

# Is there a 'Religious Right' Emerging in Britain?

Andy Walton

with

Andrea Hatcher and Nick Spencer

'This report should be read in its entirety by academics researching the role of religion in British life as well as journalists, commentators and members of civil society groups who engage with faith issues.'

*Ben Clements, Lecturer in Politics, Leicester University*

Theos 

**This report gives a reliable overview of evidence concerning the purported rise of the Christian Right in Britain. Drawing on new research, it profiles several new Christian groups. By placing them in context, it shows why rumours that an American-style movement is crossing the Atlantic are greatly exaggerated.**

*Linda Woodhead, Professor of Sociology of Religion, Lancaster University*

**This is a measured and thoughtful piece of research, contributing to a topic where there is too much heat and too little light in contemporary debate. It assesses the presence – or, rather, the current absence – of a coherent ‘Religious Right’ in British politics through a detailed comparison with the characteristics of the movement in the US.**

**It clearly identifies and explains those areas of substantive difference with the US Religious Right. It arrives at a persuasive conclusion, based on a close reading of both public opinion data and studies of Christian campaign organisations involved in mobilising and lobbying on policy debates.**

**This report should be read in its entirety by academics researching the role of religion in British life as well as journalists, commentators and members of civil society groups who engage with faith issues.**

*Ben Clements, Lecturer in Politics, Leicester University*

**The notion of a Religious Right in this country makes good copy. That is why the idea is appropriated – or more accurately misappropriated – by the media. This carefully researched report suggests a more apposite interpretation of the data. It is to be warmly welcomed.**

*Grace Davie, Professor of Sociology, University of Exeter*

# Theos Friends' Programme

Theos is a religion and society think tank which seeks to inform and influence public opinion about the role of faith and belief in society.

We were launched in November 2006 with the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor.

## We provide

- high-quality research, reports and publications;
- an events programme;
- news, information and analysis to media companies, parliamentarians and other opinion formers.

## We can only do this with your help!

Theos Friends receive complimentary copies of all Theos publications, invitations to selected events and monthly email bulletins.

Theos Associates receive all the benefits of Friends and in addition are invited to attend an exclusive annual dinner with the Theos Director and team.

If you would like to become a Friend or an Associate, please visit [www.theosthinktank.co.uk](http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk) or detach or photocopy the form below, and send it with a cheque to Theos for the relevant amount. Thank you.

Yes, I would like to help change public opinion!

I enclose a cheque payable to Theos for:  £60 (Friend)  £300 (Associate)

Please send me information on how to give by standing order/direct debit

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Tel \_\_\_\_\_

**Data Protection** Theos will use your personal data to inform you of its activities.

If you prefer not to receive this information please tick here.

*By completing you are consenting to receiving communications by telephone and email.  
Theos will not pass on your details to any third party.*

*Please return this form to:*

Theos | 77 Great Peter Street | London | SW1P 2EZ

S: 97711 D: 36701

Theos 



## Theos – clear thinking on religion and society

Theos is a think tank working in the area of religion, politics and society. We aim to inform debate around questions of faith and secularism and the related subjects of values and identity. We were launched in November 2006, and our first report '*Doing God: a Future for Faith in the Public Square*', written by Nick Spencer, examined the reasons why faith will play an increasingly significant role in public life.

### what Theos stands for

In our post-secular age, interest in spirituality is increasing across Western culture. We believe that it is impossible to understand the modern world without an understanding of religion. We also believe that much of the debate about the role and place of religion has been unnecessarily emotive and ill-informed. We reject the notion of any possible 'neutral' perspective on these issues.

### what Theos works on

Theos conducts research, publishes reports, and runs debates, seminars and lectures on the intersection of religion, politics and society in the contemporary world. We also provide regular comment for print and broadcast media. Recent areas of analysis include multiculturalism, Christian education, religious liberty and the future of religious representation in the House of Lords. Future areas of focus will include questions of values in economic policy and practice and the role of religion in international affairs.

### what Theos provides

In addition to our independently driven work, Theos provides research, analysis and advice to individuals and organisations across the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. Our unique position within the think tank sector means that we have the capacity to develop proposals that carry values – with an eye to demonstrating what really works.

### what Theos believes

Theos was launched with the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, but it is independent of any particular denomination. We are an ecumenical Christian organisation, committed to the belief that religion in general and Christianity in particular has much to offer for the common good of society as a whole. We are committed to the traditional creeds of the Christian faith and draw on social and political thought from a wide range of theological traditions. We also work with many non-Christian and non-religious individuals and organisations.

