FALWELL ON LOCATION

by

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The visitor gets some sense of what to expect even when passing through the corridors into the lobby of the airport in Lynchburg, Virginia. There, prominently placed on the most obvious wall, is a Freedom Shrine, put there by the Exchange Club of Lynchburg "to strengthen citizen appreciation of our American heritage." The Club has made picture-framed copies of the Bill of Rights, Declaration of Independence, Monroe Doctrine, Washington's Farewell Address, Jefferson's Inaugural Address, the Instruments of Surrender for both Germany and Japan at the close of World War II, and various letters and statements of U.S. presidents and statesmen.

Parked outside on the runway, hardly a stone's throw away, is a small sleek white jet airplane, marked only by letters and numbers painted on its tail, alongside of which is a faded blue two-door Datsun sedan, with a uniformed security officer sitting inside.

"Is it Jerry Falwell's?" I ask.

"Yes, it's his. It costs him a million dollars a year just to have it, but it's more than worth it. It helped him bring in more than $60 million last year. Besides, Dr. Falwell loves his family. He likes to come home for dinner, even if he has to take his jet out again in the evening."

My informant is the airport car-rental desk clerk. By day Casey is an undergraduate student, a major in business administration, in Liberty Baptist College -- the college Falwell founded in 1976 at the base of Liberty Mountain in the southeast portion of the city. Casey is intrigued that I have come so far to learn more about Falwell and the organizations -- Thomas Road Baptist Church, the Old Time Gospel Hour, the Moral Majority, Liberty College, et al. -- he is responsible for establishing and administering.

"What's he like?" I ask, as I sort through my credit cards to find the right one.

"Well, he's controversial," Casey responds. "He's gotten so involved in so much that he's hardly a minister any longer. It's hard to see him as a minister. Sure, he's a minister. He's there every Sunday for church services, and he's usually there for prayer services on Wednesday night. But the church has become so large that he has to do his work through his assistants. But I'll say one thing for him. Jerry's a man of conviction. He stands up for what he thinks is right. And he's not afraid to speak out when he feels something needs to be said. He's done a lot for the city too. And he loves the students."

"Tell me more about the students. Who goes to Liberty Baptist College? What's it like to be a student there?"

"Well, it's pretty strict," Casey continues, "but not as strict as Bob Jones University -- not that strict -- where many of the faculty came from. We have a dress code. Everyone is required to attend chapel. There is a curfew. Only double-dating until the junior year. No drinking. No drugs. No dancing. No rock music. It's pretty strict. And if anyone sees anyone violating the rules, we have to report it."

"You have to report it?" I question.

"Yes, we do."

"You mean you have to tell on each other?"

"Yes." (Pause)

"What do you think of that?" Casey asks me, leaning over the counter now, waiting for the response of someone from the outside.

"Like, if I want to have a glass of wine with my dinner some Sunday night, off campus, and someone from the college sees me, do you think it's right for him to turn me in?"

"I wouldn't like that," I admit, "but you must have known about the rules before you came."

"My parents wanted me to come here," he continues. "I've been pretty happy, especially at the first. My parents just love Jerry Falwell. They take Moral Majority literature into the voting booth with them, every election. I don't think they could stand it if I ever left here. I don't know how I could explain it."

"Are you thinking of leaving?" I ask.

"Uh, yes, but probably not until I finish the year. I don't know. I've been thinking about it. I'd just feel better if I didn't know people were judging me all the time. In the beginning it seemed so good. I'm a Christian. Being with other Christians means a lot to me. But funny things happen here. A lot of students are trying hard to be holy -- but too much on the outside. I don't know. Maybe I should stay. I don't know."

He had finished the paper work on the car-rental agreement. I put my credit card back into my billfold. He had selected a white Chevy Malibu for my use. We went outside into the crisp air, under the sparkling Virginia sky. He made certain that the car contained a good map of the city, then pointed me in the direction of the motel. He promised to look for me at chapel the next morning when Jerry Falwell would be delivering the message.

I arrived on campus early, and found my way to a front-row seat in the auditorium of the multi-purpose building, a structure that serves not only as the campus gymnasium but also as its chapel. It would be easy to confuse the two functions. For when Falwell came to the microphone on the podium, he beckoned the school's outstanding football player to come forward. The reason: for the first time in the history of the college, a member of an athletic team had been given the "outstanding performance in the nation" award because of his accomplishments in an intercollegiate contest. The crowd of more than 5,000 persons applauded and looked pleased as Falwell beamed and the young athlete looked down, modestly, at his shoes. Falwell wore a "Jesus First" pin on the lapel of his vested navy-blue suit. He was also dressed in high-top shoes, a white shirt, and the striped blue and white tie I had seen numerous times on television and in many of the pictures taken of him. He too could pass for a one-time athlete who, since the days of intercollegiate competition, had become a frequent after-dinner speaker. I expected him to look sober and serious, but much more apparent was his eagerness to smile and offer humorous one-liners.

The students about me were dressed to play their part too. All of the gentlemen wore neck ties -- a campus requirement -- and the ladies were in dresses or blouses and skirts, many in heels. The men had high haircuts. Campus rules forbid the hair to touch the collar or come over the ears.

First, in the day's proceedings, came the school announcements, most of them having to do with rules of deportment. The dean reminded the students that final examination time was approaching and that extra precautions would be enforced. Then, after a guest soloist had sung several stanzas of "What a friend we have in Jesus" -- "a plum purty outfit you're wearing today, sister," the song-leader had said in introducing her, "yes, right plum purty" -- the audience settled back for Dr. Falwell's sermon.

He was as a father talking to a large family. He mentioned being in Nashville the night before, and Birmingham the night before that. He had met a number of parents of some Liberty students. He recited the names of some of them. "James?" he called out to one of the students whose name he read, "don't you have a brother named Mark?" Looking about, he continued, "where's James? Oh, there you are?" James waved back. "And June Beason, I talked with your family in Birmingham. Your aunt and uncle were there too. I shook their hands on Monday night."

Then he told of the money he had raised at the banquets at which he had been speaking. $143,000 the night before, and "all of it for the college." The people assembled gave each other that pleased, gratified look that seems to befit moments of shared success and satisfaction. He said he was going to Pennsylvania the next day. Wherever he went, he reiterated, he spoke about the needs of the college and the mission it represents. He asked for the prayers of the faculty and students.

He was speaking seriously, but his tone was playful. The banter back and forth gave evidence of why, since boyhood, Falwell has had the reputation of being mischievous, a practical joker. Even now he likes to startle callers who telephone the Old Time Gospel Hour by answering, "Hello, this is the Lynchburg Police Department. May I help you?" Clearly, he was having fun this morning too, enjoying his place among the people with whom he felt most at home.

