

Gingrich and the Christian Coalition

Gingrich's Philosophical Position

The curious fact about Newt Gingrich is that the people who know him well have a difficult time forming a single opinion about him. He is a multiple-personality politician who has so skilfully played the role of antagonist-tactician that even his apparent positive or constructive endeavors can never transcend suspicion. At the same time, he is a gifted and powerful thinker who delights in creating and assessing political ideas, recent examples of which are his "Contract with America" and the book TO RENEW AMERICA, the elaboration of the ideas within the "Contract." While all of this is occurring, he also plays the role of political reformer with his own ideological (there is no better word to describe it) program for the restoration of fundamental American democracy, not only within the United States, but, he hopes and sometimes expects, throughout the world. Put all of this together and one has in Newt Gingrich the consummate national political opposition leader whose highest aspiration is to have taken responsibility for social and economic reforms so fundamental and sweeping that nothing since Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal have had greater formative influence on the life of the nation. In the 1994 election, in "the war of ideas," Newt Gingrich was the clear winner, in spite of the fact that barely 15% of the electorate had heard of "The Contract" and Gingrich himself carried a large set of personal and political negatives. He won because of the in-

terpretation he lended to the outcome of the election, when not everything was well understood. Yet, it was altogether fitting that he take credit for the Republican sweep that occurred, for he functioned as the most accurate and effective enunciator of the philosophical position that beat all other rival positions.

As we have already noted, it was a simple position that was exceedingly simple to grasp. Fortified by the social ills that were everywhere apparent, the thesis was (and still is) that proper and inherent human motivation had increasingly run into the obstacle of government intrusion, intervention, and interference. By nature human beings are endowed with both ability and a drive to pursue appropriate objectives to advance the conditions of the human race. The problem, according to Gingrich, is that this natural propensity is frustrated by inappropriate and unwisely imposed governmental intervention. Through such illegitimate intervention, government has encouraged perverse forms of human behavior. More and more, individuals misguidedly look to government largess to supply what rightly accrues to human aspiration and amotivation. Consequently, "the bond of trust" between citizens and their government has been broken. What follows is that too many citizens are looking to government to do what they should be doing for themselves. Collective moral decay, as Gingrich sees it, is due to the fact that citizens are not accepting responsibility for the situations in which they find themselves. Indeed, the situation has become so perverse that citizens now routinely blame government for their plights, and, of course, expect government to extricate them. Again, the pervasive moral decay is due to the fact that no one is accepting responsibility; everyone, by contrast, is looking to some external governmental agency to supply what can only properly come from their own resources.

Thus, in Gingrich's view, the only appropriate recourse is to rein in the power of government, particularly at the federal level, and the only effective way to impose such limits is to attack the presumptions of those responsible for current excesses. Thus, the theses presented in "The Contract with America," which are more fully enunciated in Gingrich's book, To Renew America.

Under the sponsorship of these hypotheses, the consequent political program can't help but be radical. Gingrich and his allies could never be content with some minor programmatic tinkering here and there. Their goals would never be satisfied, say, were budgetary deficit figures trimmed or the numbers of people in the federal workforce reduced. Rather, there must be root-and-branch transformation. Virtually everything is susceptible to change because the foundations of prevailing expectations regarding government are not simply being challenged, but, in every appropriate way, are under attack. Indeed, it is thoroughly appropriate in this context to employ a military frame, for there is no question but that the reformer sensed that the time was right to engage the opposition in fierce political battle. Thus the contest that began in the 1994 election cycle has continued into the 1995 legislative year, and, unless something completely unexpected occurs, will be sustained into 1996, and, most pointedly, into the 1996 presidential election cycle.

Four Perspectives on Gingrich

There is no question but that the side Gingrich opposed found itself reeling following the results of the 1994 election. As we write this analysis, a full year after that election, the reeling is still there, the uncertainty compounded, the recovery strategy still not very sharply in view. All of this says

that Republican blows hit Democrats hard and were extraordinarily well timed. In fact the devastation was so accurate and swift -- to be likened to quick military action at night -- that hardly anyone anticipated it would happen. Moreover, many of those most seriously and deeply affected remained dazed and confused weeks and months later. The election outcome signalled a large shift in national conviction, a veritable revolution within the realm of prevailing ideas.