# Is there a 'Religious Right' Emerging in Britain?

Andy Walton

with

Andrea Hatcher and Nick Spencer

Published by Theos in 2013

© Theos

ISBN 978-0-9574743-0-7

Some rights reserved – see copyright licence for details

For further information and subscription details please contact:

Theos

Licence Department

77 Great Peter Street

London

SW1P 2EZ

T 020 7828 7777

E [hello@theosthinktank.co.uk](mailto:hello@theosthinktank.co.uk)

[www.theosthinktank.co.uk](http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk)

# contents

foreword	5
about the authors	6
acknowledgements	7
executive summary	8
introduction	11
chapter 1 – the US Religious Right	18
chapter 2 – the British picture: size and political characteristics	34
chapter 3 – the British picture: organisations, campaigns, finance	46
chapter 4 – conclusion	78

# foreword

'Religious Right' is one of those toxic terms that lurks in the corners of British public debate, often used to mean 'Very Bad Thing' rather than anything more precise.

Of late, the term has appeared with increasing frequency in the mainstream press and media, with commentators across the political spectrum speculating (and sometimes simply stating) that a 'US-Style Religious Right' is emerging in Britain.

This report tests these claims. By drawing on quantitative data pertaining to voting patterns, party membership, funding, and social attitudes, and a number of new one-to-one, in-depth interviews with prominent Christian organisations who have been accused of being members of a nascent British Religious Right, it assesses whether the accusations hold water. The Executive Summary offers the top-line answer to this, but I would urge people to read the report in its entirety to get a fully nuanced answer to this sensitive question.

This short report makes no pretence at being the last word on this topic. Indeed, a repeated refrain is that more research is needed. But if we need better research, we also need a more moderate tone.

As with all discussion about the role of religion in public life, using terms (whether 'Religious Right', or 'persecution') loosely does no-one any good. If one hope of the authors, therefore, is that this report will serve as a spur to further research into this area, a second is that the surrounding debate will be conducted with greater accuracy – and graciousness – than has been the case to date.

Theos believes strongly that religious people can, should be, and usually are a positive influence in our public life. For this to continue faith communities need to engage in an on-going process of informed criticism and self-reflection, and other actors, particularly highly visible commentators, need to ensure that their critiques are accurate and justified. We hope that this report will help us all in this task, contributing to a more civil and intelligent public conversation on these issues.

Elizabeth Oldfield  
Director, Theos

## about the authors

**Andy Walton** is a writer and broadcaster. A graduate in History and Politics from Lancaster University, he also holds a Masters in Journalism. He works for the Contextual Theology Centre in east London, is involved in Community Organising and is an active member of St Peter's, Bethnal Green.

**Andrea Hatcher** earned her Ph.D. in political science from Vanderbilt University. She is Associate Professor at Sewanee: The University of the South, a university owned and governed by the south eastern dioceses of the Episcopal Church. In addition to studying the political behaviours of evangelicals in the United States and in the United Kingdom, she has published research on party leadership in the American Congress.

**Nick Spencer** is Research Director at Theos and the author of a number of books, most recently *Freedom and Order: History, Politics and the English Bible* (Hodder, 2011).



# acknowledgements

I am grateful to all those who were interviewed as part of this project. They were generous with their time and candid in their reflections. Their engagement on this potentially sensitive topic was appreciated.

Advice and encouragement came from many sources but I'm especially indebted to Canon Dr Angus Ritchie and my colleagues at CTC, as well as to Revd Adam Atkinson, Paul Bickley, Emma Bailey, Dr Andy Flannagan, Ruth Dickinson, David Parish, Jennie Pollock, Dr Jenny Taylor, and Elizabeth Oldfield. My parents and grandparents were, as ever, a great support.

The contributions of Nick Spencer and Professor Andrea Hatcher to the project were significant, but any errors remain my responsibility.

I hope this report will provide a useful contribution to the debate over the political interventions of certain Christian groups in Britain, but it is far from the last word on the matter. A greater degree of honesty and clarity in that debate on all sides would be a welcome result of this project.

