

FOURTH EDITION

Onward Christian Soldiers?

The Religious Right in American Politics



Clyde Wilcox and Carin Robinson

Onward Christian Soldiers?

Dilemmas in American Politics

Series Editor: **Craig A. Rimmerman**, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

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Onward Christian Soldiers?

*The Religious Right in
American Politics*

FOURTH EDITION

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Hood College



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Cover photo: Pastor Rick Warren (center) gives the invocation as President-elect Barack Obama and President George W. Bush bow their heads during the 56th presidential inauguration ceremony for Barack Obama, January 20, 2009.

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Preface

Writing about the Christian Right always brings out the schizophrenic elements in me, as my roots war with my politics. I grew up in rural West Virginia, and many of my family and friends who still live in that area are supporters of the Christian Right. My father was a fundamentalist Sunday school teacher who taught me the Bible and was a fan of Jerry Falwell. My mother was a charismatic who regularly watched Pat Robertson's *700 Club* and greatly enjoyed a Spirit-filled religious retreat every spring. My great-aunts, to whom this book is dedicated, seldom missed a televised sermon by Charles Stanley.

As a child I attended the Walnut Grove United Methodist Church, a church in the revivalist tradition of Spirit-filled fundamentalism. I was often drafted to play the piano in revival services in small churches in the surrounding area, where I spent a few hectic minutes trying to determine in which key to play each song so as to minimize the number of dead keys on the very old, poorly maintained pianos. The people in those churches are fair-minded, warm, and compassionate. I could fill a book with tales of their extraordinary kindness and generosity. Most of them are also very conservative; they oppose abortion, gay rights, government welfare programs, and most other liberal policies. Although I am no longer part of that culture, I respect, admire, and love the people there.

Yet I also came of age politically in the late 1960s and was shaped by the civil rights, antiwar, feminist, and environmental movements. I strongly oppose most of the policy agenda of the Christian Right. I want my daughter and son to grow up in a world in which they have equal access to a wider range of roles than society now provides. I want my gay and lesbian friends to live free of discrimination based on whom they love. I want the public schools to teach my children to think for themselves, be tolerant of diverse lifestyles, and know about the latest scientific thinking. Thus my political values are in conflict with my roots, and I engage in much internal debate when I write about the Christian Right.

I hope this internal dialogue has produced a fair assessment of the role of the Christian Right in American politics and the dilemmas it creates for the polity. If I have succeeded, it is due in no small part to the suggestions of colleagues over the years: Mary Bendyna, John Green, Ted Jelen, Matt Moen, Ken Wald, Rachel Goldberg, my wife Elizabeth Cook, and many others. In this edition as well as the third, I benefited from the collaboration of Carin Robinson, who has graduated from student to equal collaborator. It has been a pleasure working with her on the book, and I have enjoyed our e-mail dialogues over various issues. We would like to thank the staff of Westview Press, specifically Toby Wahl, Sharon DeJohn, Erica Lawrence, and Michelle Welsh-Horst, for their kind assistance on this project.

I wrote the first edition of this book while teaching a small seminar on the Christian Right at Georgetown University in the fall of 1995. The thirteen students in that class were a lively group who inspired me to rethink many questions, assisted me in locating important information, and helped remind me why I enjoy teaching. Over the next ten years I taught the class several other times, and in many cases had wonderful students whose papers have been influential in my understanding various issues. In 2009 I had another stellar group of students, some of whose papers are cited in this edition.

This book is dedicated to my grandmother, Zoe Wilcox, and her two sisters, Beulah Musgrove and Grace Ice. Although these women lived quite different lives, they shared a lifelong interest in learning and teaching. Their strength, compassion, decency, and love of life inspire me daily.

Clyde Wilcox

I grew up in an evangelical church. My family attended church every Sunday, and I went to Bible camp each summer. My first exposure to American politics came from Focus on the Family and Christian news magazines. At an early age, I learned about the culture wars. Though my parents gave me the freedom to choose my own path, the evangelical subculture of my youth left me little room for exploration. By early adulthood, I had grown disillusioned with a tradition that was more about behavior than beliefs, more about feelings than facts. Around the same time, I encountered evangelicals who believed in evolution, voted for Democrats, and supported gay rights. The experiences did not negate my religious beliefs but did refine them.