His sermon explored the ways in which the Christian faith was lived in the beginning, at the time of the apostolic church in the Roman world. This is the historical period that fascinates and attracts him most, the time when persecution was overt and dramatic. He welcomes the decisiveness of the choice such situations force. Yes or no. True or false. Committed or not. Right or wrong. The Bible is the Word of God, or it isn't. America is humankind's best hope, or it isn't. Overt opposition forces advocates of specific beliefs to clear-cut resolute responses. Falwell sees marked parallels between the dilemmas persecuted Christians faced and those of the present time. His evaluation of other historical periods is far less positive, except for the time of the radical Reformers, in the sixteenth century, and the period around 1776, when the nation was founded by men -- underscore men -- whose guiding principles were informed and supported, he believes, by the conviction of that same pristine Christianity he wishes now to reinstate.

He spoke of how the first Christians were regarded by the people of their time. And he was pleased to say that in that time, as today, virtually everyone knew of their presence. "Not everyone liked them, but everyone respected them. Everyone knew they were there. Even people who hated what they stood for had to respect them."

It seemed too early in the discourse to be making the application. But he did so anyway, a point that was to be repeated throughout the thirty minutes or so that he spoke. He told his hearers -- the family gathered before him -- that they have become well-known in the society, well-respected too, finding favor in others' eyes, in spite of the fact that they also have "vehement and belligerent

enemies." But it shouldn't bother them that there are politicians who wish to do them in. Such opposition is predictable. Take comfort in the assurance that the vast majority is on their side. Such support may not always be overt, but they can be sure that they are being upheld by a prevailing national sentiment.

He told of his own upbringing, of growing up in adjacent Campbell County and listening to Charles E. Fuller, of the Old Fashioned Revival Hour, on the radio in his bedroom. He quickly traced the development of evangelical preaching from radio to television, emphasizing that what he is doing in this generation is a continuation of the work exemplified by Fuller, Oliver Greene, and Billy Sunday.

Never mind that mainstream schools, liberal theologians, and modernist philosophers haven't accepted the truth of the Christian message yet. The sentiment -- yes, the sentiment -- of the majority of the people is on their side. Don't even think that secular humanism and communism might do them in. No, all they need do here is think about what might happen if all emigration and immigration restrictions were suspended for thirty days. At the end of thirty days, the United States would be teeming with people; they'd be all over, in bus depots, on the highways, in the streets, everywhere. And, at the end of thirty days, there'd be but two people in the Soviet Union, Mr and Mrs Brezhnev, "and Mrs Brezhnev would be thinking about packing her bags." Don't worry about liberation theology either. "Nobody believes it but the idiots who present it." Sure, he knows that "there are some Elmer Gantrys in the evangelical movement today." But only a few. "But why aren't the liberals on television? Because no one out there wants to hear what they have to say!"

And to the accusation of some of his opponents that he mixes religion with politics, well, he thought he had explained this sufficiently before. Simply put, he is pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church, and Liberty Baptist College is one of its ministries. He is also involved in the work of the Moral Majority, but this is a political, not a religious organization. It deals with political issues. He admits that these several agencies have overlapping interests. "But what else would you expect? One's religious convictions impact on every area of one's life. If a man is religious,it's him. It's part of him. It's all of him."

He reminded his hearers of some of the principles for which the college stands. They understand that life is important and sacred, "from fertilization to conception and beyond." They oppose abortion resolutely, both as a matter of principle and as a primary component of their collective identity. Planned Parenthood, by contrast, is "doing all they can to kill life." They, by contrast, are working to restore the sanctity and stability of the family and the home. He and some of his associates in Birmingham are working to create a Save-A-Life Program -- the predecessor version of Save-A-Baby program announced on television on January 31, 1982. The intention is to place children who might otherwise have been aborted in Christian foster homes, and to care for their mothers in a similar way. Much better this way, through the workings of voluntary activity, than to follow the misguided advice of NOW. "What is NOW?" he asks, "national organization of witches? (Laughter) Oh, excuse me. But I'm talking about the Betty Friedans, Gloria Steinems, Bella Abzugs, and all the other thugs."

He cites the debate that occurred on the campus recently, in which a Professor Doolittle of the University of California, an avowed evolutionist, was bested by a fundamentalist, Duane Gish, of the Institute for Creation Research. He holds up a copy of the Washington Post's coverage of the debate in its October 15, 1981 edition, and reads the headline aloud, "Science Loses One to Creationism." He cites a national poll indicating that the majority of people in the country believe that

the biblical account of creation ought to be taught alongside the scientific theory of evolution. He looks out on the multitude, with a pleased smile on his face. "We are winning," he says. They applaud. "We are winning. We are winning."

And they shouldn't think that they are fighting alone. They have plenty of help. Falwell cites a recent article by Daniel Yankelovich in Psychology Today which speaks of "the hidden appeal of the Moral Majority." 67 million Americans are secretly hoping for their success, knowing that the outcome would be better for their children. And in the U.S. Congress, Senators Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond and others are giving strong support to restoring voluntary prayer in the public schools. He expects that measure to pass during the current legislative session, and he can assure his hearers that the President of the United States approves of it too.

With a broad grin on his face, looking supremely pleased, even triumphant, he says that "we're blowin' the minds of our opponents." He knows that they are being "cussed out" by many who feel frustrated. "But never mind. The only folks against you are the liberal clergy and the godless politicians, because it threatens the security of their little empires."

Now he stands ready for the command. Charge! "We ought to move right in. We can significantly change the course of human history. Ignore the other side. The doors are wide open. Move right in. Walk through the doors. And let the whole world know that the Bible-believing churches are moving out to claim the cities for Christ."

There is more applause. The woman sitting next to me exclaims "Glo-o-ry," clasps my hand, and I notice she is carrying a copy of a book entitled, When Mom Goes to Work.

As the sermon comes to a close, I am reminded of a similar sermon of Falwell's quoted, in part, in Francis FitzGerald's NEW YORKER article of May, 1981, the one in which the same marching themes are heralded in heavily military language:

> The local church is an organized army equipped for battle, ready to charge the enemy. The Sunday School is the attacking squad. The church should be a disciplined, charging army. Christians, like slaves and soldiers, ask no questions.
>
> It is important to bombard our territory, to move out near the coast and shell the enemy. It is important to send in the literature. It is important to send that radio broadcast and to use that dial-a-prayer telephone. It is important to have all those external forces being set loose on the enemy's stronghold.
>
> But ultimately some Marines have to march in, encounter the enemy face-to-face, and put the flag up....
>
> I'm speaking of Marines who have been called of God to move in past the shelling, the bombing and the foxholes and, with bayonet in hand, encounter the enemy face to face and one-on-one bring them under submission to the Gospel of Christ, move them into the household of God, put up the flag and call it secured. You and I are called to occupy until He comes.