Andy Walton

# executive summary

- Recent years have seen an increasing number of claims that a US-style Religious Right either exists or is rapidly emerging in Britain.
- On the surface, these claims appear to be justified. There is evidence of greater co-ordination among Christian groups with a strong socially-conservative commitment, in particular relating to human sexuality, marriage, family life, and religious freedom, about which they are vocal and often willing to resort to legal action. This is a familiar picture within US politics.
- Closer research and analysis suggests, however, that it is misleading to describe this phenomenon as a US-style Religious Right. This is for a number of reasons:
  - ♦ The *economic* view of those committed British believers (i.e. who call themselves religious and frequently attend a religious service) who are often deemed part of an emerging Religious Right is disproportionately left-of-centre. To take just two examples: 67% believe that it is “the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes”, while 64% believe that “government should provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed”. Such an economic view is fundamentally at odds with the default position of the US Religious Right. In the words of one leading evangelical interviewed for this report: “If you were to take most [British] evangelicals, and transport them across the Pond, I think the vast majority of us would be viewed as ‘left-wing’ in our political allegiance.”
  - ♦ The range of socio-political interests of those Christian groups accused of being a Religious Right is subtly different from those in the US. While there is considerable overlap concerning issues of abortion, sexual ethics, family structure, and religious freedom, many prominent British groups also focus on issues such as gambling, prostitution, people trafficking and addiction. Conversely, interest in Israel, evolution, military intervention in foreign affairs, and (as noted) opposition to big government remain largely absent.

- ♦ There is no sign of the kind of tight-knit, symbiotic relationship between a right-of-centre political party and a unified Christian constituency emerging in the Britain as it did in the last quarter of a century in the US. This is important as the phrase 'US-style Religious Right' does not just denote the existence of people with socially-conservative, anti-government political views that are driven by a religious commitment (a phenomenon that can be seen in every political society on earth) but the partnership of those views with a particular political party and agenda. This is what transformed US politics two generations ago, and has characterised it since. There are few signs of it happening in Britain.
- ♦ The British Christian (indeed, religious) constituency is very considerably smaller (and more diverse) than the US one. Moreover, it is also less self-consciously religious. When asked by the Pew Forum in 2008 which factor influenced their political decision-making the most, 27% of weekly worshippers in the US cited their faith. The 2008 British Social Attitudes survey revealed that only 9% of British people with a religious affiliation said religion was 'very important' in making decisions on political issues. Britain not only has a much smaller religious constituency than the US, but within it, a smaller proportion of believers see faith as a direct influence on their political behaviour.
- ♦ Finally, those British groups that come closest to stereotypical US Religious Right characteristics (narrow range of interests, links to US, theologically unsophisticated, defensive attitude, aggressive rhetoric) are also further from political power. The reverse is also true.
- None of these factors may be taken to prove that a US-style Religious Right could never develop in Britain. Rather, they suggest that it has not and currently shows few signs of doing so.
- The report examines briefly why Britain has not followed the US path. It suggests five factors that have been particularly significant:
  - ♦ the comparatively small number of Christians in Britain (and the relative unimportance of religion in political decision-making even among committed British believers);
  - ♦ the existence of an established church in England and Scotland, which has helped prevent popular church leaders 'carrying' their congregations with them, as happened in the US;

- ♦ the generally a-(party) political position of leading British evangelicals, in particular the late John Stott;
  - ♦ the size of the religious broadcasting market and the comparative position and religious output of the BBC;
  - ♦ the historically left-of-centre economic commitment of British Catholics.
- Although these trends can change, and in some cases are changing, making it impossible (and ill-advised) to state that a British Religious Right could never emerge, current evidence and trends suggest that it is not likely to in the immediate future.
  - The report concludes by arguing that accusations of an emerging British Religious Right have been unwarranted given the available evidence. It counsels those who have made such accusations to pay closer attention to the evidence, if they seek to prevent the kind of culture war they claim to wish to avoid; while at the same time counselling those Christians inclined towards a narrowly socially-conservative agenda and defensive narrative of 'persecution' to expand both their theological focus and their perspective on what persecution entails.

