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THE NEW RELIGIOUS POLITICAL RIGHT

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The thesis examines the ideology of the new religious political right, the movement's structure, the methods it uses to influence modern society and its similarity and differences with past American populist and nativist movements.

The religious right is made up of fundamentalist Protestants, socially conservative Catholics and several other groups with fundamentalist Protestants being the largest and most influential group. Fundamentalist Protestant ideology is based upon the doctrine of "inerrancy" which holds that the Bible is literally correct in all of its detail.

The religious right is significantly influenced by the doctrine of Christian Reconstructionism which is based on the belief that Christ will return after a thousand year rule by Christians (postmillennialism) as opposed to the more common view that Christ will bring true believers to heaven before Armageddon and will return with them afterwards for a thousand year rule (premillennialism). The Reconstructionist view mobilizes followers to take political action to establish a Christian theocracy where all members of society are required to live in accord with biblical law.

The religious right is characterized by extremely prejudiced views based on traditional sex-role stereotypes. Sexism and homophobia are important components of its belief system. Racism and anti-Semitism are present but usually not overt or

severe. There is considerable hostility on the part of fundamentalists toward all other religious beliefs, including other Christian ones, but they are willing to ally themselves with other religious groups to change social policy.

The religious right functions as part of the larger new right movement. It is well organized and well financed with many groups having particular areas of focus and particular public policy objectives but functioning as part of a larger coordinated network so that their efforts are complementary and facilitate the Christianizing of society and government.

During the 1980s the major focus of the religious right was on the federal level where they enjoyed considerable support from the Reagan and Bush administrations. By 1990 the emphasis shifted toward grassroots organizing to take over local and state governments and to gain control of the Republican party. The religious right has made significant progress in these areas by having national organizations establish state and local chapters and by using socially conservative churches for political mobilization.

The skillful use of Christian radio and television programs, large direct mail lists, their own publications, and the use of thousands of local churches for political activity have turned the religious right into a formidable political force. The

movement, while certainly not representing a single set of beliefs or objectives tends to be quite hostile toward fundamental democratic principles.

The movement, like past American populist and nativist movements, is a reaction to modernity and rapid social change. It is not a traditional conservative movement since it seeks radical social change and is anti-elitist. Homophobia and sexism have replaced xenophobia and provided a new set of scapegoats. The movement poses a considerably greater threat to American democracy than past populist and nativist movements because it has greater resources and organizational strengths.