Therefore, today I approach the study of the Christian Right with great ambivalence. My ambivalence is a function of my sympathies for portions of the movement's platform mixed with my understanding of scripture that leads me to forsake all political warfare for the simple message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Although I can agree with certain sentiments of the Christian Right, I do not readily endorse the movement as a reflection of biblical Christianity. I fear Christians in this country have Americanized the Bible and limited our scope of influence by equating the Gospel with public law and in some cases a political party. Although my political attitudes have no doubt been shaped by my religious upbringing and professed faith, I refrain from making claims about God's will for America, for He has the *whole* world in his hands.

Revising this book has been a great exercise for me as I sort through both my support and my opposition to the social movement as it stands in 2010. I hope the perspective I bring to this edition contributes to the balance my coauthor achieved in earlier versions. I am incredibly grateful to him for the opportunities he has given me to participate in this scholarly discussion as well as the challenges he poses that refine my own faith. I also thank the many students who have dialogued with me about my research and have kept me curious and humble along the way.

My contribution to this book is dedicated to my church family in Bethesda, Maryland. I am thankful for their support as I press on.

Carin Robinson



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Introduction

The Christian Right in Context

The America I know and love is not one in which my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama's "death panel" so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their "level of productivity in society," whether they are worthy of health care. Such a system is downright evil.

Sarah Palin, in a message posted on Facebook about President Obama's health care plan, August 7, 2009



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ON SEPTEMBER 4, 2008, Alaska governor Sarah Palin addressed a wildly cheering crowd at the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis, accepting her party's nomination as vice president. Christian Right activists who had lamented Sen. John McCain's victories in GOP primaries were delighted with Palin's speech. As television cameras lingered over her young daughter Piper slicking back the hair of Palin's baby son Trig, pro-life activists cheered Palin's decision to give birth to a child with Down syndrome.

Her selection by John McCain was testimony to the power of the Christian Right in the Republican Party. McCain's first choice, Connecticut senator Joe Lieberman (D), and his second choice, former Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge (R), were both pro-choice. McCain had calculated that any votes he lost by their selection would be offset by gains among moderate voters, and that the selection of a former Democratic vice presidential candidate would signal to voters that McCain was a change agent. But Christian Right leaders threatened to stage a walkout at the Republican National Convention if either man were chosen, and their veto stuck.

Palin's choice helped McCain win support from many Christian Right activists, who had strongly opposed him ever since he had referred to movement leaders Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell as "agents of intolerance" during the 2000 presidential campaign. Although McCain had tried to mend fences, including meeting privately with Falwell and giving the commencement speech at Falwell's Liberty University in 2006, most activists were not appeased. McCain received the fewest number of votes of the ten Republican presidential candidates in a straw poll taken in 2007 at the Values Voters Summit, a gathering of Christian Right activists. **Focus on the Family** founder James Dobson said at the time that he would not support McCain's candidacy "under any circumstances."¹ But one month after Palin became McCain's running mate, Dobson changed his mind. He told his radio listeners he was as happy on the day Palin became the prospective vice presidential nominee as he had been on the day Ronald Reagan was inaugurated

president. *Newsweek* declared her nomination the start of a “religious right revival” (Miller, 2008).

Yet Palin exemplified many of the contradictions of the contemporary Christian Right. Though celebrated by movement leaders, Palin also reflected the traditional weakness of Christian Right candidates by alienating moderate Republicans and independent voters, many of whom saw her as an ideologue who lacked the knowledge and experience required of someone a heartbeat away from the presidency. YouTube videos circulated showing Palin at the Assembly of God church in Wasilla referring to her oil pipeline project as “God’s will” and of a Kenyan pastor in a different service praying for protection against witchcraft in the Alaska legislature.

The days preceding Palin’s speech were marred by controversy when it was revealed that her seventeen-year-old, unmarried daughter was five months pregnant. Palin quickly announced that her daughter had plans to marry the father; Christian Right activists rallied behind Palin and cheered her daughter and her boyfriend onstage. In 1992 Christian Right activists had similarly cheered when Republican vice presidential nominee Dan Quayle attacked a fictional television character named Murphy Brown, who found herself pregnant after sleeping once with her ex-husband and chose to become a single mother. Bristol Palin was praised for her pro-life decision, but Quayle had charged that the *Murphy Brown* show contributed to the “poverty of values.”