The immediate success of the revolution, however, and the fact that the convictions held (and hold) power, is not necessarily a confirmation of either the cogency or the durability of Gingrich's ideas. In the first place, in spite of whatever descriptive nomenclature the man from Marietta, Georgia might prefer as title of his programmatic reform, it really is difficult to create something new or without precedent. In a word, there are strong hints that what Gingrich has constructed (or, more appropriately, reconstructed) is a return to the philosophy of the old confederacy of the mid-nineteenth century, which guided one of the two contestants in the Civil War. Why do we call it a throw-back to confederacy assumptions? Because the way of dealing with federal governmental authority by transferring federal monies into bloc grants to the states constitutes the clearest possible reassertion of states' rights. Gingrich supports this move by contending that local government is most effective government, and the further away the decision points are the more likely people will suffer by legislative decision. This thesis carries understandable attractiveness, particularly when it is advanced in the presence of home voting groups. The increase of distance creates an increase in remoteness, and remote jurisdiction always breeds suspicion on the part of those governed; thus, whatever measures promise to bring the centers of jurisdiction closer to home are bound to carry a certain attractive-

ness. However, in addition to matters of popular appeal, one should view Gingrich's ploy as involving a shift in the balance of power from Washington to the states, a diminishment of the role of federal government, and, without question, a reduction in the power of the President, whose office, more than any other in government, represents and embodies the national interest. In this regard, it is not surprising, following the Republican "landslide" of 1994, that Bill Clinton was heard to tell reporters at a press conference that "the Presidency is relevant," meaning even in the current political climate. One would be somewhat hard pressed to provide exact equivalents, but there is no doubt that the spirit of Gingrich's reforms and traditional Confederacy assumptions closely resemble each other.

There is a second way to place Gingrich's proposals and his overall influence upon American social, cultural, and political life within a larger frame. This involves tracing the extension of a modality that has its origin in academic life into the world of politics. We refer specifically to the phenomenon of deconstructionism. Deconstructionism first affected our understanding of the ways in which knowledge was acquired, and thus found its most compelling early influence in academic subject fields like history and literature. But since its time of origins, this influence has spread to virtually all academic fields that employ a hermeneutics (that is, the study of principles of interpretation and explanation), including sociology, anthropology, philosophy, art history, religious studies, and the like. Within the academy, deconstructionism is associated with the contentions of Jacques Derrida, a contemporary French philosopher, whose best-known book, Of Grammatology (1967), contains an argument about language, speech, and communication, which locates meaning not as something given in and of itself, but is always an elusive linguistic construction. The task of the interpreter is to engage in

the process of "deconstructionism" so as to discern or identify such meaning. We are employing the word "deconstructionism" with reference to Gingrich's influence on contemporary American politics not in the special sense in which the term applies in formal academic discussion, but informally. We refer specifically to its tone or temper. In short, Gingrich's political philosophy is not an exercise in construction or composition, but works, instead, to break things down into smaller pieces, or, in short, to skilfully penetrate and decipher prevailing constructions. Perhaps it is due to the many years in which, as a member of the Republican minority in the midst of a confident Democratic majority, he was placed in the position of antagonist. Or perhaps it is due to the fact that Gingrich was Professor Gingrich, a faculty member in a department of history, before he was elected to the House of Representatives, and as a scholar and researcher he has been trained to practice a form of deconstructive intelligence. The truth is that he has become much more adept at exercising criticism than he is in making avowals. His legislation has been concentrated on the need to reduce the size of government by eliminating redundant and unnecessary regulations and, most tellingly, by attacking hierarchical order of all kinds, particularly when it imposes authority that he feels obligated to challenge. His legislative successes do not yet include constructive proposals, say, with respect to environmental sensibilities, the care and nurture of children, or even the functions of government. In virtually everything he touches, his instinct is to see how much can be eliminated or discounted before he can even consider what might be built up, reconstructed, or composed anew. In calling him a "deconstructionist" we are pointing most fundamentally to the directional spirit of his political instincts and legislative interests. His most prominent public role has been to challenge the conventional wisdom

of the Counter-Culture generation, whose ideas he believes are responsible for run-away expenses and a decadent morality.