# introduction

A prime time *Channel 4* documentary in May 2008 made a stark and confident claim:

Tonight, *Dispatches* explores how fundamentalist Christians are trying to transform society... Drawing inspiration from the Religious Right in America, Britain's hard-line Christians are mounting fierce campaigns around a range of issues... Christian fundamentalists could just be beginning to exercise their power.<sup>1</sup>

This was the most high-profile and sustained examination of an alleged British Religious Right to date.<sup>2</sup> The hour-long documentary focused on the activities of Andrea Minichiello Williams (then part of the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship, now of Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre), and Stephen Green of Christian Voice. In an accompanying article in *The Independent*, film-maker David Modell talked about the "implementation of radical Christian views."<sup>3</sup> Writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, he argued that Christian groups had "borrowed the tactics of America's religious Right in...attempts to affect policy."<sup>4</sup>

Modell's language may seem alarmist and his conclusions unequivocal, but he is far from being the only reporter to claim that Britain is seeing the emergence of a US-style Religious Right. Other articles in *The Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* reported the same phenomenon, with one front page story bemoaning the influence of Christian organisation CARE.<sup>5</sup>

*The Guardian* has also used the term to describe activities of which it is suspicious. A 2011 article on abortion, for example, presented the Religious Right as a *fait accompli*:

Lisa Hallgarten, director of the pro-choice charity, Education for Choice, warned that resurgent pressure from the religious right risked changing the environment in which the debate around abortion was taking place.<sup>6</sup>

One of the more pugnacious contributions on this issue in *The Guardian* came from the Rt Revd Dr Alan Wilson, Anglican Bishop of Buckingham. In responding to an article written by the leader of the Christian Peoples Alliance, Alan Craig, Dr Wilson began, "As

attractive as some on the religious right seem to find it to spice up their bigotry with alarm and a sense of national destiny...<sup>7</sup> It is not only journalists who are certain there is a Religious Right in Britain but also high-ranking Church of England clerics.

*The Guardian's* sister paper, *The Observer*, conflated the activities of a group of Christian organisations to argue that Britain is seeing the emergence of a Religious Right:

As politicians chase the religious vote and, conversely, religious groups look to muscle their way into the political arena, the temptation is to draw comparisons with the United States, where the two worlds are seemingly inseparable.<sup>8</sup>

More evidence comes from the *New Statesman*. A 2007 article described the “threat presented by the religious right.”<sup>9</sup> Another piece outlined the writer’s perception “that the Christian movements both here and in the USA clearly feel most at home on the right,” while going on to assert that

the agendas of the Christian church and the political right-wing make comfortable bed-fellows. You know the kind of thing: anti-abortion, anti-unions, opposed to same-sex marriage and tough on crime.<sup>10</sup>

A longer *New Statesman* article published just prior to the 2010 General Election reported that “Christian fundamentalists form a noisy wing of the Conservative Party, and their influence is growing fast.”<sup>11</sup> This piece claimed that “strong links have emerged between the Religious Right and some Tories, with support from the media. Some groups in Britain have received funding from US groups.”<sup>12</sup>

The presumption of the existence of a British Religious Right comes not only from the liberal and left-leaning press. The *New Statesman's* insistence on the growing ‘threat’ may not be matched by *The Spectator*, but it too has carried several pieces that present the Religious Right as a brute fact. An article on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill<sup>13</sup> and another about church schools<sup>14</sup> both spoke of a British Religious Right as if it was a cohesive movement, of which readers would be aware.

A 2009 article in *The Times* claimed a British Religious Right existed and went on to say there was a direct link between it and its US counterpart. “There is some evidence that some of the campaign methods of the Religious Right in America are already being used in Britain.”<sup>15</sup>

*The Daily Telegraph* has also carried stories suggesting the existence of a Religious Right. Two articles, about the Conservative Party on abortion<sup>16</sup> and the Party leadership<sup>17</sup>, presented it as a reality. Both suggested that the right wing of the Conservative Party constitutes a *de facto* Religious Right.

One other intervention, from the Evangelical Alliance rather than a secular media source, is noteworthy. The Alliance's magazine *Idea* asked the question, "How right is the Religious Right?"<sup>18</sup> The article was quick to point out that Christian leaders couldn't envisage a situation that mirrors the USA. However, it did acknowledge the fear of journalists and commentators over "a fundamentalist 'evangelical' movement gaining a strong foothold in British politics."<sup>19</sup>

The years since the Second World War have seen the ever-increasing influence of the USA on Britain. It's often said Britain has an increasingly 'presidential' system. We now see US-style 'primary' elections for selection to stand in some parliamentary constituencies, and 2010 witnessed the introduction of that quintessential American electoral product, the televised debate. So, the argument goes, the Religious Right is yet another (and maybe the most malign) import from the American political system into the British body politic.

*A 2012 Demos report entitled Faithful Citizens argued that 'religious citizens in Britain are... more likely to hold progressive political values.'*

It is possible to take this argument at face value and worry that Britain has already slipped into a 'culture war,' precipitated by the emergence of a coherent and well managed Religious Right. If this were true, it would be cause for alarm. But is it true? There has been surprisingly little hard research into the alleged size, influence and strategy of a purported Religious Right in Britain. Rather, its existence has often been presented as a simple fact, its similarity to the US Religious Right assumed.