Palin’s opposition to same-sex marriage, abortion, and stem cell research, and her support for abstinence education and the discussion of **creationism** in public schools, excited Christian Right activists. But during her vice presidential debate, Palin defended her state’s partnership benefits for same-sex couples and declared her personal tolerance for same-sex couples.

Perhaps most strikingly, Sarah Palin has made decisions that sharply contrast with Christian Right ideals. Whereas Christian Right groups argue that women should stay home with young children, Palin took a transcontinental flight while in labor, gave birth to a child with special needs, and was at work in the governor’s mansion the next morning. The mother of five children, including a pregnant teen and two children under the age of five, Palin eagerly accepted the opportunity to take on one of the most demanding jobs in the world. After her defeat in 2008 Palin resigned her job as governor, not to spend more time with her family, but to campaign more actively for president. Her new position as commentator on Fox News gives her an impressive opportunity, but also an imposing schedule.

In 2010 the Christian Right is not dead, but neither is it thriving. In 2008 movement leaders were unable to agree on a favorite Republican presidential candidate, and their least favorite candidate won the nomination. Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 election was a major defeat for the movement, made even more bitter by the defection of a number of young **evangelical** voters to the Democratic ticket. In 2005 the movement had easy access to Republican leadership in the White House, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Senate, but in 2010 the Democrats control all of these institutions.

Over the past few years former **Christian Coalition** leader Ralph Reed and former president of the **National Association of Evangelicals**, Rev. Ted Haggard, have been embroiled in scandals. Movement leaders Rev. Jerry Falwell and Rev. D. James Kennedy died in 2007. Beverly LaHaye stepped down as president of **Concerned Women for America** (CWA) in 2006, and James Dobson retired as chairman of Focus on the Family in early 2009. The new generation of leaders is not as well known and thus is far less able to mobilize their constituency.

Moreover, in the wake of Christian Right activism there has been a growing unease over the mixing of religion and politics. A national survey in 2008 revealed that the majority of Americans (52 percent) believe that churches and religious institutions should "keep out" of politics, the highest level of opposition since the question was first asked in 1996. Even among white evangelicals—the base of the Christian Right—concern with religion's effects on politics rose from 16 percent in 2004 to 36 percent in 2008.²

Today a more moderate brand of evangelical political activism has gained visibility through people like Rick Warren and Joel Hunter, pastors of theologically conservative megachurches who have expressed concern for the environment and AIDS in Africa from the pulpit. Both men are pro-life and opposed to same-sex marriage, and this allows them to maintain credence with the evangelical community while at the same time broadening its political agenda and nudging it outside Republican Party politics.

Young evangelicals appear particularly open to this new style of politics, as numerous studies find young evangelicals to be less conservative than their older counterparts. In 2008 only 40 percent of evangelicals under age thirty called themselves Republicans, compared to 55 percent in 2006.³ In addition, younger evangelicals express more concern than their parents for the environment, health care, poverty, and even same-sex unions. Today large portions of the Christian Right's agenda and its partisan style are unappealing

to the next generation of evangelicals, suggesting that the movement will struggle to attract support in the coming generation.

There are also signs that the movement is even losing some of its original stalwarts. One of the founders of the contemporary religious right, Cal Thomas, who has repeatedly expressed concern over the direction the Christian Right has taken since the 1990s, had this to say at the end of 2008:

Thirty years of trying to use government to stop abortion, preserve opposite-sex marriage, improve television and movie content and transform culture into the conservative Evangelical image has failed. The question now becomes: should conservative Christians redouble their efforts, contributing more millions to radio and TV preachers and activists, or would they be wise to try something else? I opt for trying something else.⁴

Just a few years after many analysts credited white evangelical voters with returning George W. Bush to the White House and swelling the GOP margin in Congress in 2004, the same analysts were saying that the Christian Right was finished and evangelical politics were floundering. But media accounts of the influence of the Christian Right have gyrated wildly, from underestimating the movement's considerable resources to overstating its numbers and impact. In 1995 most accounts supported claims by Ralph Reed (then director of the Christian Coalition) and others that the Christian Right helped the Republicans gain control of the House of Representatives for the first time in a generation and win control of the U.S. Senate (Wilcox, 1995). Just three years earlier, many commentators had blamed Christian conservatives for damaging President George H. W. Bush's chances for reelection by using divisive and often extreme rhetoric at the Republican National Convention.