The third comprehensive perspective that we would like to impose on the ideas that Newt Gingrich has put forward is one that has origin in the Lutheran theology to which the present Speaker of the House was introduced by as a child by his grandmother. No, certainly, we do not know how much of Lutheran teaching he assimilated, nor the degree to which this is a conscious portion of his spiritual and intellectual makeup presently. But there is a cardinal Lutheran teaching, first expressed by Martin Luther in 1520 in his treatise on "The Freedom of a Christian", to which Gingrich has exhibited sustained obedience. It is the treatise that lays down Luther's convictions regarding what is referred to as "the doctrine of the two kingdoms." Luther's thesis is that the Christian lives and works within two environments simultaneously. Citizenship in the spiritual kingdom allows one to be "so exalted above all things," Luther writes, "that nothing can do him any harm." Citizenship in the earthly kingdom brings with it compulsion to do good deeds, but not to effect one's salvation or to try to influence one's status in the spiritual kingdom.

When Luther enunciated this teaching, he was steering his way through prevailing late medieval Catholic theology to find a way to protect Christian believers from the proposition that life in the spiritual kingdom is earned as a consequence of doing a sufficient number and quality of good deeds. This teaching, for Luther, was directly contradictory to his belief that salvation was the gift of grace, received by faith. At the same time, he urged Christians, here below, to do good works, not for purposes of transferring their merits into a desired status within the heavenly kingdom, but because it was right and proper to be so engaged.

I have suggested that Gingrich is "Lutheran" to the extent that his view makes earthly government somewhat dispensable. No, it is not merely an option, for there is no doubt that we will always have it, and, thus, must always tolerate it, at least. But the good deeds that earthly existence enjoins are of a highly volitional nature. They are not necessary to the achievement of that which is most important in human life. Rather, that which is most necessary has its locus and source outside the earthly realm. The same principle is held by Christian right followers for whom the second birth, or redemption, provides the human being with access to that which is most fundamentally, reliably, and normatively human. There are Lutherans, of course, who see things another way; we have already referenced the teachings of the Danish writers, N. F. S. Grundtvig, for whom good government belongs to "the order of creation," which is to be affirmed with as much confidence as "the order of redemption." But the Gingrich-people accord primary status to the reality that is accessed through being born again. Translation and application: that which most deeply sustains human life does not fall from the workings of earthly institutions, no matter how well intended. And while there are laws that must be obeyed, and ordinances that must be protected, the path to virtue is volitional and not required. When one reads Martin Luther this way, one can find a clear routing to emphasis on strictly voluntary (rather than coerced, demanded, or required) ethical behavior. The difference is that Luther's recommendations were intended as antithesis to the teaching of salvation via the path of good works while Gingrich can discern in the same convictional base the occasion and opportunity to counter government-funded social programs with his own version of volunteerism. The same convictional base can be employed, should one choose, to cast aspersions on the credibility of government.

The fourth placement comment to make about Newt Gingrich is that he really is an ideolog. And this is not necessarily a pejorative statement. We have already referenced his love for ideas, and the fact that the reform movement he conducted in 1994, and following, was principled by ideas. By now the reader will appreciate that this writer rather likes this tendency in Gingrich; after all, we both have experience as teachers, researchers, and writers. This means that both of us have made our living identifying and testing ideas, to make determinations about which ones are worthy, faulty, misleading, ambitious, etc. The difference between a lover of ideas and an ideolog is that the latter places ideas within a coherent and coordinated system of ideas, and then proceeds to argue for the truth of the system. Thus, when Gingrich speaks, trying to convince his hearers (whether in public speaking situations, on the floor of the House of Representatives, on television or on radio, or in his books and essays) of the cogency and wisdom of his insight, the appeal is to the system of thought that he is advancing. It is the formula of truth to which he is making his most basic appeal.

Without question, it is a full-scale system of thought. It contains answers to questions about how the nation found itself in the situation it faces in the late 1990s. It answers to questions about the divisions of the 1960s, and how these came about. It exhibits negative judgment on the influence of the Counter Culture. It salutes the anti-communist fervor that has been part of prevailing conservative intellectual climate since the 1950s. It privileges nature in the debate about which carries greater influence, nature or nurture. It places greater emphasis on "unum" (which then becomes defined in restrictive, exclusive terms) than on "e pluribus" in this well-established formula. It privileges a certified "we-feeling." It is understandable, there-

fore, that this ideology exhibits concern when "multi" threatens to become too large, as it is in "multicultural" or "multiculturalism" or even "multinational". The same distrust of "multi" is also implicit in fears about "united", particularly when "united" indicates agreements between forces (as in United Nations) that threaten more discrete national entities. For "United" in this sense gives credence to a "multi" that actually fails to respect the protections previously established around the "unum."

