view the moral basis of the “common good,” over the liberal ethic of tolerance.

²⁹The relationship between religiosity and prejudice is curvilinear. Those who are peripherally involved in religion are the most prejudiced, and those who are heavily involved the least. People’s motivations for attending are also important (Gorsuch 1988, Kirkpatrick 1993). Although some scholars question their motives and methods, CP groups like Promise Keepers have made significant attempts to promote racial reconciliation (e.g., see Olsen 1997).

³⁰These scales ask about attitudes toward homosexuals, atheists, communists, and feminists (left-wing target groups), but not about people’s attitudes toward fundamentalists, gender-role traditionalists, etc (right-wing target groups). They ask whether it is okay to have books that advocate atheism in the public library but not about books that advocate conversion to Christianity.

Finally, however, even using the traditional tolerance scales, there is a significantly higher variance in tolerance attitudes among CPs than in the general population (Gay & Ellison 1993). This suggests that some subgroups within conservative Protestantism are highly tolerant and others are highly intolerant. Much of this intolerance seems to result from fundamentalism rather than religious orthodoxy per se (Green et al 1994, Kirkpatrick 1993). Tolerance is also influenced by how much a group feels marginalized and threatened (Green et al 1994, Sullivan et al 1982, p. 251).

Culture Wars?

With the rise of the religious right (RR), many scholars and journalists have become convinced that America is involved in a culture war in which CPs play a leading role (e.g., Hunter 1991). However, at the grass roots this does not appear to be the case (C Smith et al 1998, Williams 1997, Manza & Brooks 1997, DiMaggio et al 1996, Davis & Robinson 1996, Iannaccone 1993). After analyzing multiple attitudinal measures on the GSS and NES, DiMaggio et al (1996) conclude that the attitudes of liberals and conservative religionists have actually converged since the 1970s. The only area of increased polarization they found is in abortion attitudes. Since the 1970s, liberals have become more pro-choice and more unified in their views; conservative religionists have become more internally polarized (pp. 733–34). The gender-role and racial attitudes of both groups have also become more liberal and less polarized over time. The authors analyze a number of other possible cleavage lines in society, but only party ID showed increased cleavage (i.e., the attitudes of self-identified Democrats and Republicans have become more polarized). This may have resulted because conservative Southern Democrats have increasingly joined the Republican party, which makes Democrats appear more liberal and Republicans more conservative.

There is also little evidence of a massive increase in the number of CPs (Guth 1996a, T Smith 1992, Wuthnow 1992). Some people convert to CP denominations, but higher birth rates and greater retention of CP children cause much of the relative growth. However this has been a slow, gradual process (Guth 1996a, Finke & Stark 1992).

Moreover, according to Manza & Brooks (1997) white CPs have not become more Republican or increased their presidential voting behavior between 1960 and 1992, although liberal Protestants have become increasingly Democratic. This seems to contradict the research of most other scholars (e.g., Kellstedt et al 1996d, Layman 1997). However, different starting years and methodologies seem to have caused these apparent contradictions.³¹ Manza & Brooks started

³¹Manza & Brooks divided Protestant into conservatives, moderates, and liberals. Kellstedt et al divided them into evangelicals and mainliners. However, this does not seem to explain the different results. Manza & Brooks' analysis shows no trend for either conservative or moderate Protestants (which include the denominations in Kellstedt et al's evangelical category).

their analysis in 1960; most others start around 1980 (e.g., Layman 1997). However, Manza & Brooks' analysis shows that CPs moved strongly into the Democratic party to support fellow evangelical Jimmy Carter in both the 1976 and 1980 elections. Thus, this temporary Democratic shift is the anomaly, not their gradual drift back into the Republican party.

The second difference is the type of controls used. Manza & Brooks controlled for the overall trend in presidential voting; the others did not. On average, the general population voted more Republican in presidential elections between 1960 and 1988; thus, in cross-tabulated analysis without controls, CPs seem to have become more Republican and mainline Protestants to have remained unchanged in their political loyalties (see Kellstedt et al 1996d). However, this does not necessarily contradict a proper reading of Manza & Brooks' tables. According to their tables CPs have become no more Republican than the general population has, while liberal Protestants have resisted the general trend. Thus, if the CP trend does not differ significantly from the general population, it seems unlikely that the RR had a major impact on CP presidential voting or party ID, at least up to the 1992 elections. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that CP voter participation peaked in the 1976 and 1980 Carter elections and has declined since (Manza & Brooks 1997).³²