The tone and the fervor are the same. Military, athletic and religious incentives are blended all into one. The collective pumping-up, the force with which the in-

junctions come, the feeling of comradery , the energies unleashed belong to the world of intense competition, where the troops are fitted for battle, and the issue is "do or die." I had thought he had been talking of preparing for heaven, but I feel that I'm in the company of people who are on the tournament trail, if not to the Roman arena, at least to the NAIA regional championships in Richmond or Charlotte.

I leave the chapel service in the gymnasium to speak with Dr. Falwell. People about me are excited. Talk is animated. Everyone is smiling, chatting, looking clean and hopeful. Falwell is making his way to the stout four-wheel drive van that is parked at the door of the gym. He is genial, open, responsive. He repeats some of what he has said about humanism: "if humanists really have something to say, why don't you say it?" He shares some impressions about California; he had been in San Diego just days before. He wants to be sure that I'm being well cared for during my stay in Lynchburg. He puts me under the care of Nelson Keener, one of his close associates, and, in a short time, I find myself in the administrative offices of the Old Time Gospel Hour on Langhorne Road, a large unmarked building, adjacent to an A&P supermarket.

Keener gives me the important statistical information first. Thomas Road Baptist Church started with only thirty-five people just twenty-five years ago, after Falwell graduated from a Baptist seminary in Missouri. Today it has more than 18,000 members, and the Old Time Gospel Hour, one of its ministries, boasts a mailing list of 4.2 million names, significantly larger than many Protestant denominations. Over 1000 persons are employed in the work of the church, with approximately seventy-five of them being assistant ministers. The Old Time Gospel Hour, Liberty Baptist College, the Academy, together with a Bible institute, a theological seminary, a ministry to the hearing-impaired, and a program of Bible study by correspondence are all regarded as belonging to the work of Thomas Road Baptist Church, a parish that has an annual budget of $60 million. I am shown how the mail is processed, the books sent out with repeated requests for financial assistance. I see the telephone operators taking calls over the 800-number Falwell claims is the busiest in the nation. There are boxes and boxes of "Jesus First" pins and virtually warehouses full of printed materials, including Falwell's book, Listen America. Falwell's picture is on the wall in nearly every room. Some of the photos show him with his family, one or two with President Reagan, several with Phyllis Schlafly. In all of them Falwell looks both serious and pleased, and is wearing his vested navy-blue suit.

Nelson Keener is quite prepared to respond to any questions I might wish to raise with him. He appreciates the associations he has had with certain members of the religious studies faculty at the University of Virginia in nearby Charlottesville. In telling me this, he reveals how he is approaching me, namely, as one whose interest in the subject is primarily academic. I had some preconceptions of my own too. I had taken Keener to be Falwell's "Ed Meese." The course of our conversation confirms that both of us were on the right track.

But, by this time, I wish to cut through the particulars, much of which information I have been given several times.

"What's it all about?" I ask. "What's he up to?"

"Falwell?"

"Yes, Falwell. What does he want? What does he want to achieve. He comes across as a zealot and a patriot. You're close to him on a day-to-day basis. How do you understand his intentions?"

Keener leans back in the chair in his panelled office. He tells me he has become accustomed to answering questions about specifics. Something like this will require a few moments' thought.

He closes his eyes, opens them, looks to the ceiling, then sits up straight, leaning forward, placing his clasped hands on the large glistening wooden desk in front of him. He is an alert man, slightly built, friendly, committed to the cause, interested in finding out what others think of Falwell.

"Sure, I'll tell you. I'll tell you what I think it's about," he commences. "Jerry Falwell is trying to help people live by their moral beliefs and standards. This is what he is doing. He senses that society is encouraging them to live below their moral standards. He wants to assist them to live where their inside hearts tell them they should. They know they should be there, but they aren't. And Jerry is helping them find their way back." An associate, Mary Catherine Wright, tells Keener that he has never said this as concisely before. Keener laughs and asks me if I got all of it down in my notes.

"The problem is that many of the social influences we encounter each day wish us to live beneath our standards," he elaborates. Such negative incentives work upon us, from all sides, all day long. Falwell wants to counter these negative forces with some positive ones. No, he doesn't want to take programs off network television, but only, in Keener's words, "to clean them up."

He cites the program "Three's Company." The situation portrayed there -- unmarried persons of both sexes living together under the same roof -- is suspect from the first. It is a violation of the ideals of the traditional family. Young viewers watch it, then come to think that it's acceptable to live that way. What Falwell says about television he believes he is saying as a professional in the industry. He simply believes that children today are living under too many exploitative pressures. The purveyors and marketers of sex come at them before they are capable of responding properly. Advertisers go after them, stimulating or creating needs they didn't know they had. The avenue through which a large portion of this exploitative work is conducted, in Falwell's view, is the media. He knows why he has incensed Norman Lear, in particular, and others within the television industry. What he says is threatening to their livelihoods, and television has become big business.

"Falwell's strength is that he can articulate what a lot of people feel, but don't know how to put into words," Keener continues. "He knows that people recognize that television influences have a negative effect upon home and family stability. What singles him out from the others who feel this way is that he has the courage to stand up and say it, with words other people recognize to express their fears and feelings too."

"But he speaks out on these issues," I interject, "as a fundamentalist preacher. It's part of his religion to do what he is doing."

Keener chuckles. "Yes, Jerry is a renegade. Think of fundamentalist Christianity before he became involved. It had the reputation of being anti-intellectual, and it displayed hardly any political or social savvy at all. Jerry is changing this. He has founded a college which, in a very short time, has become fully accredited. He saw the need for a credible liberal arts academic program on a conservative theological base. So he did it. He built himself a college. In addition, he has become directly involved in social and political issues. It surprises people to learn this. They take him to be some Bible-banging preacher. But he's much more."

"In your own words, why does he make so much of abortion? Why is abortion always the 'national sin' he mentions first?" I continue.

The answer comes quickly.

"Because, in Jerry's mind, the family is the first institution that God created. It is the primary institution on earth. Most of the things he speaks out against he believes are conspiring to mess up the sanctity of the family." In addition to abortion, Falwell lists the growth of feminism (which, in his view, diminishes the role of woman as homemaker), the licensing of homosexuality (he sometimes calls San Francisco "Sodom"), society's permissive attitude toward pornography, sex education in the public schools (and by the government at taxpayers' expense), and the easy availability of drugs. Falwell believes that when any of this is condoned, it makes it all the easier for individuals to live beneath the standards of their own moral beliefs. The wholesale inclusion of these factors as accepted components of society helps explain why families are deteriorating and the society itself has lost its quality.

"But not all of what Falwell says is about the family. He also speaks frequently about Israel. He is firm, too, in calling for a strong national defense." I am thinking, of course, about Falwell's celebrated friendship with Menachem Begin, Prime Minister of Israel.

"Falwell is the best friend in America that Israel ever had," Keener responds.

