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Hoping for a Better Tomorrow,

Criticism of the Relationship Between the Neocons and the Christians.

Conspiracy theories are amazing for the informal ways they create forums for discussion about what minorities see as pressing issues. They are also remarkable in how they arise at particular moments in history or are triggered by specific events. In this paper, I wish to look at a relatively new strain of thinking that has mostly arisen in the post-9/11 world. This is the idea that the evangelical movement in America is being used by certain leaders to transform the democracy into a fascist state. A popular label for these evangelicals by the theorists involved in the debate is “Christian fascists.” In analyzing this idea, I will limit myself to looking for the causes of this thinking and the motives of its theorists. By avoiding tangents, such as other theories about the goals of American Christianity, I will be able to better examine the environment from which a particular community of discussion is born. This will also reduce the scope of the community for a better, more inclusive study. Beginning with the goal of understanding how this theory came to be and why, I now put forth that it is the result of both the increasing involvement in politics by evangelical Christian groups and the increasing public speculation about the intentions of the neoconservative movement. Through this study, more can be understood about a sentiment felt by an increasing number of Americans as well as the potential affects it could have on the future mainstream thought.

Although the theory has some variations concerning the motivations of American Christian groups and their role in the greater neoconservative movement, there are some basic convictions. The theorists are, “not suggesting that the state has become fascist. We remain a bourgeois democracy” (Leupp). Rather, a fascist state is the future they predict if there is not change. As for the fascists, some pronounce a belief that they are developing in a manner similar to how the Nazi party did in Germany before the rise of Hitler. Chris Hedge mentions what a professor once told him saying,

Adams saw in the Christian right...disturbing similarities with the German Christian Church and the Nazi Party...that he said would, in the event of prolonged social instability or a national crisis, see American fascists rise under the guise of religion to dismantle the open society (Hedges).

Although Hedges seems to criticize the Christians most of all, it is the neoconservatives who are running the show. These neocons are a new breed that are the result of, "...the dramatic shift of the red-state bourgeoisie from leave-us-alone libertarianism, manifested in the Congressional elections of 1994, to almost totalitarian statist nationalism" (Rockwell). They have formed a new theology that combines some Christian themes with strong support for the central government (Lang). The result is a support base of evangelicals for a nationalist movement.

Differences in this theory usually deal with the degree of subscribers beliefs and opinions about the main impetus behind the movement towards fascism. While Hedges talks mostly about the Christian church's role in the movement, others, such as Justin Raimondo, look more at the new right and its change in language and actions from those of the old right (Hedges, Raimondo). Many of the theorists are scholars and approach the issue as either libertarians or Christians. They are all drawn to this thinking as a response to the American political environment that has developed from increased Christian involvement in politics as well as new concerns about greater centralization of government and aggressive foreign and domestic policies dealing with the War on Terror. The idea that there is a growing fascist movement in America helps them to understand and voice concern about changes in the nation's behavior.

To set up the scene for understanding this issue, Christianity had not been a major political actor since prohibition before *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. It was that court ruling that lead to the formation of the Moral Majority by Jerry Falwell and a new trend of political action by evangelical groups. Since the 2000 election, the influence of these groups has become more noticeable in the mainstream with discussion about their influence in George W. Bush and other

politicians' elections. Still, the idea that American Christianity is playing a role in the creation of a fascist state did not begin to develop until after September 11, 2001 and the Iraq war. It was these terrorist attacks that allowed the administration to implement its hard line, and increasingly unpopular, security policies. In effect, the idea of Christian Fascism comes from an observation of the role Christian groups played in electing an administration that is seen by some as moving in an overly nationalistic direction.

With this general history in mind, critics of both the evangelical and the neoconservative movements have arisen from different perspectives. The overarching complaint of the libertarians is that the American right has moved away from advocating small government and liberty. According to Llewellyn H. Rockwell in *The Reality of Red-State Fascism*, they have caused a dramatic increase in the size of the central government and have adopted a strong anti-leftist sentiment. In response to this, he says that, "anti-leftists [should] work to educate themselves about economics, so that they can have a positive agenda to displace their purely negative one" (Rockwell). The feeling that the right's tactics are increasingly negative is a major part of the problem. Rockwell provides the example of an editorial that was printed in *Editor & Publisher* which, "suggested that the troops be brought home from Iraq 'sooner rather than later.'" (ibid) After its release, the journal received many hateful letters calling the author a traitor and other such terms.