Why then do CPs have so much greater public visibility? First, CPs' increased wealth and education have led to increased community involvement and greater organizational skills. Now CPs as a whole are almost even with mainline Protestants in education, income, and middle-class identity (Guth 1996a). Some groups of CPs always were middle-class and college educated, but others, like Pentecostals, have made significant recent gains. Second, some CPs have set up political pressure groups that attempt to speak for the CP community and have mobilized activists to participate in the Republican party organization (which previously was dominated by mainline Protestants). These organizations allowed previously marginalized groups to inject their concerns into the public arena (see Regnerus & Smith 1998). They also facilitate rapid dissemination of political information to CP constituents. As with the rise of Catholic involvement in politics earlier in this century, the new political visibility of CPs has raised concern among older elites. Third, CPs are more visible because of a restructuring of the political spectrum. Traditionally, Catholics, Jews, minorities, and Southerners voted Democratic, and white non-Southern Protestants voted Republican. However, according to Manza & Brooks (1997), liberal Protestants have moved strongly toward the Democratic party and conservative Southerners into the Republican party. This has radically shifted party coalitions and rhetoric. Thus, whites, Jews, secularists,

³²This analysis focuses on presidential elections: CPs may have increased their voting in non-presidential elections, or since 1992. Research by Green et al (1996a,b) suggests that this is the case.

and social liberals have become the new core of the Democratic party. This has left more conservative Protestants as the core of the Republican party (Manza & Brooks 1997, Green et al 1996b, p. 4).³³

According to Manza & Brooks, decomposition of the regression coefficients suggests that this shift in the party alignment of liberal Protestants was caused by their increasingly liberal views on social issues, especially abortion (no doubt the rise of the RR helped speed them on their way). The shift of liberal Protestants and Southerners has increased the internal consistency of both parties on social issues and made it in the interest of party elites to manipulate religious and regional issues to mobilize political support and demobilize opposition. Social issues may mobilize some CPs, but fear of the RR is also an effective counter-mobilization tool (Wald 1995, Rozell & Wilcox 1995c).

*The Religious Right*³⁴

In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of CPs became increasingly concerned about the direction in which the United States was moving. Stricter enforcement of the separation of church and state, the legalization of abortion, the sexual revolution, the gay rights movement, the removal of religion from public education, the increasing sexual explicitness of TV and movies, the spread of pornography, and challenges to traditional gender roles all raised concern (Guth 1996a). These issues were strongly linked to the family and the socialization of the next generation of believers (Davis & Robinson 1996, Oldfield 1996).³⁵ Also, CPs' growing socioeconomic status allowed them to develop stronger institutional structures.

However, the 1976 campaign of Jimmy Carter provided the initial spark. Carter was openly evangelical, and CPs moved strongly into the Democratic party to support him in the 1976 election. Despite common beliefs to the contrary, CPs disproportionately supported Carter against Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election (Woodberry et al 1996; also see Manza & Brooks 1997, Lipset & Raab 1981, p. 29).³⁶ However, the 1976 election drew the attention of New Right strategists (most of whom were not CPs) (Oldfield 1996, p. 100, Guth

³³This religious cleavage is even more evident among party elites than at the grass roots (Kellstedt et al 1996d).

³⁴For more extended summaries of research on the RR, see the introductory chapter of Rozell & Wilcox 1996, Wilcox 1996, pp. 25–57, Oldfield 1996, and Guth 1996a.

³⁵RR activists often use the rhetoric of a persecuted minority (Oldfield 1996, pp. 31, 55; Reed 1994).

³⁶Woodberry et al (1996) selected white CPs by denomination and then further separated respondents by region and age into Northern and Southern CPs from three different age cohorts. In 1980, all groups except Northern baby-boomer CPs supported Carter at rates similar to those in 1976 (young Northerners seem the least likely to have been influenced by the RR). Mainline Protestants were far more likely to abandon Carter. In fact, all mainline groups did, except Northern baby-boomers (who increased in their support).

1996a). They realized that they could win the presidency and a substantial portion of Congress with the CP vote and began to court its politically conservative wing. At the same time, repeated intervention of the government in Southern fundamentalist schools (many of which had grown significantly during desegregation), and frequent inquiries by the Securities and Exchange Commission and the IRS into the fund-raising of TV ministers, helped convince formally apolitical leaders like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson of the importance of political involvement (Guth 1996a). New Right activists eagerly showed them the political ropes. This helps explain why the economic rhetoric of the RR is more conservative than that of its CP constituency. From its inception the RR has been just one part of a new right-wing political coalition (Iannaccone 1993; also see Oldfield 1996, pp. 100, 218–19).