I counter that I've heard this said before, but I'm also aware of certain statements Falwell has made, concerning whether or not God hears the prayers of Jews. "Doesn't he really want all Jews to become Christians?"

Keener doesn't want to face the question directly. He begins by giving me names of Jews living in New York City and Los Angeles who are in Falwell's corner. He lists prominent American rabbis whom Falwell understands to be on his side. The principle is a literal interpretation of Genesis 12:3 -- that "he who blesses Israel will be blessed, and he who curses Israel will also be cursed." In Falwell's mind, the United States has an obligation to support and encourage Israel, that is, if the United States is to remain strong and vital. But it's the principle of the thing that counts. And Falwell stands, with some Jews, in opposition to the Arabs, not in small measure because of their susceptibility to communist influence.

"Is the United States the new Israel?" I ask this, knowing Falwell believes our nation to have a special covenantal relationship with God.

On this point my informant wishes to be very careful. The answer, I believe, is yes and no. Falwell doesn't wish to establish an American theocracy. At the same time, the United States does stand in a position of special favor with the Almighty, but, primarily because of our past, that is, because of the principles upon which the nation was established. Here Keener would prefer to speak matter-of factly rather than speculatively. Falwell has simply looked about to notice that our nation is fast losing hold on its favored status because it is abandoning the principles its forefathers (emphasize <u>fathers</u>) secured. And with this we are back to a repetition of Falwell's perception of the changes that have occurred.

As Keener talks, I remember the statement Falwell made about mixing religious fervor with patriotic zeal, about looking back to the time

> when it was positive to be patriotic [which] as far as I am concerned...still is. I remember as a boy, when the flag was raised,

> everyone stood proudly, and put his hand upon his heart and pledged allegiance with gratitude. I remember when the band struck up "The Stars and Stripes Forever," we stood and goose pimples would run all over me. I remember when I was in elementary school during World War II, when every report from the other shores meant something to us. We were not out there demonstrating against our guys who were dying in Europe and Asia. We were praying for them and thanking God for them and buying war bonds to help pay for the materials and artillery they needed to fight and win and come back.

And this recollection called up another statement of Falwell's:

> We are not a perfect nation, but we are still a free nation because we have the blessing of God upon us. We must continue to follow in a path that will ensure that blessing. We must not forget that it is God Almighty who has made and preserved us as a nation.

And another:

> Americans must no longer linger in ignorance and apathy. We cannot be silent about the sins that are destroying this nation. The choice is ours. We must turn America around or prepare for inevitable destruction. I am listening to the sounds that threaten to take away our liberties in America. And I have listened to God's admonition and his direction -- the only hopes of saving America.

In Falwell's view, Keener explains, America is the only nation that can protect peoples and nations who cannot protect themselves. It is the last strong bastion of defense against the onslaught of communism. Falwell is afraid that if liberals have their way, the country will be sold away. The liberal attitude equivocates, qualifies and becomes so abstract that issues are complexified beyond anyone's comprehension, and whatever direction is provided fails to capture the enthusiasm and commitment of the people. Because liberals provided no clear guidance when they had the chance, the society became overly permissive and the public became too tolerant. "Sure Penthouse and Playboy are angry with Falwell because he has rattled their foundations and threatened their growth." But he did so because he doesn't believe in the liberal goal of creating free minds. He believes that secular schools teach facts without providing guidance. And he thinks that children ought to be taught, not just given facts. He believes in educational guidance, in spiritual formation. When secular humanists gain control, they abandon intellectual training for free thinking. Falwell believes that today's society is living out the product of liberal influence.

"Ronald Reagan gets into the story too, especially when he blames the nation's difficulties on 'an overly optimistic view of human nature,'" I add. Keener acknowledges that the relationships between Falwell and the President are close. "There is mutual respect. Falwell likes Reagan, believes he is providing the proper correctives. He thinks Reagan is the best thing that has happened to America in at least twenty years." It is Reagan's decisiveness that stands out. When he took office, in no time at all, "the country started looking and feeling better again. Like those Libyan planes that attacked our planes over the Mediterranean. Reagan gave the order to shoot if fired upon. We were fired upon, and ke-boom, we fired back, and we nailed those dudes right there on the spot." Keener laughs, and gets up from his chair, excited, enthusiastic, well-pleased. "Nobody's going to mess with us anymore. Reagan

shows too much resolve and stamina."

"But look," he continues. "There are rules of international law. Libya violated the rules. The United States is not an aggressor. We do not start wars. We do not go around and take land from people. But we can't let them push us around forever.

"And this is why Falwell wasn't happy with President Carter?"

My question draws a long pause. After all, Jimmy Carter was known to be a born-again Christian. He hails from an area of the country not too distant from southern Virginia. Further, Carter is a Baptist, like Falwell. There should be strong affinities.

Clearly, Nelson Keener would rather not respond because he doesn't want to say anything negative. At last, after due consideration, he begins "Well, Jerry was disappointed with Carter. Carter was a liberal, and he believed him incompetent. He couldn't understand how a born-again Christian could become an abortionist run wild. In addition, Carter made the country look bad. He was indecisive, made us look weak. But now we have Ronald Reagan." And we are back again talking about the U.S. fighter planes responding to the Libyan threat over Mediterranean waters.

I shift to another subject.

"Do you, does Falwell, really wish the whole world to become Christian? You know what this means, that Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, everyone else, would be converted to the Christian faith." In posing the question this way, I explain that John Hick, the British theologian, estimates that virtually ninety-five percent of religious preference is tied directly to biographical factors. Thus, if a person of religious sensitivity is born in Benares, chances are he'll become a good Hindu. If born in Minneapolis, chances are he'll be a Christian. In Cairo, he'll be a Muslim. "Does the Old Time Gospel Hour want to correct this situation completely, and make Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others into Christians, literally and actually?"

For the first time, I recognize all too clearly that I am pursuing my intellectual interests and not Keener's or Falwell's. He doesn't want to answer the question except to say, "in principle, yes, but Jerry is realistic enough to know that this will not happen until Christ returns." Neither of us wishes to push the topic further, at least not on this day.

I go from there to the offices of the Moral Majority, less than two miles away from the headquarters of the Old Time Gospel Hour. As I listen to all that is being told me, I realize that I'm beginning to hear everything at least twice by now. Yes, I know that Jerry Falwell is dedicated, speaks out courageously, and is an organizational wizard. More than one person in the city told me, "Jerry just dreams something, and, next year, it happens." I know too that Thomas Road Baptist Church started in the old warehouses of the Donald Duck Bottling Company. And I'm aware that Jerry Falwell has a close personal relationship with the President of the United States, that he hardly ever misses the church service on Sundays or Wednesday nights.