Justin Raimondo, says in his piece *Today's Conservatives Are Fascists*, that "the evidence for the malevolent transformation of the American Right is all around us" (Raimondo). He goes on to name three trends that he sees. According to him, the neocons are now justifying the internment of Japanese-Americans in WWII and suggesting that the same be done today with Arab-Americans. The right is also making use of torture and "a ruthlessly aggressive foreign

policy of military expansionism” (ibid). Rockwell goes on to try to understand where the support for these changes is coming from. He says that,

Along with [hateful talk] goes a kind of worship of the presidency, and a celebration of all things public sector, including egregious law like the Patriot Act, egregious bureaucracies like the Department of Homeland Security, and egregious centrally imposed regimentation like the No Child Left Behind Act. It longs for the state to throw its weight behind institutions like the two-parent heterosexual family, the Christian charity, the homogeneous community of native-born patriots. (Rockwell)

The neoconservatives’ base acts in a semi-religious manner. It is not just that there are groups in America advocating policies he opposes, it is that they wish to impose them on the entire nation.

The Christians participating in this debate are concerned with the same aggressive behavior exhibited by the right, however, they tend to look more closely at the morality preached by the leaders of these neocon groups. Rev. William E. Alberts says that while the administration acts as if it is concerned with morals, neither it nor its supporters actually are. He says, “‘moral values’ did not propel President Bush to victory but hatred of other human beings- ‘the culturally unlike’ gay and lesbian persons especially who defy conventional values” (Alberts). In his paper he make an argument that it is not true religion that supports the increasingly authoritarian behavior of the government, but rather an ideology that wishes to dominate those who think differently. Another Christian, Rev. Rich Lang, talks about this same ideology in terms of an apocalyptic theology. This theology is not concerned with this life or this world, but only with preparing for the end. He claims that it is at the heart of Bush’s politics and the movement he leads (Lang). Chris Hedges is also speaking from a Christian perspective when he argues that the church, in its attempts to create a Christian nation, will produce a fascist state (Hedges).

Both the libertarians and the Christians in this discourse say that the Bush administration is acting in an increasingly totalitarian manner. They also agree that this is able to happen because of the fear that has been growing in the nation since 2001. Both positions fear a loss of liberty to an undemocratic regime. Many of the libertarians and Christians stress the ideals of the old right, while some .

The Christian Fascism theory community is composed of mostly educated people. Many of them are Ph.D.'s, such as Gary Leupp, Rev. William E. Alberts and Carolyn Baker. They all have a Christian background, and strongly disapprove of the administration's actions. This group also seems to be active for those producing the theories more than for the casual observer. This is based on the lack of good forums for discussion. Some people with more casual interest will comment on an essay, but there is little discussion. These commentators usually stick with bickering and phrases like, "Great article...Great essay." The theorists do engage with each other through citations in their pieces. Gary Leupp mentions and quotes a number of libertarian and Christian writers in *Everybody's Talkin' About Christian Fascism*. Still, most of the interaction comes from a few commentators making their plea to the masses.

These people say that they are motivated by the future they envision if things do not change. Still, there are other possible explanations. Ryan T. Anderson writes about Chris Hedges in his blog saying, "what really animates Hedges' anger at religious conservatives...is their recent political power and success on the state level at banning same-sex marriage" (Anderson). He then describes how Hedges started a gay-rights organization in college at his father's request. After this he states his belief that people accusing fundamentalist Christians of being fascists are making an attempt to prevent such believers from participating in political discussion. So are these people writing to avoid what they see as a disaster, or to prevent certain

groups that are gaining power from participating in the decision making process? The answer could be both. From Lew Rockwell's perspective, the rising power of fundamentalist Christianity appear to be the beginnings of a fascist movement, while at the same time the Christians feel persecuted from the perceived intolerance of Rockwell. Rockwell believes that they should not be allowed to precede because of the danger they present to our liberty, but the Christians believe that they are acting on that liberty by participating (Rockwell).

The texts by these thinkers are written about the recent past, the present and the near future. The earliest piece was *Christian Conservatives and Religious Freedom*, written in 2003 by William L. Anderson. This essay discussed how Anderson believed that the Christian effort to bring their politics to the federal level would result in the central government gaining more power and eventually, this would reduce religious freedom (W. Anderson). After this, and several new developments, more writing on the subject appeared, and it began to take a much harder stand on what was happening. The result would not be simply reduced freedom, but all out fascism. Looking at back at 2003, America had just entered Iraq, and speculation about the lead up to the war was beginning. By April of the next year, the images of prisoners in Abu Ghraib being tortured were released. In September, the American death count reached 1000 and Kofi Annan was publicly stating that the invasion was illegal by UN standards. When 2005 came, it was announced that no WMDs had been found and throughout the year criticism continued to build. Between that time and now, Saddam has been hanged and the war has continued, showing few signs that it will end soon. Simultaneously, congress proposed a ban on gay marriage, Terry Shiavo's life became a national issue and the debate about abortions resurged in another attempt to illegalize them. Not only was the religious right influential

enough to bring all these issues to the center stage, but on the state level, they encountered substantial success in passing their anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage laws.