Despite the attention the RR received in the press, it was initially very weak. The Moral Majority, the Religious Round Table, and The Christian Voice predominantly mobilized fundamentalist ministers from the Sunbelt (Guth 1996b).³⁷ The Moral Majority was composed mostly of Independent Baptists and some conservative Southern Baptists and Presbyterians. The leadership was almost exclusively pastors in Jerry Falwell's Baptist Bible Fellowship. Although mobilizing the ministers in his denomination allowed Falwell to list organizations in 47 states (which looked good on paper), most of the organizations did very little. Many pastors were either not interested or too busy running their churches to do much politically. The Moral Majority gave a total of only \$25,000 to political candidates and had little grass-roots mobilization, even among CPs (Guth 1996a, Guth & Green 1996a, Georgiana 1989).³⁸ A survey of contributors to 60 political action committees (PACs) shows that conservative political attitudes, not demographic or religious factors, best predicted support for the Moral Majority (Guth & Green 1996a).

Nevertheless, these organizations collapsed within a few years. Initially many observers claimed the RR had died, but to their surprise it rose again with the presidential campaign of Pat Robertson in 1988. Robertson received few votes but surprised journalists and opponents with the size of his activist following (Oldfield 1996, Green 1996). Other candidates raised more money, but he received contributions from more individuals than the rest of the Republican candidates combined. These supporters were primarily middle-class urban Pentecostals and charismatics from the Sunbelt, areas where secular and traditional religious values are increasingly in tension (Green 1996). Those who voted for him were also primarily Pentecostals and charismatics (Smidt et al 1996, Rozell & Wilcox 1995b, Oldfield 1996). However, Robertson failed to

³⁷Pentecostals were also an important element of the Christian Voice (Smidt et al 1996).

³⁸Even Jerry Falwell's television audience was small, ranging from about 1,440,000 in 1981 to 300,000 in 1988 (W Martin 1981, Winzenburg 1988).

gain wide support even among CP clergy. A survey of ministers indicates that only about one tenth of Southern Baptist ministers and one fourth of Assemblies of God ministers supported him (Green 1996).³⁹ Still, his campaign was important because it tapped a largely unmobilized segment of CPs (Pentecostals and charismatics), established the first truly grass-roots RR organization, and created the foundation for the Christian Coalition (Green 1996, Smidt et al 1996, Oldfield 1996).

After his failed presidential campaign, Pat Robertson asked Ralph Reed to form the Christian Coalition with the remnants of his political organization. Reed attempted to broaden the coalition to include evangelicals, Catholics, Mormons, black CPs, and conservative Jews. He framed the movement in more moderate terms, laced his speeches and books with seemingly liberal language about the rights of women, condemnation of racism, and repentance for past wrongs perpetuated by CPs (e.g., Reed 1994, 1996). The Christian Coalition actually established a grass-roots organization and has expanded the coalition to include a significant number of evangelicals and Mormons. Support by Catholics, blacks, and Jews is still minor (Green 1995, Rozell & Wilcox 1995b). As religious activists have integrated into the political system and gained more experience, they have lost some of their original militancy and become increasingly willing to compromise (Wilcox 1996, pp. 105–11, Moen 1995, Soper 1995, Billings & Scott 1994). The RR now has strong influence in the Republican parties of Utah, Kansas, Nebraska, and ten Southern states. It has contested influence in Virginia, Arizona, Iowa, Minnesota, Idaho, and the five Pacific-rim states, and modest-to-weak influence elsewhere (Green et al 1998b).

Despite impressive mobilization of activists, the RR's political impact has been minimal. Many of its victories have been symbolic, such as influencing the wording of the Republican party platform (Green & Guth 1996, Rozell & Wilcox 1995a). Most scholars now believe the RR will not disappear but will not become a dominant influence in politics either (Oldfield 1996, Wilcox 1996, Guth 1996a, Rozell & Wilcox 1995a, Green 1995).

There are several reasons for this. First, the RR has a limited constituency. Through the 1980s and 1990s, approximately 10% to 15% of survey respondents reported support for RR organizations.⁴⁰ A somewhat larger group supports specific issues on the RR's agenda; a much smaller number are active

³⁹The Assemblies of God is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States (Green 1996).