The same philosophical orientation lends support to the integrity of individual initiative as distinct from anything that may come one's way apart from one's agential or earning powers. Though he elevates states' rights above those of the federal government, he has not abandoned hierarchical thinking. In his view (though, as far as I know, he hasn't said any of this publicly), the Speaker of the House, as the leader of the legislative body that is most representative of the people, is the pre-eminent national governmental leader. Why? Because he is situated at the pinnacle of the primary system of representational power within national government. The Speaker is the leader of that form of national government that most directly affirms the principle that politics is primarily local.

A Politics Rooted in Ideology

We have asserted that this is not simply a collection of ideas, but that the ideas own systematic coherence, and that it is primarily the system itself that Gingrich has most interest in selling. On what basis can this assertion be defended? Answer: on grounds that one can think one's way from any one of the affirmations to virtually all of the others. What Gingrich believes about children is prefaced by his preference for nature over nurture. Accordingly what he finds abhorrent in the behavior of the so-called "flower children" of

the 1960s is concordant with his view that dreaded communism was first an external threat to the nation, then quickly became an internal mode of operation and behavior that most seriously threatened the nation from within. The "flower children" as well as the Counter-Culture, in his view, were instruments, no matter how unwittingly, of communist expansionism, agents of the diabolical totalitarian force whose intent was to destroy the system of government and way of life that is synonymous with democracy as practiced within the United States. Each piece in the composite can be related to all of the others. But Gingrich's viewpoint is not simply a coherent system of thought; in addition, it exhibits a very definite goal.

The ideological element comes into full view when one recognizes that every piece of evidence cited or data referenced is intended to help draw a sharp contrast between a coordinated way of life that is being stoutly defended in contrast to a coordinated way of life that is being thoroughly denounced. In this respect, virtually every time Newt Gingrich mounts an argument it is in strong and vehement behalf of a prescribed way of life -- call it an authorized orientation to reality -- that appears threatened by the so-called progressive alternative to which his political opponents owe allegiance. As noted already, it is not for this principle or that legislative initiative that Gingrich contends, but for an authorized view of the world that includes an authorized view of the nature and destiny of the United States within the geo-political environment of the last half decade of the twentieth century. Its specifics aside, the real intent of "The Contract With America" is to help establish this view of the world -- indeed, this orientation to reality -- as being normative to the way Americans today both think of themselves and govern themselves.

Understandably, then, one finds these ~~views~~ ideological views enunciated, sometimes beneath the lines, in Newt Gingrich's 1995 best-selling book, To Renew America, which begins, as the prepared reader might expect, with the author's assessment of America's status within the family of nations, most particularly, Germany, Japan and China. The thesis of the book comes early and easily: in World War II, the United States attained an ascendancy never before realized, following which period the nation extended its influence even further. But from the 1960s forward, decadence at home has mounted to real epidemic proportions and the nation's reputation throughout the world has taken some serious hits as well. America needs to be renewed, Gingrich insists, and the pathway toward renewal lies in the selection of the authorized version of life in contrast to "the decay and failure of the welfare state" (about which even Baby boomers and their successor generation have very low regard). The renewal will follow the reassertion of "American civilization" (the name accorded to the normative view of life). To put the matter succinctly, listen to Gingrich's brief capsule:

Since 1965...there has been a calculated effort by cultural elites to discredit this civilization [that is, American civilization] and to replace it with a culture of irresponsibility that is incompatible with American freedoms as we have known them. Our first task is to return to teaching Americans about America and teaching immigrants how to become Americans. Until we reestablish a legitimate moral-cultural standard, our civilization is at risk.