In 1980, after Ronald Reagan won the White House with a margin that surprised pollsters, the media credited Jerry Falwell and the **Moral Majority** with the Republican victory. Journalists "discovered" the strength of the Christian Right, and some painted the Moral Majority as a juggernaut that represented a substantial portion of the American citizenry. But public opinion polls soon revealed that Jerry Falwell was one of the most unpopular men in America, and journalists then "discovered" the weakness of the Christian Right. They painted the movement as small, extreme, and so deeply fragmented that further growth was impossible. By 1983 the media had pronounced the Christian Right moribund. In 1984, when Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and their followers were a visible presence at the Republican

nominating convention, the media rediscovered the assets of the Christian Right, only to rediscover its weaknesses by 1986. Early in the 1988 presidential campaign, when Pat Robertson did surprisingly well in the very early Michigan balloting and placed second in the Iowa caucuses, the media again discovered a hidden army of Christian Right activists. At the end of the campaign, when Robertson had spent more money than any other candidate but won only a handful of delegates, the weakness of the Christian Right was again the story. In late 1988, with a moderate Republican in the White House, Robertson back on television, and the Moral Majority essentially bankrupt, the media wrote the movement's obituary. Journalists were not alone; some scholars saw the movement as moribund at various points in its history and depicted its downfall as inevitable (Bruce, 1988).

In fact, throughout much of this period public support for the Christian Right and its issue agenda changed little. What did change is the sophistication of movement leaders and the presence of grassroots organizations. Between 10 and 15 percent of whites support the Christian Right and have done so since the formation of the Moral Majority in 1979 (Wilcox, 1992; Wilcox, DeBell, and Sigelman, 1999). Yet the organizations of the Christian Right became more effective in mobilizing some of those supporters into activism and providing informational cues for voting. The power and visibility of the movement varied over time as organizations were formed or disbanded, and as Republican strategists focused on evangelical votes as a core of the party coalition.

The movement has important strengths and weaknesses. It is likely that the fiery speeches by Christian Right leaders at the Republican National Convention in 1992 hurt the GOP in that election, and that the quiet mobilization of Christian conservatives in the 1994 elections helped the Republicans win a number of closely contested House and Senate races.⁵ Christian Right support helped George W. Bush win the White House in 2000 and 2004, but it did little to make John McCain competitive in 2008. The movement has great assets. It has dedicated, savvy activists who have worked for many years on issues they care about and a broader base of members and supporters. Most of these supporters attend church once a week or more, which means that they regularly meet face to face, giving the movement an infrastructural advantage that liberal groups envy.

But many of the movement's leaders are prone to publicly voicing extreme statements, which often results in ridicule of the movement. For example, the late Jerry Falwell, speaking soon after the terrorist attacks in September

2001, proclaimed on national television: “I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, **People for the American Way**, all of them who have tried to secularize America. I point the finger in their face and say, ‘You helped this happen.’”⁶ Falwell later apologized, but he became the target of angry blogs and television and radio talk show jokes for months. In August 2005 Pat Robertson called for the assassination of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. Robertson later insisted that he had been misunderstood, but because he had spoken on national television, a video record of his remarks remained, and his denial did little to quell the international uproar. After powerful earthquakes devastated Haiti in January 2010, as the world rushed to provide aid, Robertson claimed that Haitians had long ago pledged to serve the devil if he would help them win independence from France. Religious leaders across the spectrum condemned Robertson’s bizarre response to this disaster.

What Is the Christian Right?

The Christian Right is a social movement that attempts to mobilize evangelical Protestants and other orthodox Christians into conservative political action. Many of its leaders object to the term “Christian Right,” which they believe depicts a narrow movement. Some prefer the term “religious right,” which would encompass all “people of faith,” including conservative Jews and possibly Muslims. Yet despite the visible presence of a few orthodox Jews at Christian Coalition conventions in the 1990s, the movement remains concentrated primarily among white evangelical Christians, and especially among the **fundamentalist** and **pentecostal** wings of evangelicalism (Green, 1995). Others object to both “Christian Right” and “religious right” on the grounds that labeling the movement as part of the “Right” implies that it is outside the political mainstream. Ralph Reed, formerly of the Christian Coalition, prefers the term “Christian conservative,” but many conservative Christians opposed the Christian Coalition and similar organizations. Other Christian Right leaders insist that theirs is truly a “**pro-family**” movement, although the agenda of the Christian Right includes many issues unrelated to the health of American families. Moreover, many liberals believe that Christian Right policies would harm families. We use the term “Christian Right” in this book without any necessary implication that the movement lies outside the American mainstream.