⁴⁰These percentages may be too high. According to T Smith (1996), when surveys ask about support for the "Religious Right," most respondents do not understand that this applies to a political movement. Support for the "Religious Right political movement" is much lower than for the "Religious Right." Even among supporters of the political movement, 47% had read little or nothing about it, and about 40% lacked awareness or admiration of even one of the major leaders (Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, or Ralph Reed).

participants (Rozell & Wilcox 1995b; also see T Smith 1996, p. 27). Even in Virginia, only 15% of voters said endorsement by Falwell, Robertson, or the Christian Coalition would increase their support for a candidate; most said it would reduce it (Rozell & Wilcox 1995c, p. 125). Yet Virginia is the home of Falwell, Robertson, the Christian Coalition, and numerous other RR organizations. The RR has limited support even within the Christian religious community (Jelen 1987, Guth & Green 1996a). Many (if not most) CP ministers remain solidly apolitical; only fundamentalist ministers seem to have responded with enthusiasm to the RR's call (Guth 1996a, p. 12). Even among Southern Baptist ministers, about half think political activism usually hurts the church (another third are not sure), and half think some Southern Baptist leaders have gone too far in mixing religion and politics (Guth 1996b). Many people who welcome religious people into the public square still fear the intolerance of RR leaders. Although a number of RR issues have broad support in the general public, openly identifying with the RR usually hurts candidates politically (Gilbert & Peterson 1995, Wald 1995). RR organizations and leaders are considerably less popular than the messages they intend to convey (Jelen 1987).

Second, there is a residual antipolitical bias among many CPs. Even with demographics controlled, CPs as a whole are still less likely to vote in presidential elections than are all other religious groups (Manza & Brooks 1997). Many CPs fear politics will dilute the church's spirituality, destroy internal harmony, debase its moral authority, and divert attention from evangelism (Guth et al 1996b, Oldfield 1996). Large groups like the National Association of Evangelicals and influential evangelical magazines like *Christianity Today* have supported selected RR initiatives but have resisted endorsing candidates or involvement in elections, and they have consistently counseled moderation (Guth 1996a). Third, both CPs and the RR are internally divided, with many competing organizations, leaders, and agendas (Green 1995).⁴¹ CP organizations can be found on multiple sides of most political issues.

Fourth, the RR is isolated from many of the mainstream culture-shaping institutions.⁴² Few Baptist, Pentecostal-Holiness, or other CPs are among the "power elite," few are CEOs, and few are listed in *Who's Who* (Pyle 1996, Davidson et al 1995, Manza & Brooks 1997). Few CPs are in the movie or TV industries (Rothman & Lichter 1984, Lichter et al 1983); few work at prominent newspapers, magazines, or TV newsrooms (Jelen & Wilcox 1995, Lichter & Rothman 1981), and few work in academia—especially in the humanities and social sciences (Jelen & Wilcox 1995, Wuthnow 1985, Gorsuch

⁴¹See McAdam (1982) for how a similar complexity of organizations hampered the effectiveness of the Civil Rights Movement after the mid-1960s.

⁴²They do have access to "subcultural shaping" institutions of their own.

1988).⁴³ Many of these sources also suggest that these elites are more socially liberal than the general public and especially than CPs. Thus, the RR has one type of power (i.e., votes, donations, activism), but RR activists have little power to determine how their movements will be framed in the national media or to influence which people and statements will be highlighted to represent their causes.⁴⁴ Their attempts to censor or influence textbook and media content must be done in public through boycotts and letter campaigns; they cannot do these things behind the scenes, or make others censor themselves through their control of promotions and resources.

Still the RR enjoys something like a veto power in the Republican party. On their own, the constituents of the RR cannot determine the Republican presidential candidate, and any candidate too closely tied to the movement would probably lose. But the Republicans would have difficulty nominating a candidate they directly oppose. Thus, Republican candidates must at least give lip service to their cause.⁴⁵

The RR has primarily been successful where its activists have been part of a broad coalition of allies, when their role is not highlighted, where state and party organizations have less control over committee memberships, candidates, and interest group activities, and where they have a mass constituency of CPs and other conservatives (Green et al 1998b, Guth & Green 1996a, Green et al 1996a, Wald 1995). Thus, they have gained substantial influence on the Republican party in the South and in Utah. However, in most other places RR activism arouses intense opposition (e.g., California, Oregon, and Minnesota). Because of the high commitment of CP activists, they are also influential in low-turnout elections and caucuses (where political participation has greater cost) (Oldfield 1996).

Why Conservative Churches Grow

Dean Kelley's 1972 book, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, demonstrated that CP churches tend to thrive numerically, while more liberal churches languish. Since then, scholars have advanced several theories seeking to explain why. For example, status discontent approaches focus on threats

⁴³In Jelen & Wilcox's academic sample (professors of political science, sociology, history, and English), 90% thought "Evangelicals/Religious Right" have too much power, 86% had the strongest view of the separation of church and state, and 75% thought "Evangelicals/Religious Right" are a threat to democracy (only 36% mentioned "Nazis/KKK/Racist Right").