The local consensus seems to be that Falwell has done much for Lynchburg. I found some people who detest him, but many more who approve of him. A priest of one of the two Catholic churches in the city says that his parish is hardly affected by the presence of Thomas Road Baptist Church. He explains that Catholics account for no more than three percent of the population of the State of Virginia. This, not Jerry Falwell, is what he has a hard time contending with. He adds

that Falwell's influence is strongly felt in the meetings of the ministerial associations.

On Wednesday night, I find my way to Thomas Road Baptist Church for the weekly prayer service. I've been told to get there early because available seats get taken quickly. When I arrive, thirty minutes before the service is to begin, the parking lot is already full, with cars, vans, and at least twenty school buses the churches use to transport its members. When I find my way inside, I am greeted by persons I have met at the other Falwell-institutions within the city -- the Moral Majority office, Old Time Gospel Hour, and the college. They recognize me by now, seem pleased that I am there, but begin asking me rather personal and pointed questions. "If you were to die tonight, would you be ready to meet your maker?" I respond with complexifiers, in the manner they expect, I suppose, and try to steer the discussion onto subjects more immediate but less total.

The church has seats for about four thousand people, and it is full. Folding chairs have been placed in the only available remaining space, in the aisles. It is a mixed-age group, with the majority appearing to be in the twenty to thirty year-old range, but this may be due to the influx of students from Liberty Baptist College. (The school library closes at 4:30 on Wednesday afternoons to give students time for dinner and the prayer service following.) Many of the young men are dressed in pin-stripe suits, with white shirts and ties.

The congregation sings enthusiastic gospel songs, all of them about their friendship with Jesus and the good things that are coming when they get to heaven, while waiting for Falwell to appear. While they sing, I overhear a man behind me pray, "Oh Lord, we pray for Dr. Falwell. We know, Oh Lord, that he's only a man." I look up to the front, and Falwell is present, surrounded by a bevy of male associates, most of them in their high-top shoes. The only female seen prominently is the church organist.

Falwell looks pleased as he scans the audience. He knows many of the people personally. He nods here and there, waving discretely, demonstrating his recognition and affection.

Nearly always, when he steps into the pulpit, he talks of family matters first. This night, he announces the engagement of two of the singers in the group that has just sung. Then, turning to the two, smiling broadly, he says, "if you didn't want me to announce that, just yet, we can ask everyone here to keep it quiet for a time. They're good folks. They'll do what we ask them."

The congregation enjoys the banter. He is having a good time too. He talks about the joys of the Christian home, where individuals are properly related to each other because they are properly related to God. One of the privileges of being pastor of the church for twenty-five years, he says, is that he now announces engagements of persons whose parents' engagements he announced years ago. He thinks this pattern will continue, perhaps, for several generations, until Christ returns or he (Falwell) and his associate, Brother Wemp, "will come hobblin' up here trying to remember just what it is we're supposed to be saying."

He continues with geneology. He has been in Birmingham and Nashville lately (a repeat of the announcements he has made at the College) and has seen people whose greetings he wishes to bring. He cites names of mothers, fathers, children, recalling stories about each one, taking time to get the relationships specified correctly, asking the congregation for help when he isn't sure. "Is the Tait I know your daddy or your uncle? Your uncle? But I know your daddy too." Nothing gives him greater satisfaction, he recounts, than watching "good clean Christian

boys and girls growing up to be giants for Christ." He reminds the people assembled that this is why they have their ministry at Liberty Baptist College. Through all of it, he is the father talking with his children, the progenitor, the advocate of patriarchal order, Abraham, Father Abraham, who is called to lead his people forth, through an environment that is usually hostile.

The sermon, like most of his sermons, is based on a chapter of the New Testament which tells of the last days. Falwell says that he firmly believes we are living in the last days, "yes, in the last of the last days." All of the signs point in this direction. Hedonism is rampant. Everyone is looking out for himself. People are claiming individual rights, asking 'What can the country do for me?' There are vast outbreaks of moral perversion, greater now than ever before in the history of the nation. And Christians, living in this situation, are called upon to "swim against the tide, to walk against the wind, to move upstream."

He enumerates the menacing national sins. Abortion. Disintegration of the family. Breakup of the home. Divorce. Drugs. Pornography. Sex education in the schools. Homosexuality. (Pause)

He tells of a gay bar that has just opened in downtown Lynchburg, not far from the city hall. He asks the song leader if he knows the address. Startled, his sheepish "no" response brings laughter to the congregation. Falwell tells about the night he and his wife sat in their car across the street from the bar and watched "all of the strange people going in and out of there." He tells of the two male associates he had directed to go into a gay bar in Washington, not long ago, not far from the White House, just to find out what was going on. "We dressed them up real sweet," he says, "got 'em smelling good, had them wear these tight britches, got them sashaying back and forth, and gave them a small camera. Trouble is they got so fascinated with what they saw that they forget to get any pictures. (Laughter) Brother Wemp? You know what I should have done that night? I should have telephoned the bar, and said, 'Hello, this is Jerry Falwell. Is my photographer there?' That's what I should have done." (More laughter)

He talks about Penthouse magazine, a tiresome subject, he says. But the good news is that one of the women who had worked on the Penthouse story -- Falwell's "soul winner" comments that "she must have been a woman, because she couldn't have been a lady" -- has been to Lynchburg recently, and "got saved, and gave her life to Christ." The ministers on the dais behind the pulpit smile and nod their approval and satisfaction. The man sitting next to me slaps his knee exclaiming "praise the Lord." A lady in the pew in front turns her head to respond with a quiet "glo-o-ry," and the applause mounts from all quarters in the large church sanctuary.

The preacher lists other recent successes. He believes Congress will approve legislation to return voluntary "non-animated" prayer to the public schools. (More applause) He is gratified that the entire population is beginning to recognize that the public schools "have gone to pot and academic standards have nosed-dived." People have been aware of this for a long time, but were afraid to mention it. But this is the role of the prophet: to rebuke evil, to preach out against sin, to name particular sins, "to cry out against Nazis, communists, feminists, homosexuals, and moral perverts." The trouble is "parents don't tell their children what bad is." And the permissive churches ("which is most of them") say that "what is wrong is right." But the "raw culture out there has to be shown that there is another way to live. We have to show them. Kids today -- we know it -- are victimized by a society those of our generation never had to deal with."

He closes with some comforting words about the joys of being in the family of God. He knows of nothing on earth that can provide greater satisfaction. And, besides, "wherever Christ is present, you can recognize all of the other family members."

Then, as if to demonstrate that fundamentalism, voluntarism, and beneficence go together, he announces a special offering for a boy in the congregation who needs to be taken to Boston for treatment of a severe case of diabetes. Falwell's associates have arranged for someone to take him there by private jet. Arrangements have been made, too, to keep the boy's mother on regular salary during whatever time she needs to be away from Lynchburg. A family in Boston has been secured to provide her with meals and lodging. But large additional costs are involved. And Falwell wishes the congregation to be generous in their support. As he requests this, he reaches down over the pulpit to make the first contribution as the offering plates are passed.