Like all social movements, the Christian Right is composed of social movement organizations, leaders, activists, and members, and it seeks to attract support from a broad potential constituency. Robert Zwier argued that

the primary audience, or constituency, for these groups was the approximately 50 million evangelicals in the country, and in particular the fundamentalist wing of that community. The aim from the beginning was to mobilize a group of people who had traditionally avoided politics because they saw it as dirty, corrupt business . . . by convincing people that political involvement was a God-given responsibility. (1984, 9–10)

Movement leaders have been and remain more ambitious, seeking an even larger constituency. Jerry Falwell spoke of appealing to “Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Mormons, and fundamentalists.” Ralph Reed and the Christian Coalition made major efforts to expand its appeal to mainline Protestants, Catholics, African Americans, and Jews. In their efforts to ban gay marriage, the **Family Research Council** and Focus on the Family have reached out to African American, Hispanic, and Korean churches, and even to **social conservatives** in other faiths, including Muslims and Jews (Campbell and Robinson, 2007).

It is important to distinguish among movement leaders, movement activists, movement supporters, and the potential constituency of the Christian Right. Media accounts frequently equate the Christian Right with all born-again Christians. Such reports greatly exaggerate the movement’s strength, for there are many born-again evangelical Christians in the United States. Many born-again Christians are African American, and their faith leads them to a somewhat different policy agenda than that of the Christian Right. Among white evangelicals, some oppose the Christian Right, many are neutral toward the movement, a sizable minority are supportive, and a much smaller number are active members. White evangelicals are considered to be the core of the potential constituency of the Christian Right.

The organizations of the Christian Right are national groups, such as Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, and Concerned Women for America, as well as countless state and local organizations. The movement’s leaders include James Dobson, Tony Perkins, Wendy Wright, and Gary Bauer, among others. Its activists are those who volunteer their time and money to work for these groups, and its members are those who have joined an organization but do not actively participate. The strength of the Christian Right

lies in its activist base. For example, activists have distributed **voter guides** in churches throughout America, and the information in those voter guides may have influenced people who have never considered joining the Christian Right. Activists lobby state legislatures and local school boards and try to influence the nominations of Republican candidates in their districts.

Social movements are decentralized, differentiated, and sometimes disorganized. John Green, a political scientist, observed, "There are many modes of mobilization, many pools of resources, many sources of complaint, differential goals and beliefs, and a wide variety of activities, all occurring more or less simultaneously and more or less spontaneously."⁷ Thus, no one organization or spokesperson represents the movement. Although Focus on the Family and leaders such as Dobson, Perkins, and Wright receive the lion's share of media exposure, there are many Christian Right activists who are not supporters of these groups or figures and would support only part of their policy agenda.

Moreover, the Christian Right has no single agenda, but rather a collection of overlapping agendas. Some Christian Right activists focus almost entirely on ending abortions in America; others are concerned primarily with issues surrounding homeschooling. Some are motivated to fight what they call the "radical homosexual agenda," whereas others focus on banning same-sex marriage. Others seek to reduce the amount of sexually explicit material in television, movies, and popular music. Some seek to promote a role for religion in public life: prayer in public schools, nativity scenes on city property, and a public acknowledgment that the United States is a Christian (or sometimes Judeo-Christian) nation.⁸ Some activists care about all of these issues and more, whereas others focus on one issue.

As has been the case with other social movements, some elements of the Christian Right have become institutionalized. Focus on the Family began as a Christian ministry seeking to strengthen the traditional family. Initially the organization stood apart from the political arena, but in 1983 it launched its political involvement by helping to found the Family Research Council, an educational organization in Washington, D.C., that advocates for socially conservative public policy. Later Focus on the Family partnered with the Family Research Council to oversee the creation of more than thirty state affiliates, and then created its own political arm in 2004. Its state-level affiliates played an important role in legislative battles in many states.