By contrast, there has been research examining the link between British Christianity and progressive politics. A 2012 Demos report entitled *Faithful Citizens* argued that "religious citizens in Britain are...more likely to hold progressive political values." Drawing on data from Britain Citizenship Survey and the European Values Survey, the report claimed that "those who belonged to a religious organisation in Britain were more likely to place themselves on the left side of the political spectrum; more likely to value equality over freedom; [and] less likely to have a negative association towards living next door to immigrants."<sup>20</sup> However much weight one places on the Demos study, these results do not sound like an emerging Religious Right.

The key question is not, of course, whether there are Christians or indeed religious people on the right of the political spectrum. Everyone recognises there are, just as there are Christians on the left and atheists on both sides. What is also not open to question is whether there are organising bodies through which the right-wing religious campaign. Again, everyone recognises that there are, just as there are organisations for left-wing Christians (the Christian Socialist Movement), left wing atheists (Labour Humanists) and liberal atheists (Humanist and Secular Liberal Democrats).

Nor, even, is it a problem that such bodies campaign and lobby. CARE, for example, lobbies on marriage and family life, in the same way as it does on prostitution and human trafficking. Similarly, the British Humanist Association lobbies on assisted dying, equality legislation and faith schools. Organised political activity is not a sinister activity conducted only by a handful of shadowy organisations: it is the bread and butter of a democratic society.

Nor, finally, is the problem whether such organisations have access to parliament or are affiliated to bodies within parliament. A number of MPs and peers belong to the Conservative Christian Fellowship, just as others to belong to the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. The British Humanist Association boasts of having “monthly meetings with the senior civil servant responsible for CLG’s [Department of Communities and Local Government] work on religion or belief”, and of having MPs table Early Day Motions in support of humanist policies “ranging from collective worship in schools to humanist marriages.”<sup>21</sup>

None of this is controversial or suspect. A free democratic society not only permits citizens to vote, organise, campaign, lobby, and stand for what they believe is right. It *needs* them to do so.

What *is* in question is the specific issue, raised by so many media commentators (alongside, of course, organisations like the National Secular Society) that there is a US-style Religious Right either existing or emerging in Britain. It is this claim that this report examines. What precisely comprises a US-style Religious Right is discussed in chapter 1, which outlines its history, reach and defining characteristics. This is more than simply an academic exercise, for to know whether a Religious Right is indeed emerging in Britain, we need to be clear on what constitutes the alleged template.

Chapter 2 then turns to Britain. It offers a brief overview of the Christian-political nexus in Britain before examining the reach and contours of the alleged British Religious Right by drawing on voting and opinion data gathered through the annual British Social Attitudes survey and the British Election Study.

*To know whether a Religious Right is indeed emerging in Britain, we need to be clear on what constitutes the alleged template.*

Chapter 3 goes on to look at some of the organisations that have been judged part of a nascent British Religious Right. Drawing on interviews with key leaders, it assesses the extent to which such organisations, either separately or together, fulfil the criteria of being a/the Religious Right.



A short conclusion sums up the findings and offers some reflection on how these may play a role in the ongoing debate around these issues. For the most part, the report does not pass judgment on the issues and organisations discussed. This is not because the authors don't have views on the subject, but because it is primarily an exercise in research and analysis, in which, in as far as possible, the data and interviewees should be allowed to speak for themselves.

If British politics is being shaped by this characteristically American phenomenon, as it has been by others, it is imperative to understand when, how and to what ends. It is hoped that this report will answer some of those questions.