As this is happening, a man comes quietly up alongside me from somewhere in the back of the church. He tugs at my sleeve asking me if I think I will go to heaven. I thank him for his interest, but tell him that there are other places I need to go first, like to Baltimore, in the morning, for a meeting of some representatives of state humanities councils.

When I arrive at the Baltimore conference and step back into a world that is much more familiar to me, a noted academic authority is speaking eloquently (but with dependent clauses, adverbial qualifiers and a cautiousness I couldn't find in the Falwell circle in Lynchburg) about the power of the humanities. While portraying the challenges the humanities face, he mentions the work of the Moral Majority and the other groups who seem intent upon doing battle against "secular humanism." Understandably, there is increasing concern throughout the country that such efforts might create difficulties for humanities programs just as they have already created havoc for schools and public libraries. Every section of the country has experienced situations where rightist religious and political pressure (usually in combination) has been directed toward censoring library acquisitions and removing books (like Grapes of Wrath) from shelves. The speaker takes the threat seriously, he says, but knows it cannot be successful. The humanities, after all, are supported by resilient and enduring intellectual legacies. If they suffer anxious moments of disfavor, they can be counted upon to rise again. Such has been the story of western civilization. From these dynamics, our cherished cultures have been built.

When he finishes, I join my colleagues in genuine but subdued applause. Following the rules of decorum with which we are familiar, we leave the hall for another cup of coffee before another session of the conference begins. Though we do display similar pleased and satisfied looks, I notice that there are fewer pin stripes, white shirts and blue ties, and our hair does occasionally touch the ears and reach down to the collar.

With my visit to Falwell-town still acutely fresh in mind, I sense the difference between the ways my colleagues and I approach the world and the way Falwell recommends. Our deepest commitment is to those intellectual challenges that remain unmet, the dilemmas for which there is no easy resolution, and the truth that lies just beyond one's grasp. For us, much of the time, the truth lies in the search itself. It is important that the search not be short-circuited by answers that are premature and dogmas that rigidify in advance. But measured by the apocalyptic intensity of Falwell's charge, such an intellectual stance must seem precious and libertarian.

But the larger problem for us is that there are disciplined academic ways of saying some of the things Falwell says. Many thoughtful people, who have no particular

allegiance to the new right or the evangelical movement at all, are learning how to say it. And when the case is put in these revised terms, we can make Jerry Falwell, at times, sound pretty impressive.

For certainly he is not alone in spotting correlations between the disintegration of the traditional American family and the larger, more pervasive social and cultural fragmentation. He is not the only one to suspect that network television -- primarily because of the motivations which lend it sponsor -- carries profound exploitative capacities, especially for young viewers, which can hardly be credited as being character building. He is not the only one concerned about the future of America's public schools. And his suspicion that increased governmental involvement may not be the most effective way of dealing with all problems, regardless of their source, has very nearly become majority opinion.

Regarding some matters specifically religious, Falwell may have even more support than he realizes. He is certainly not the only one who is fearful about the process of secularization. Such fears are intrinsic to the spirit of religion. He is not the only one involved in the establishment of an alternative school system, one informed by religious creeds and religious sensibilities. After all, the parochial school system of the Roman Catholic Church has been around for a long time. Church-related private colleges have been an important part of American higher education from the beginning. Even Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were established under religious auspices.

Nor is Falwell the only one to suspect that the shaky alliance between the Christian faith and Enlightenment philosophy may finally have come apart. The German theologian, Karl Barth, talked this way too. The American sociologist Daniel Bell has declared "the end of the Enlightenment." The contemporary writer, Peter Berger, would probably agree. The German pastor, Deitrich Bonhoeffer, saw the development coming, from his prison cell during World War II. Falwell is not alone in seeking to give Christianity an alternative historical and intellectual orientation than the one with roots in seventeenth and eighteenth century issues and problems.

Furthermore, Falwell is not the only one to recognize that enforced caution regarding the subject of religion in the public schools creates certain intellectual and spiritual vacuums. Such vacuums inevitably invite at least quasi-religious--yes, call them humanistic--responses. And the same will not always be perceived as being compatible with the tenets of the nation's established churches.

When Falwell talks about the need to restore a vision for America, it isn't that he wishes to counter some strong, clear-cut, resilient prevailing viewpoint. It isn't simply that he believes his version is preferable. Rather, he understands himself to be responding to the tragedy of a situation in which the nation's prolonged collective "dark night of the soul" (following Watergate, Vietnam, and the other recent depressants) has severely weakened compelling shared senses of purpose. For, in Falwell's eyes, the Vietnam War is the dramatic consequence of what happens when a society is at odds with itself. If America had been united, faithful to its vocation, it would have won the war easily. It should have won the war decisively, to stop the assault on our basic freedoms before the enemy could gather that additional momentum. If the nation didn't expect to achieve such purposes, it shouldn't have gotten involved in the first place. Of course, all of this involves second-guessing. But the conflict in fundamental resolve that surfaced dramatically during the war years remains an urgent present problem. In Falwell's view, it should not be allowed to persist indefinitely. The American dream needs to be rekindled. This is the purpose behind his "I Love America" rallies that have now taken place in all fifty states of the Union.

This, more than anything, also helps explain his attitude to Jimmy Carter. When the latter revealed, in July 1979, that the people were suffering "malaise," he pointed to many of the same set of diagnostic factors Falwell emphasizes too. But Falwell believes that diagnosis needs to be followed by prescription, and then by appropriate response. Carter, in Falwell's view, simply didn't know how to follow through. But now, under Ronald Reagan, this failure is being corrected. The malaise is being exorcised. As the new president said during his commencement address at West Point, in May, 1981, "the era of self-doubt is over."

How does one account for it?

The inside view -- the one Falwell would like his interpreters to accept -- is that the people on whose behalf he speaks -- American citizens all -- have simply had enough. They are angry about the outcome of the Vietnam War. They are indignant about the failure of national leadership. They feel the same about the deterioration of America's public schools. They are infuriated over what has happened to previously dependable American institutions, particularly the family. They are sick of what they perceive humanists are doing to traditional American moral values. They are convinced that permissiveness is masquerading as progress, and that neither need be advanced by some inevitable process of development and expansion. At the same time, they have become irate over the compelling evidence that the achievements of the work-ethic hardly count any longer. They view national power in extended athletic tournament terms, and cannot accept that Uncle Sam may now be "number two" instead of "number one." These are the items that have encouraged them to become passionate and visible.