The dominant contrast can be located on nearly every page of the book. Sentences like this one abound: "We must replace the welfare state with an opportunity society." And this one: "No civilization can survive for long with twelve-year-olds having babies, fifteen-year-olds killing one another, seventeen-year-olds dying of AIDS, and eighteen-year-olds getting diplomas

they can't read." And to demonstrate that the desire to reestablish a firmer foundation is not an aggregate of age, Gingrich offers this observation:

Older Americans who grew up with the certainty and convictions of World War II and the Cold War are eager for a rebirth of American values. Baby boomers who grew up with the counterculture are now sober and mature enough to see that many of its principles simply don't work.

Which comments force this pointed perspectival question:

Will historians record America as a meteor that emerged as a world power in the twentieth century, then found itself unable to solve its own internal problems and rapidly declined into a regional power? Or will they remember America as the center of freedom that, having defeated its foreign enemies, found the moral and political courage to revitalize its civilization and lead the human race to even greater levels of freedom, prosperity, and security? It is impossible to know today which story will be told to our descendants.

But about the fact that the contrast is sharp, and the consequences thoroughly invasive, there can be little doubt.

It may surprise Newt Gingrich to learn that the viewpoint he advances is so ideologically driven that the history he tells is not very reliable. In the first place, the "American civilization" that he praises so highly is not something to be recovered from the past, but is an early-to-mid-1990s invention. While one might be able to find threads of influence that reach back from the present into the pre-1960s era, there are too many complexifying and conflicting elements to allow for any real equation between what existed then and what is being recommended today. Perhaps it is useful to prepare an inventory of what seems to be missing in contemporary American life in contrast to what appeared to be available then. But the identification of such items is not tantamount to an ability to transport them forward into

today's public life, for all such cultural ingredients exist in context and in relationship. When the framework is no longer present, the ingredients cannot be arranged in the same way. To make matters a bit more complicated, much that Gingrich likes about pre-counterculture America is the framework itself, and not the ingredients. But how can anyone legislate that the views of life that prevailed in the United States in the 1950s be given normative status today? How can anyone presume to transpose the framework forward? And, since the entire era cannot be transported forward, on what basis would Gingrich make his selection of the portions or elements within it that might be resuscitable.

Significantly, the era he adores occurred before the height of civil-rights awareness that commenced during the time of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. In hoping to recreate the situation that pertained then, would he also like to return to a pre-civil rights era? And what would he do with the movement commonly referred to as "women's liberation"? This movement has only become prevalent since the early-to-mid-1960s. In desiring to return to the "pre" time, does Gingrich wish to turn back the revolutionary clock on this development too? Also, in the 1950s, even more of the world than today was ruled by some relatively untested assumptions about the propriety of colonisation. Would Gingrich prefer to associate normative status with a time when colonizer controlled the colonized, and relatively few voices in the world were raising objections? And if it is to the Counter-Culture that Gingrich objects most strenuously, how would he have addressed the apparently legitimate issues that the new post World War II generation raised? As the first generation of human beings to have been born, as Morris Dickstein so vividly documents in his book, Gates of Eden, into the nuclear age, wouldn't Gingrich understand that legitimate questions

would be raised about how the exercising of such power might affect life on this planet? If he really wanted to pick and choose concerning the components of the era that would be transmitted forward in contrast to the ones that would be jettisoned, what principles of selectivity would he employ? And on what basis would he defend his choices? Of course, our queries are highly hypothetical because the exercise itself is impossible.

The chief problem with this view of "unreality" is that it encourages its advocates to miss the real force of what is occurring today. Too often, in my judgment, Gingrich approaches problems by dismissing them, or, more precisely, by choosing to focus his gaze somewhere else. Whenever he advocates a swift death penalty (as for convicted drug traffickers from Mexico or Central America), he is saying that he'd prefer not to have to deal with this matter at all. Whenever he cites odd books, like Leon Dash's When Children Want Children, which blames the welfare state for increases in illegitimate births, or Marvin Olasky's The Tragedy of American Compassion, which alleges that government aid destroys people, he is following his ideological propensity to look one way but not all ways, to consider a portion of the evidence but not all of the evidence. His hope, in both of these instances, is that government assistance will justifiably go away. But what his analysis overlooks -- or, I suspect, chooses not to see -- is the evidence that government aid also assists some people (but, of course, not all people) and welfare benefits have assisted some mothers (but, of course, not all mothers) to find ways to escape what the Speaker refers to as "the culture of poverty". For example, what about the role of state colleges in educating now two or three generations of Americans? This would not have happened had the government not been involved. What about bridges and roads? Again, none of this would have occurred without the facility of government. When for-

mer California governor Pat Brown died in 1996, he was hailed as the creator of modern California, meaning that under his leadership the highway system, the system of higher education, the system of irrigation and waterways, and much more, was constructed. Pat Brown's sense of the responsibility of government with respect to the achievement of the common good stands in sharp contrast to the position Newt Gingrich enunciates.