## references

- 1 *Dispatches – In God’s Name*, Broadcast on Channel 4, 19 May 2008.
- 2 We will capitalise the words ‘Religious Right’ throughout. This is because we consider it to be a coherent movement in the USA. We are attempting to ascertain if a similar movement exists in Britain, and therefore will keep to this usage.
- 3 David Modell, ‘Dispatches: Making a giant leap of faith’, *The Independent*, 19 May 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/dispatches-making-a-giant-leap-of-faith-830550.html> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 4 David Modell, ‘Christian fundamentalists fighting spiritual battle in Parliament’, *Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/1975933/Christian-fundamentalists-fighting-spiritual-battle-in-Parliament.html> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 5 Jane Merrick and Brian Brady, ‘Exclusive: right-wing group pays for Commons researchers’, *The Independent on Sunday*, 30 March 2008, <http://web.archive.org/web/20091124091518/http://www.independent.co.uk/news/British/politics/exclusive-rightwing-christian-group-pays-for-commons-researchers-802607.html> Accessed 10 June 2008.
- 6 Ben Quinn, ‘Pro-choice activists rally for abortion providers to keep counselling role’, *The Guardian*, 9 July 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/09/pro-choice-protesters-abortion-rights-rally?INTCMP=SRCH> (The use of the word ‘resurgent’ implied a previous incarnation of the Religious Right in Britain, but it is not made clear what or when this may have been.) Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 7 Alan Wilson, ‘Hitler and the ‘Gaystapo’ have no place in gay rights debate’, *The Guardian* website, 9 November 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/nov/09/gaystapo-alan-craig-gay-rights> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 8 Jamie Doward and Gaby Hinsliff, ‘Who would Jesus vote for? (Christians are on a mission to tell us.)’ *The Observer*, 20 March 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/mar/20/religion.world?INTCMP=SRCH> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 9 Claire Anderson, ‘Your conscience or my rights?’, *New Statesman* website, 17 January 2007, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/campus-radicals/2007/01/religious-gay-rights-equality> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 10 Andrew Z Williams, ‘Faith should not dictate political affiliation’, *New Statesman* website, 16 June 2011, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/06/god-debate-faith-graying> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 11 Sunny Hundal, ‘The right hand of God’, *New Statesman*, 24 April 2010, <http://www.newstatesman.com/British-politics/2010/04/conservative-christian> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Rod Liddle, ‘What Harman calls ‘a distraction’, the rest of us call debate’, *The Spectator*, 22 June 2008, [http://images.spectator.co.uk/essays/all/2538451/part\\_3/what-harman-calls-a-distraction-the-rest-of-us-call-debate.shtml](http://images.spectator.co.uk/essays/all/2538451/part_3/what-harman-calls-a-distraction-the-rest-of-us-call-debate.shtml) Accessed 16 August 2012.

- 14 Leading article, 'Sex, lies and education', *The Spectator*, 27 February 2010, <http://images.spectator.co.uk/politics/all/5797563/sex-lies-and-education.shtml> Accessed 16 August 2012.
- 15 Tom Baldwin, 'Religious right encroaches on Tory party despite Cameron's stance', *The Times*, 21 November 2009, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article2100835.ece> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 16 Melissa Kite, 'Fox courts religious Right with plea to limit abortion to 12 weeks', *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/3323922/Fox-courts-religious-Right-with-plea-to-limit-abortion-to-12-weeks.html> Accessed 12 June 2012
- 17 Melissa Kite and Patrick Hennessy, 'Davis defies religious Right and vows to fight on popular platform', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2 October 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/1499719/Davis-defies-religious-Right-and-vows-to-fight-on-popular-platform.html> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 18 *Idea Magazine*, November 2007, pp. 26-27.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Jonathan Birdwell and Mark Littler, *Faithful Citizens* (London: Demos, 2012), p.18.
- 21 See BHA Annual Reports for 2009 and 2010 for further details.

# the US Religious Right

## history

In the 1976 Presidential election, 49% of evangelicals voted for Democrat Jimmy Carter.<sup>1</sup> By 2004, Republican incumbent George W. Bush received the support of 78% of white evangelicals.<sup>2</sup> With the number of Americans self-identifying as evangelical increasing in the same time period from 34%<sup>3</sup> to 42%,<sup>4</sup> this was a significant shift. Evangelicalism had become heavily associated with the Republican Party.

A thorough history of the Religious Right would go back to the Puritans of New England, through the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and into the twentieth century via the Civil War and abolitionism. Evangelicals joined calls for workers' rights and fairness amid industrial advancement. These campaigns, popular among mainline and evangelical Protestants, provoked a backlash from those who feared a shift from spiritual to temporal needs.