And the technique is to fix on a select number of issues that can be fitted to a single agenda. The "national sins" Falwell feels obligated to denounce, in virtually every instance, concern matters of personal and interpersonal behavior -- matters of personal morality -- most of which most people consider to be items of choice or rights of privacy. They are family matters, in the main, everyone of them dealing specifically with the role and place of women. Thus it is difficult to escape the conclusion that what bothers Falwell most is that certain forces have conspired to upset the power of male dominion and the supremacy of patriarchal order. This is the conclusion to which I have come.

Accordingly, the abortion issue incenses him because the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision interferes directly with the dominion of male agency. He is impassioned on the subject of homosexuality -- frequently in violation of the homiletical decorum expected of a proper Virginia gentleman -- because he sees it as a severe patrilineal aberration. He seethes and burns when talking of womens' liberation and the feminist movement, but the issue is the same: womens' liberation is a direct assault on male-secured hierarchical and patriarchal authority. His frequent joustings with Penthouse and Playboy magazines occur not altogether because his prophetic rebukes threaten to undo them -- on the contrary, in market terms, he is certainly aiding them -- but because they recognize, even when he does not, that the interest they have in common is sexuality.

This helps explain why he can leap from foreign policy to pornography. He can be contending on behalf of a strong national defense and begin railing against the deterioration of the family, as if both subjects belong under the same ideational heading. The growth of homosexuality and the absence of the

nation's collective resolve are also topics easily spliced together.

But while making such linkages through the mechanics of emotional outrage, Falwell also fails to make connections which, to the side he is opposing, seem all too obvious. For example, he can talk all day long about the evils of fornication without ever mentioning the nation's enforced entry into Vietnam, against the will of a large portion of the people. He calls liberation theology "idiocy," but has nothing to say -- except to denounce "leftists" and "communist aggressors" -- about the social and political conditions in Latin America to which such religious aspiration is trying to offer a significant motivational response. When he talks sternly and passionately on the subject of infanticide, he refers exclusively to fetuses and unborn children--the victims of abortion. There is never a word concerning the 57,000 Americans killed in Vietnam -- young combatants who averaged less than twenty years of age. He likes to praise the good young people of Liberty Baptist College, for primarily the way they look, what they believe, and what they have not become. I saw no evidence whatever on campus of extracurricular interest in any cause or subject except athletics and religious ideology. No protest announcements against nuclear arms or nuclear power. Nothing about ecology, world hunger, racism, or poverty. No reference at all to the peace movement or the need for global cooperation (topics that would elicit an explosive outburst against the evils of the United Nations). No questions about the propriety of MX Missiles or dramatic increases in military spending.

But the most crucial intellectual omissions lie in Jerry Falwell's reading of the course of western history. He takes his major cues in this regard from Francis Schaeffer's book, How Should We Then Live?, whose subtitle reads The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture. But he shows no recognition whatever of having come to grips, say, with Sigmund Freud's Civilization and its Discontents, or with Norman O. Brown's Life Against Death, or with the works of Philip Rieff. Hence he is not aware of the profound interdependencies between the sexual exploitation he denounces and the fundamental incentives of the capitalist "free enterprise" system he praises. But the consequences are built into the incentives. As paradoxical as this might seem, Penthouse and Playboy magazines do indeed belong to the world Falwell wishes to restore.

This places his enumeration of the nation's primary sins in much more intriguing light. For the breakdown of authority that creates so much dismay can be interpreted as the wounding of the collective super-ego, the force of which will be likened to the slaying of the father. The recognition of this shows up in Falwell's observation that America's patrimonial situation has become tarnished and confused. What the country is fast becoming, in his eyes, violates the patterns of lineage established by the founding (and sanctioning) fathers. It is as if the children no longer know who their father is. Consequently, they are becoming a race of people whose destiny cannot easily be protected by the covenant the founders made with God, the Father Almighty. And the acts of disobedience and waywardness they are committing register as assaults on the fathers, who, in words Ronald Reagan likes, "sired a nation that grew from sea to shining sea."

Understandably, Jerry Falwell has caught the nation's attention. He has the ear of the President, and is well represented in the White House and in the administrative offices of present Cabinet officials. And the movement he champions has its lobby groups -- Moral Majority, National Conservative Political Action Committee, Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, National Christian Action Coalition, Christian Voice, Religious Roundtable, and the various groups in which Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich are involved -- to insure that the right causes

are promoted and the right candidates are elected. The political clout they can wield was vividly demonstrated in the defeat of liberal Senators McGovern, Culver, Bayh, and Church in November, 1980.

The movement also has its own bookstores and its own schools. (Falwell expects Liberty Baptist College to have an enrollment of 50,000 students by 1990, which would make it as large as the University of Minnesota or Ohio State.) It has its own music and art, much of which is communicated through its own radio and television stations -- the other network. It now has shared ways of judging the meaning and consequences of historical and political events. It has its own set of commentaries on the Bible. It even has its own new or revised creedal statement, written impressively in the form of a Christian Manifesto, by Francis Schaeffer -- a book published deliberately to counter the force of the Communist Manifesto of 1847 and the Humanist Manifesto of 1933 and 1973. The movement is well on its way toward having an alternative comprehensive history of western culture. It can sponsor its own patriotic ceremonies and national observances -- witness the "I Love America" rallies Falwell has held throughout the country. Indeed, if current trends continue, the emerging Falwell phenomenon will have captured many of the nation's primary symbols -- the flag, the family, motherhood, the founding fathers, not to mention many of the traditional means of access to patriotism, all of it mixed together somehow under the symbolisms of the "Jesus First" lapel pins.

It calls itself revolutionary, but it is really counterrevolutionary. It has much less to do with the nation's founding fathers than with combating the alienation of America's post-World War II children. It is incendiary, but so was early Christianity. It promotes zealotry, but so did the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, at least, until they could be tempered by the civilizing tendencies of the Church and, yes, the humanistic traditions of western culture. It is passionate -- mixing national patriotism with religious patromania -- but this is typical of the resurgence of fundamentalism in every culture in which it has been successful in working its way into the political mainstream. Many of the same combination of elements are present in contemporary Iran.

And it can secure its way because the religious and political response of the nation is fragmented and unsure. Falwell woos Jews -- deceptively, I think -- by his strong support of Israel and his well-publicized friendship with Menachem Begin. Catholics who might otherwise oppose him approve of his strong stand against abortion, which, for many, is the primary religious and political issue. Protestant reaction is mixed and disjointed too. The churches retaining strong claims to evangelical fervor are being slow or cautious, if they oppose him at all. Some approve of him wholeheartedly. For others, there is much in what he says and stands for -- his Bible-based sermons, the force with which he preaches the gospel, the way in which his use of television can be regarded as a pioneering effort in bringing the gospel to the whole world, and the impressive national and international company he keeps -- to evoke their approval and admiration. Besides, he has every opportunity to play upon the feelings of inadequacy and guilt of those groups which know themselves to have become "lukewarm," or sense that their own religious zeal falls far short of the courage of the Christian martyrs and confessors (the ones Falwell likes to talk about) who faced the lions in the Roman arena. When non-fundamentalist churches take issue with him, they can expect to be called "liberals" in league with "secular humanists." And many of these groups are struggling with their own feelings about the role of women in the church and about their attitudes toward abortion. In positions of such ambivalence, it is impossible for them to offer concerted or unified response.