Ralph Reed and the Christian Coalition

When one links the Gingrich view of the world with the disposition of the Christian Coalition, Pat Robertson's production, a number of additional elements are added to the ideological mix. As in the portrayal of Gingrich's position, for which we invoked the evidence in his 1995 book, To Renew America, we will be focusing on the most current rendition of Christian Coalition thinking, namely, that provided by Ralph Reed in his 1994 book, Politically Incorrect: The Emerging "Faith Factor" in American Politics. For Reed, who holds a Ph.D. degree in American History from Emory University in Atlanta, and who has the reputation of being exceedingly smooth politically and intellectually, Politically Incorrect serves as a kind of manifesto of the cardinal principles of the neo-Pat Robertson movement. The old Pat Robertson, the founder of the CBN University in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and the "700 Club" on Christian television, also aspired to become the Republican candidate for President in 1988. But the electorate became increasingly leary of the possibility that Robertson might attain an elected leadership role because of his pronounced pentecostal proclivities -- he regularly speaks in tongues, and sometimes practices faith healing (a difficult combination of talents to insert into the Oval Of-

face) -- and because of public statements thanking God for an answer to a prayer that dissuaded an approaching hurricane from moving onto Virginia coast land, but which, subsequently, smashed into Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Robertson continues to appear on programs produced on his television network to explain that we are living in the last days before the rapture, when, following intense turmoil, the faithful will be "called up" to live with Jesus Christ in a heavenly Jerusalem. Reed might also have such convictions, but he is careful not to disseminate them publicly. Indeed, when one hears him speak on the various network television shows, one can hardly detect that he represents evangelicals. There he is, mixing charges and counter-charges in the midst of apparent easy-going conversations with well-known political commentators as well as national office holders, always seeming controlled, reasonable and charming. Why, one would ask, would anyone see anything harmful or dangerous in Ralph Reed? And if Reed is chief spokesperson, why should there be any fuss about the Christian Coalition?

I have come some distance on this subject since studying it rather carefully in the late 1980s, in preparation for the writing of a book, The New Religious Right, that was published by the University of South Carolina Press in 1990. For the original project, my intent was to try to get the attention of readers who were prone to dismiss conservative Protestant fundamentalist religion as being unworthy of serious consideration. Thus the tone of The New Religious Right was altogether conciliatory; I was willing to make the case that the relatively new religious movement could indeed be regarded as a thoughtful response to the contemporary moral and spiritual crisis of the nation. But I wrote the book this way because the movement seemed to be dismissed too easily.

Now, five years later, following the Coalition's dramatic seizing of political and ideological power, it seems time to take the next step, namely, to contend and illustrate how absolutely poorly equipped it is -- intellectually, spiritually, politically, and instrumentationally -- to meet the major social challenges of our time. Here some equations are being advanced that must be contested. Christian Coalition people say that contemporary society is in a terrible mess. They understand how the society got this way, and they have a program for doing something about it. They truly believe that if both diagnosis and prescribed remedy were widely accepted, the society would find its way out of the current moral and spiritual morass and back to stability and normalcy. But the society must be born again, as it were. To repent of its ways is to reverse the cataclysmic fall into collective laceration that was produced by the social, political, cultural, and anti-theological seductions of the 1960s. To reverse this fall from collective grace is to turn once again (both individually and collectively) to God. What the nation needs most, according to Christian Coalition vision, is a profound spiritual awakening. Hence, the call for school prayer, Bible reading in the schools, anti-abortion legislation, and a host of measures that are designed effectively to resist whatever social changes run contrary to "family values" of a patriarchal, father-mother-and-children model. And this is the normative model by virtue of its congruence with traditional theological orthodoxy.

Again, some readers are thinking, what is wrong with this? The diagnosis is clear and the proposed solution is straightforward. Why wouldn't such a program be adopted?