At the same time, waves of Catholic and Jewish immigration meant the dominance of Protestant belief was challenged, while modernist theology was becoming popular. In response, so-called 'fundamentalists' began to speak up and organise in nonconformist Protestant churches. Not only did they advocate theological orthodoxies, they also scorned political ideologies such as socialism and scientific theories such as evolution.<sup>5</sup>

The Scopes Trial of 1925 saw fundamentalists pitted against modernists in a courtroom.<sup>6</sup> John Thomas Scopes was accused of breaching Tennessee's Butler Act, which forbade the teaching of evolution. Despite being found guilty, his conviction was overturned on a technicality. More profoundly for fundamentalists, their cause had been ridiculed in court and by large sections of the media. They withdrew from public life and only fully re-engaged fifty years later after a series of events, leaders and movements coalesced into the Religious Right.<sup>7</sup>

The 1960s saw liberalisation across the West. In Britain, abortion and gay sex became legal by Acts of Parliament. In the US, advances in Civil Rights had already unsettled conservatives. Primarily confined to the South, evangelicals became more politically

conservative and found common ground with fundamentalists. The progressive agenda taking hold in American society was the trigger, with three catalysts at federal level of particular importance.

First, on 22 January 1973 the Supreme Court found in favour of 'Jane Roe' and effectively legalised abortion. It was a decision which remains a shibboleth in US politics. Catholics had long opposed it but Revd Prof Randall Balmer argues *Roe* wasn't in itself a cause of grass-roots outrage among evangelicals. Instead, it was settled upon by leaders of the nascent movement during a conference call. He quotes an interview with Paul Weyrich, one of the founders of the Religious Right. Balmer says:

Someone suggested they had the makings of a broader political movement... and asked what other issues they might address...a voice on the end of one of the lines said, 'How about abortion?' And that is how abortion was cobbled into the agenda of the Religious Right.<sup>8</sup>

Second, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was passed by Congress in March 1972. Seemingly benign – "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex"<sup>9</sup> – it provoked an opposing campaign.<sup>10</sup>

Sociologist Prof Ruth Murray Brown argues that the dispute over the ERA was the backdrop against which the Religious Right was formed.

Even before the proposed amendment was defeated, the women [who organised in opposition to it] had taken on other moral issues and had become the nucleus of the 'pro-family movement', the first phase of the Christian (or Religious) Right.<sup>11</sup>

Third, there was the fight to retain tax-exempt status for segregated religious schools and colleges. Many of these private schools had been founded to avoid the mandated desegregation of public schools, and further federal intervention angered the churches that operated them. This may sound arcane, but several respected commentators and some inside the movement itself have identified this fight as the one which galvanised the proto-Religious Right, in particular when, in 1975, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) formally revoked the tax-exempt status of Bob Jones University, a fundamentalist institution in South Carolina. Having been helped to election by his fellow evangelicals, Jimmy Carter disappointed them with his moderate stance on abortion, his support for the ERA, and the intervention against the Christian schools.<sup>12</sup>

The 1960s and 1970s also saw the increasing popularity of televangelism, with two preachers in particular using this platform as a springboard for political activism.

One of these, Baptist Pastor Jerry Falwell, founded the Moral Majority in June 1979, together with Paul Weyrich, a conservative Catholic. The Moral Majority wasn't a mass movement, but as his newsletters and telecasts reached millions, Falwell now had access to candidates eager to tap into the religious market. He was the first evangelical leader to make waves in Republican politics.

Success was a double-edged sword, however. With Reagan in power, the Moral Majority found it difficult to sustain support; the 'threat' had subsided. It was "morning in America again" as Reagan's re-election campaign victoriously proclaimed and the Moral Majority folded, although the movement lived on in smaller, local organisations.

*Success was a double-edged sword. With Reagan in power, the Moral Majority found it difficult to sustain support; the 'threat' had subsided.*

Pat Robertson, the other televangelist, had founded a successful broadcasting ministry and in 1986, he decided to run for President, challenging sitting Vice President George H.W. Bush for the Republican nomination. It was the first time a figure from *inside* the movement had competed for the highest office.

The Religious Right didn't fall into line, however. Falwell and other leaders sided with alternative candidates and Bush secured the nomination, going on to become President.

Robertson then launched himself into lobbying by founding what would become the most successful interest group of the Religious Right, the Christian Coalition. By 1992, it had 150,000 members in 210 local chapters.<sup>13</sup> The Coalition began producing 'voter guides' for elections to get conservative Republicans elected to local offices, the partnership being sealed in 1992 when the Coalition endorsed Bush for President.