Part of the institutionalization process involves training leaders, and even members, in the rules and norms of political action. Leading up to the 2008

election, affiliates of Focus on the Family distributed information to churches and pastors explaining how they could politically mobilize their congregants. The material included information on “political lingo” and a “resource arsenal” that explained how they could have “maximum patriotic impact” while working within the constraints of the political system. At other times the institutionalized social movement has used its infrastructure to challenge the norms of political action. In 2008 one Christian Right group, the **Alliance Defense Fund**, organized a concerted effort to overturn a long-standing rule prohibiting endorsements from the pulpit, claiming that the rule violates freedom of speech. More than thirty pastors agreed to endorse Sen. John McCain, hoping to trigger an investigation by the Internal Revenue Service, which the Alliance Defense Fund could then challenge in court, potentially leading to the rule being found unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.⁹

In general, however, organizational leaders have sought to distance the group from activists who make extremist statements in public and to discipline the organization to behave well in political activity. When newly mobilized homeschool advocates threw ice at speakers at the Virginia Republican nominating convention in 1993, Ralph Reed quickly pointed out that the hecklers were not members of the Christian Coalition, but rather backers of homeschool advocate Michael Farris (Rozell and Wilcox, 1996). State and local Christian Right activists were often dismayed at the public statements made by Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, and many are happy to have less flamboyant movement leaders in 2010.

Whereas some movement activists have worked to institutionalize interest groups of the Christian Right, others have been involved primarily within the Republican Party and now constitute a major faction of the GOP. Although movement leaders sometimes insist for tax purposes that theirs is a nonpartisan movement, it is clear that the Christian Right is active almost exclusively in the GOP. This was not always the case. The most visible spokesman for an earlier manifestation of the Christian Right in the 1920s was William Jennings Bryan, a perennial Democratic presidential candidate. Moreover, when Pat Robertson first entered politics, he backed a candidate who sought to win the Democratic nomination. In addition, Robertson’s father was a Democratic senator.

Yet as the turn of the twenty-first century approached, the movement was so closely identified with the Republican Party that when a Christian activist told a Christian Coalition gathering that his brother was a strong

Christian and a Democratic officeholder, he was greeted by stunned silence (Hertzke, 1993). Jerry Falwell left little room for Christians to vote for Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry in 2004 when he spoke to those attending the Christian Coalition's Road to Victory Conference: "Vote Christian. This means pro-life, pro-family, and pro-national defense. These are second nature to God's people. . . . You cannot be a born-again Christian who takes the Bible seriously and vote for a pro-choice or anti-family candidate."¹⁰ After Democrats won the White House and took control of Congress in 2008, one organization announced to its members, "the assault on family values has begun in Washington."¹¹

Christian Right activists flocked to the Republican Party in 1980 as the Moral Majority mobilized for Ronald Reagan, and they participated in even greater numbers in 1988, when Robertson sought the GOP presidential nomination. Some of these early activists retired from politics over the next decade, but others remained active in the Republican Party. By the 2000s the Christian Right was a clearly identifiable faction in the Republican Party at the national and state levels. In some states, such as Colorado, the movement divided the party, contributing to a Democratic victory in the state's U.S. Senate race in 2004. In other states the movement was part of a larger conservative coalition that worked together to oppose Republican party moderates and Democrats alike.¹²

As a **party faction**, the Christian Right contends with moderates for control of nominations; control in turn leads to access to campaign resources and the party platform. The Christian Right provides the Republican Party with a pool of potential voters and volunteers and a ready communications network and infrastructure. But these resources come with a price. The Christian Right refuses to be taken for granted and uses its leverage as an established voting bloc to move the party's platform to the right on social policy. At a meeting for conservative leaders in 1998, James Dobson threatened to break ties with the Republican Party if it did not back the Christian Right agenda on moral issues: "Does the Republican Party want our votes, no strings attached—to court us every two years, and then to say, 'Don't call me; I'll call you'—and to not care about the moral law of the universe? . . . Is that what they want? Is that the way the system works? Is this the way it's going to be? If it is, I'm gone, and if I go, I will do everything I can to take as many people with me as possible."¹³ Dobson echoed his threat in 2008 when he indicated that he would support a third-party candidate if former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani was the Republican nominee.