Politicians can hardly oppose him either, except in partisans terms -- which, because it is expected, doesn't carry great force. Barry Goldwater took Jerry Fal-

well on, in October 1981, and was soundly criticized for doing so. The lesson of that episode is that what distinguishes the successful new-right of the 1980s from the unsuccessful old-right of the 1960s is the strong conservative and unified religious support the newer version possesses. After the virtual conservative sweep of November 1980, politicians who take strong stands against Falwell should know they run the risk of losing significant segments of their constituencies.

The intellectual community, in the main, I think, has underestimated him. I suspect that his ability to influence significant segments of the population is due, in part, to diminished national confidence in the viewpoints that prevail in the intellectual establishments. In one sense, the story is about the rise of the new religious right. In another sense, the same story can be told in terms of the vacuum in the middle -- an occasion that invited the Falwell phenomenon to rush in.

I also believe that Jerry Falwell was created by the trauma concerning the nation's involvement in the Vietnam War. There has been great disappointment for at least the past decade and a half, that is, since the Vietnam situation was correctly perceived in about 1967 -- the year immediately preceding the pivotal year which witnessed the deaths of Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Thomas Merton, the year of the explosive and bloody democratic convention in Chicago. Against such disappointment and self-flagellation, Falwell proclaims a new enthusiasm. There has been dissatisfaction; Falwell champions a new success story. There has been conflict in the nation's resolve; Falwell advocates the rebirth of the heroic American spirit. He is joining Ronald Reagan in letting the entire world know: no longer can our adversaries, foes or competitors, in the words of the President, "futz [sic] around with Uncle Sam."

Falwell's is an American story, but it belongs to the fact that fundamentalist religion has risen to prominence within the three dominant religious traditions of the western world. In Iran it takes form in the rise of the Islamic theocracy. In Judaism, too, the strains of conservativism are more powerful today than in recent decades.

One must ask, given the larger picture: Is this what religion does just prior to the time when the desacralizing tendency achieves virtually complete success? Or have the vast multiplicities of new experiences and challenges of the modern world created a passion to rediscover a finite set of reliable simple and bedrock truths? Have the wonders of the expanding universe made a place for Jerry Falwell? Is he the one who plays the role of wishing to halt or slow the developmental process before it gets beyond human control? Is it simply nostalgia for the old days? Is it a deliberate attempt to frustrate the desire to find, by creating, a workable peaceable global society which is ordered according to some more equitable and promising dynamics than the fierce and debilitating rivalry between "superpower one" and "superpower two?"

I contemplate all of this as I return to the place at which this chronicle began -- the Freedom Shrine in the Lynchburg Airport, erected there by the city fathers to strengthen citizen appreciation of our national heritage. Jerry Falwell's sleek white jet is still parked on the runway, next to the faded blue Datsun with the security officer sitting inside. Standing in the very center of the airport, the visitor can see both shrine and plane in a single image. From this vantage point, it becomes easy to envision Falwell as the messenger, or patriot, who flies from place to place teaching the message of the shrine.

The postscript reads that, yes, of course, he also loves his family.

As I stand there in the center of the lobby of the airport, I become aware that my friend Casey is watching me from the car-rentals desk. He wants to tell me what he has decided, that next year he will probably transfer to another college. He prefers to study in a place that is less intense religiously and more flexibly morally. The problem now is to break this news to his parents.

"Do you think that I've made the right decision?" he asks me, as he processes the now-spent rental agreement.

"Well, I think you have to do what you have to do." I respond, in the non-directive way liberals do.

I wish him well, wondering if I'll ever see him again, feeling some relief of my own that when I board the plane I too will be out of all of this. For I can return home to a campus where suspicions of movements like Falwell's are instinctive, where critical attitudes toward it, if enunciated substantially enough, can even contribute toward one's tenure.

But I realize that as soon as I tell anyone at home where I have been, my reactions to what I have experienced will be submitted to the explanatory canons of the methodological fundamentalisms of the academic community. Some will hope for a simple explanation, wanting me to say or suggest that Jerry Falwell leads an immoral life or takes money from the church coffers for his own use. Others will treat me to their own cherished theories of social and historical change, invoking hypotheses about the necessary give-and-take between liberal and conservative emphases. Still others will vent such vengeance in their denunciations that their words will begin sounding like the headlines of the Moral Majority Reports, exhibiting the same hostile, rancorous, accusative tone. Rhetorical venom, armed with brilliant half truths, is a tactic of argument available to anyone regardless of political stripe or religious allegiance or disinclination. And others, I can be sure, will take me aside, or clutch at my sleeve, to ask about my salvation.

"Casey, it does make quite a story that someone in good academic and religious standing would feel compelled to break out of a place devoted to the motto WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS FREEDOM" (as in Liberty Baptist College). But this is precisely the point.

We are talking about climates of opinion -- religious and intellectual environments that either diminish or encourage the edification of the human spirit and the creation of a better world.

The danger with all religion is that the devotee can come to live in a world created by dogma and ideology, without recognizing how such formative influences work. One can feel trapped, when the pieces no longer fit, when the world fashioned by dogma carries less and less resemblance to the world one actually encounters. Paradoxically -- Falwell would deny this -- it is the humanistic side of a religion that facilitates the passageway out, that is, if transfer is sought. For the humanistic elements temper and balance the sometimes contradictory forces within a religion. It is through this instrumentality, for example, that the divisive prophetic qualities of a religion are balanced by the priestly celebration of the unity of all things. It is through the same influences that the zealotry intrinsic to the apocalyptic temper is placed within a larger network of interacting forces. Paradoxically, too, the humanistic side of religion is the force most resolutely and persistently opposed to the secularizing tendency. "Secular humanism," in this light, is really a contradiction in terms. Religion needs humanism if it is to function as a constructive civilizing force. The challenge today is to recover the same instrumentality to exorcise the terror of the Armageddon mentality which Falwell's apocalyptic religion is trying valiantly to sanction and undergird.

There is historical precedent for the suggestion we are making, namely, that the hopeful future of humankind requires that the advocates of any religion must reach for a vision transcending the Manichean-like portrayal of conflict between rival centers of power ("Superpower One" vs "Superpower Two"). When St. Augustine learned to take the step beyond Manichean dualism, he found himself in position to think seriously and prayerfully about the requirements of a civitas dei. That's the moral of the story. But we can put it more simply. The gospel that is being espoused must be a message of peace.

Santa Barbara, California
February 4, 1982