Given all that has happened, some have decided that the connections between the neoconservatives and the religious right are causing dangerous events. After being elected with the help of a Christian base, the administration has also been responsible for an allegedly unjustified war that has included charges of torture, murder, rape and a number of other human rights abuses. During all of this, Bush not only preached Christian morality, but has also been able to maintain his support in the evangelical community. The libertarian theorists observe the growing power of the executive branch and how the Christian base has facilitated this process. Some Christians have seen this as a problem as well, but they focus more on the moral hypocrisy of the administration that the evangelicals have supported. In both cases, these writers fear that the Christian support for a powerful executive that has been accused of several human rights abuses all while supporting Christian attempts to ban what they saw as immoral, could eventually lead to a fascist movement.

During the course of my research, it has struck me that the only part of this particular theory that seems alien is the part concerning fascism. Aside from that, these articles resemble the many mainstream criticisms of the neocons, the religious right and their relationship. If these scholars had limited their pieces to commenting on the expansion of the federal government, the War of Terrorism, the increasing political action by Christian groups, or the administration's hypocrisy of preaching morality while doing immoral things, they would hardly have stood out. Rather, they would have fit in nicely with a CNN report on any of these issues. This theory distinguishes itself by making a prediction about the future of the nation using conspiratorial language. The participants decided that, unless there is change, the country is headed for a

fascist tomorrow. So what caused them to split from the mainstream and create this specialized community?

Given the scholarly involvement in this theory, it is possible that they feel they are well equipped to compare the modern situation with that of Germany during Hitler's rise. They are looking to the past to try and predict a possible future. This is a common function of history, so it would not seem unreasonable for this group to believe in its usefulness in understanding the current direction of the country. They see that evangelical Christians are openly supporting a larger, stronger federal state. These Christians expect the administration to work for them in return for their support. The fundamentalists generally support institutionalizing family and state values, which, when combined with a strong centralized state, forms a movement similar to those that lead to the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany before WWII.

Many in this group believe that there is, to some degree, a conspiracy by the leaders of either the neocons or the evangelicals to cause a regime change. This is interesting, since there is little or no evidence of such a plan. They may jump to such a conclusion out of fear that it could happen, or because they see patterns that indicate it as a likely future to them. Either way, it provides insight into the world of conspiracy thinking. These people fear that either their local government is losing control to the federal, or that their religion is being used to support ideas and actions that they do not. Reality is moving away from their conceptions of what should be, and they react by spreading their theory explaining what will happen if action is not taken.

When looking at this paper, I believe that some conspiracy theory scholars that we have looked at would find themes similar to those found in their own work. Robert Allen Goldberg looked at the implications of widespread conspiratorial beliefs similar in some ways to my subject in *Mainstreaming Conspiracism*. In it, Goldberg concludes that when these beliefs

become widespread, they can be very destructive. He says that, “lacking public confidence, core institutions become unstable and lose their ability to govern” (Goldberg 260). He would probably agree that lesser degrees of these beliefs are not so bad, such as anger over questionable human rights policies, but when it comes to the concerns about fascism, he would say that these beliefs become hazardous. Michael Kelly shares a similar position in *The Road to Paranoia* where he discusses his view that the only difference between mainstream theories and conspiracy theories is how extreme the views are (Kelly 63). I would say that extreme views are not so much a hazard as another type of check. They would not become a truly destabilizing force unless enough people agreed with the cause to affect the state’s institutions.

I also believe that Timothy Melley’s opinions would differ in some ways from mine. Given that a good portion of this community holds libertarian views, I believe he would clearly identify their beliefs as the result of agency panic where they feel they have lost control over their lives (Melley 62). Libertarians stress personal liberty above all else, so for them a sense that some freedom is being taken could translate into the formation of conspiratorial beliefs that some group is actively working to take it from them. This could be the case, but I believe their warning should be taken as seriously as it deserves to be taken. I believe that when approaching conspiracy theories, the following should be taken into account. Movements will have as much sway as their following allows. Both the legitimacy and number of subscribers should be examined. Many professors will hold more sway than many uneducated observers or many of the latter may hold more sway than the first. While this particular theory remains outside the mainstream, it does have a well educated community, potentially giving it enough influence to affect some popular thinking.

With this report, I am looking at a single theory in terms of the reason for its creation and its possible effects on mainstream thinking. This has lead me to wonder exactly how many sites, essays, and other sources contain this thinking. If I were able to create a more complete model of the community, I would be better prepared to attempt a measure of its influence. I also have recently discovered a couple of books on the subject, which I should read before continuing. After finishing this new research goal, I will be able to create a representation of the discussion and have a more complete understanding of its origins and potential effects.

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