⁴⁴Conflict may be accentuated because RR organizations use boycotts and letter campaigns to challenge the economic interests of the media conglomerates that produce many television shows, movies, and news programs.

⁴⁵Ronald Reagan did this skillfully by, for example, promoting a constitutional amendment allowing school prayer, but only after he knew there were not enough Congressional votes for it to pass (Sider 1997).

to the social or economic status of religious groups. They suggest that religious identities become more salient, commitments more firm, and resources more easily mobilized, the more a religious group feels their social status is threatened. Originally developed to explain right-wing political extremism, and largely unfashionable among contemporary sociologists, versions of status discontent theory still find occasional proponents among scholars of religion (e.g., Wald et al 1989, Lorentzen 1980, Page & Clelland 1978; see Thurrow 1996, p. 232).

Another theoretical approach, “strictness” theory, focuses on the differential impact of the microlevel normative demands religious groups impose on their members. In short, “strict” religious groups thrive, while “lenient” religious groups decline. Kelley (1972, 1978) argued that religions that deliver substantial meaning to their adherents thrive. Religions produce meaning by demanding that their followers respond to their beliefs by committing their time, money, energy, reputations, and selves in a way that validates and invests in those ideas. “Meaning = concept + demand” (1972, p. 52). More recently, Iannaccone (1992, 1994) suggests that strict religions thrive because they screen out free-riders (i.e., people who enjoy many of the benefits of the religious group while contributing little to the group). Strict churches demand that their members contribute their fair share of time, money, and emotional energy to generate the collective religious goods all enjoy. Strict CP churches that screen out free-riders enjoy higher degrees of commitment, solidarity, and mutual rewards, all of which make them thrive and grow.

A third theory of religious vitality, based on the economic model of rational choice, is called the “religious economies” or “supply side” theory (Finke & Stark 1988, 1989, 1992, Finke & Iannaccone 1993, Finke et al 1996). This theory claims that religious regulation and monopolies create lethargic religions, but pluralistic, competitive environments allow entrepreneurial religious groups to thrive. In these environments, religious “firms” (denominations and traditions) that possess superior organizational structures (denominational polities), sales representatives (evangelists and clergy), products (religious messages), and marketing (evangelistic techniques) flourish (Finke & Stark 1989). Those that cannot successfully compete, decline. CP vitality, then, is a result of unregulated religious environments that stimulate aggressive CP religious entrepreneurs to promote more diverse religious products that satisfy ever-expanding markets of religious consumers.

Finally, seeking to elaborate sociology of religion’s “new paradigm” (Warner 1993) in cultural and structural rather than economic terms, Smith et al (1998) advance a “subcultural identity” theory of evangelical church vitality. It suggests that in a pluralistic society, those religious groups will be relatively stronger that better possess and employ the cultural tools needed to create both clear distinction from, and significant engagement and tension with, other rele-

vant outgroups (short of becoming genuinely countercultural). Smith et al (1998) argue that evangelicalism possesses precisely these cultural tools. Formulated in contrast to older modernization-secularization interpretations of evangelicalism (e.g., Hunter 1983, 1987), the subcultural identity theory attempts to demonstrate how and why American evangelicalism thrives within its modern, pluralistic environment. The elaborated theory suggests that the human drives for meaning and belonging are satisfied primarily by locating human selves within social groups that sustain distinctive, morally orienting identities; that social groups construct and maintain collective identities by drawing symbolic boundaries between themselves and relevant outgroups; that modern believers establish stronger religious identities and commitments through individual choice than through ascription; that people define their values and evaluate themselves in relation to specific reference groups; that modern pluralism promotes the formation of strong subcultures and potentially deviant identities; and that inter-group conflict in a pluralistic context typically strengthens in-group identity, solidarity, resources mobilization, and membership retention.

Theories of CP organizational vitality remain contested (see Marwell 1996, Bibby 1978, Chaves 1989, Hunter 1987, pp. 203–6, Perrin & Mauss 1993), and more empirical research is needed to evaluate their usefulness.

CONCLUSION

Conservative Protestantism represents at least a quarter of the US population and significantly influences its adherents' attitudes and behaviors. Conceptual problems and measurement difficulties have obscured the importance of CP faith in many previous sociological studies. We suggest that greater clarity in definitions, understanding of history, use of sophisticated measurement tools, and attention to complex and nuanced qualitative data should significantly enhance our understanding of conservative Protestantism and its social significance in the years ahead. This type of research is already beginning to alter our understanding of CPs' gender-role attitudes, childrearing strategies, tolerance, and political behavior.

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