In my judgment -- I say this with studied conviction -- the remedies that are being advanced, as paradoxical as this may seem, actually sidestep the real problems, for the latter are never identified with sufficient accuracy. Yes,

there is a moral and spiritual crisis in the nation (although this may turn out to mean that there is a significant loss of collective self-confidence). Yes, there is too much deviant behavior, moreso than ever (but, of course, there are more people than ever). Yes, there are too many dysfunctional families (but there are lots of functional families too). Yes, there are too many young people who have no interest in investing in a future, either their own or that of a larger collectivity (yet the current generation also exhibits considerable idealism too). Out-of-wedlock births are vastly too numerous (but the percentage of out-of-wedlock people is also higher). And lack of regard for the responsibility one accepts in initiating the life of offspring has too often turned abortion into birth-control instrumentation (no dispute here). All of this is deplorable. All of it is unfortunate. And most of it, were there a will and a way, ought to be reversed. That is, human behavior ought to be properly directed. Families ought to be institutions of love and nurture. Young people ought to come into prominence excited about the future of their country and the role they might play in helping to realize this future. And every child ought to be a wanted child. Indeed, every child ought to be born into a loving family. And, of course, we should have less crime, more community vitality, a higher degree of love for country, and all of the other positive indications of a resilient and caring society.

But how do we get there from where we are now? Will it work to have a spiritual revival? If the nation can turn to God, will the necessary recovery occur?

The Counter Culture and the Congressional Culture War

Now, before critically assessing this proposition, let's turn the matter in a very different way by trying to put a positive, constructive face on the

social and moral achievements of the 1960s-based tendencies the Christian Coalition takes delight in denouncing. After all, the current denunciation is of persons who advocated civil rights, tried to extend individual and personal freedoms further, believed that the aspirations of the great society were worthy goals, advocated educational reform, increased environmental sensitivity and cooperative attempts to prevent nuclear war, and, for the most part, remain attached to these aspirations today. On the face of it, at least, none of this sounds like an evil agenda. Indeed, if standard moral tests are applied to these ambitions, the scores would come out rather high. In fact, when one looks over the entire thirty-to-forty-year period, the record is not nearly as dismal as the Christian Coalition would like to portray it. Though no one is satisfied that the levels of achievement are high enough, the case can be made that civil rights were extended further, the great society did indeed bring egalitarian advances, environmental management became more sophisticated, and the tragedy of nuclear war was averted. There can be argument as to who is in best position to take credit. The truth is that no one particularly wants to take credit, because people who are motivated this way know how much more needs to be done, in all of these critical areas.

But, from this vantage point, it would be extremely difficult to make a compelling case that the heightened sensitivity that came out of 1960s collective awareness has been something of a drag on the human race, or even that it was responsible for pushing American society off course. What has been achieved seems eminently worthy of being pursued. Thus, the assessment reflected in this frame is similar to the range of responses we referenced when describing reactions to Ralph Reed. Why the fuss? What was so wrong about the orientation to life that came to prominence in the 1960s?

The answer must lie in the prices that were (or are being) paid for the positive gains that were envisioned. But, wait a minute. Can the case be made that the 1960s agenda leads to the deleterious social behavior that Christian Coalition people decry? Specifically, does opposition to nuclear war, advocating on behalf of the environment, extending civil rights to women and under-represented minorities, et al., create the so-called moral and spiritual vacuum to which the Christian Coalition seems compelled to respond? It takes a major stretch to see equations here. Again, can any of the social, cultural, and political developments of the 1960s be assigned as source of the need to reassert "family values"? Again, there are interpretive routes that might enforce such conclusions, but they are all highly speculative and inventive. So, what is the problem? Why are Christian Coalition people so angry with other American citizens who look favorably on the social and cultural developments of the 1960s?

My suggestion is that it is not this or that feature that creates the mischief, or even the sum total of all of them. Rather, it is the disposition to call virtually everything previously presumed secure and unchallenged into question that has created the problem. And, in more precise terms, it is not the disposition itself that is most objectionable, but the authority -- the legitimacy -- that is attached to an alternative orientational stance that has gained permission, in social and culture terms, to challenge the propriety of received tradition. To put it bluntly, religious fundamentalism (not only in its Christian version as practiced within the United States, but also in its manifestations in virtually every major religion of the world) very much needs the worldview that existed prior to the occurrence of the counter-culture challenge. It can find no self-consistent way to accommodate itself to the alternative view. It owns no rightful place there. Certainly, it has made

some moves in the creation of new musical forms and styles ("Christian rock," for example), and some of the theological seminaries have made rather surprising moves away from strict fundamentalist orthodoxy. But, in the main, religious fundamentalism does not find a friendly environment in counter-culture reality. The modality it exhibits requires a sure foundation, not one that sorts and sifts and questions. It wants to be able to say that there is a prescribed way to live, prescribed truths to live by, a prescribed pathway to human fulfillment, and these prescriptions are both authoritative and normative. Counter-culture culture is not searching for norms, but for opportunities to expand consciousness. Thus, counter-culture people take insight from more than one religious tradition, and feel that there is nothing contradictory about doing so. Counter-culture people are more accepting of the reality and propriety of "multi" (as in "multi-cultural"), and such openness does not create religious, ethical, or cultural compromises for them. The fundamentalist mentality, by contrast, is intent, in every conceivable framework, of isolating "the one thing necessary" so that it can resolutely attach all of its hopes, loyalties, and enthusiasms thereto.

Gingrich's political theology is an instrument to reach back before the birth of the Counter-Culture to invoke the era of stability that he believes was characteristic of the 1950s. His intention is to restore the cultural conditions that might help regain the authority of traditional fundamentalist religion. For their part, the heirs to the Counter Culture feel that there is much left to do in the world, and that the demands of the present time call out for dedicated action. So there is a tug-of-war, marked by fundamentalist attempts at restoration in competition with new-order attempts to push on further and harder.

Without question, the Congress of the United States is the arena with-

in which this full-scale "cultural war" is being waged. Thus, a nation that was brought together by its opposition to dreaded Nazism and Fascism during the Second War is now being sundered internally by the clash between alternative orientations to life's meaning. And it hardly seems that there can be compromise because new-order people found their identity in challenging the traditional orthodoxy of the previous era, and proponents of the latter believe that reinstatement of their point of view requires eliminating or significantly downsizing the dreaded displacement position.

We ask ourselves how such a "cultural war" can ever be resolved. Of course, one of the two sides might win, and this would leave the other side vanquished. Or the two could join forces to resist the power of some other outside threat. Frankly, we don't anticipate that either of these circumstances will occur. Something else must happen, and this is how we envision it happening.

There have been times in the past when orthodoxies have been challenged and times of widespread religious, moral and political change followed. The answer must be that each of these two identifiable systems of moral counsel now understand themselves to be in direct conflict with the other. And the conflict has been extended into a and the differences between them have been extended into open conflict.

(4) In my judgment, what is deficient about this recommendation is that it portends to respond to a this-worldly dilemma with an other-worldly solution. Of course, no one really knows how a national spiritual revival would affect the behavior of millions of citizens. There is every reason to believe that many of them -- perhaps millions of them -- would change their behavior as well as their beliefs and attitudes. But what would this do about

children in poverty? How would the same principles address the changing demographics within this country, which changes in the makeup of society cannot be effectively treated simply by sealing national borders, eliminating second-language educational programs, and building more prisons to warehouse those who do not seem to fit in. What do the same principles say about the expanding gap between rich and poor in our society? How do they help us know how to regulate the desire for economic vitality and appropriate environmental protections?

The Gingrich people offer the solution that in the acceptance of the ideology lie appropriate clues concerning all of these issues and questions. This, of course, is what it is to be a fundamentalist, namely, to have but a single answer to any and all conceivable questions. But this is exactly where the rub comes in. Our dedication to democracy will not allow us to become ideologically-religious in the way that is being recommended. We come to the same conclusion each time, namely, that the recommendations of the Christian Coalition are Christian values and virtues, narrowly construed. Moreover, as soon as they are properly understood, Newt Gingrich's proposals will excite and inspire only a limited segment of the population. The nation needs a more representative basis on which to build its collective values. How this might be done effectively is the subject of a succeeding chapter. But first we must bring ourselves up to date on a companion theme in this study, namely, politics and the life of the spirit.

*Add Jim Wallis
a citation*