When Bush campaigned *against* Robertson in 1988, his message was mainly economic (his signature line was "read my lips: no new taxes"). Over the following four years, however, his agenda became more explicitly pro-family as he catered to the Christian Coalition's demands – famously proclaiming during the 1992 campaign that he wanted American families to become 'a lot more like the Waltons and a lot less like the Simpsons.'<sup>14</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Christian Coalition, Bush lost and Bill Clinton took the White House. But this was merely a prelude to one of the Religious Right's defining moments – the 1994 midterm elections. The Democrats had controlled the House of Representatives since 1955 but were swept away by a landslide led by Newt Gingrich and his Contract with America. *The Los Angeles Times* described the election as the "Christian right's

coming out party.”<sup>15</sup> The scene was set for the Religious Right to unseat Bill Clinton and win back the White House. GOP candidate Bob Dole failed to impress, however, and in their decision to withhold enthusiastic support, leaders of the Religious Right demonstrated its power.

By the late 1990s, the Christian Coalition was waning, but even as it struggled, Focus on the Family was thriving. Founded by Dr James Dobson in the 1970s, Focus is a non-profit organisation devoted to promoting ‘family values’. At its height Dobson’s daily radio show had 10 million listeners and he was described as ‘the most influential evangelical leader in America.’<sup>16</sup>

The 2000 election was one of the most controversial in history, with George W. Bush losing the popular vote but securing the Electoral College to win the White House.<sup>17</sup> Bush gained the support of a majority of white evangelicals, mainline Protestants and Catholics.<sup>18</sup> Still, the margin of ‘victory’ was tiny, so his re-election strategy centred on the Religious Right, whose leaders sensed their leverage.

The man known as ‘Bush’s brain’, Karl Rove, was summoned to meet James Dobson, who demanded action against gay marriage in return for support in 2004. He rallied his supporters behind a Federal Marriage Amendment which defined marriage as between a man and a woman and prevented states from permitting same-sex marriage. Dobson spoke about it in extraordinary terms, “This effort to save the family is our D-Day, or Gettysburg, or Stalingrad.”<sup>19</sup> The issue gave renewed purpose to the Religious Right.

Although the FMA failed in Congress, Bush still secured an official endorsement from James Dobson and received four out of every five evangelical, and over half of Catholic, votes in 2004.<sup>20</sup>

Republicans now had control of Congress and the White House. Expectations were high. The remainder of the Bush years passed without the legislative success the Religious Right craved, however. Scandal engulfed leading evangelical figures like Ted Haggard,<sup>21</sup> while staunch supporters of the movement such as Rick Santorum, lost their seats in Congress. In 2006, Republicans lost control of the House. Jerry Falwell died in 2007 and Pat Robertson became an increasingly marginal figure with his erratic statements stirring not power, but ridicule.<sup>22</sup> James Dobson’s role at Focus on the Family was diminishing (he eventually severed ties in 2010). The Religious Right was in its worst shape for many years.

In a move reminiscent of 1996, the 2008 election saw the Republicans nominate a candidate who failed to excite the Christian base. John McCain was an economic conservative, but his commitment to the causes which motivated the Religious Right

was questionable. Many eventually rallied to McCain's cause after he selected Sarah Palin as his running mate. James Dobson even predicted an apocalyptic near-future if Democrat Barack Obama was elected.<sup>23</sup> The choice of a conservative evangelical running mate won McCain the support of 73% of evangelicals but it wasn't enough to win the White House.<sup>24</sup>

Speculation mounted that the Religious Right had seen the peak of its powers. Obama adviser Revd Jim Wallis told *Time Magazine* in 2007, "The monologue of the Religious Right is over, and a new dialogue has now begun."<sup>25</sup> Others are more sceptical. The Religious Right has certainly lost its generation of charismatic founders. Some of the biggest names in evangelicalism today such as Joel Osteen and Rick Warren have not shown themselves amenable to partisan alliances.<sup>26</sup> Yet the movement is far from moribund, as Rick Santorum's campaign for the Republican nomination in the 2012 election showed.

## characteristics

When we speak of the Religious Right we are not referring simply to Christians who happen to be conservative in their politics. The US Religious Right is a coherent movement with identifiable leaders, objectives and influence. Comprising religious and Republican leaders and groups, the Religious Right mobilises adherents to action on issues that relate to their fundamental values. This set of issues has come to make up the battleground on which the so-called 'culture war' is fought.<sup>27</sup>

*Obama adviser Revd Jim Wallis told Time Magazine in 2007, 'The monologue of the Religious Right is over, and a new dialogue has now begun.'*

Although the Religious Right is made up of a variety of religious conservatives, the movement undoubtedly finds its base among those who identify as Evangelical Protestants.<sup>28</sup> Concentrating on this group alone, one can evidence something of the reach of the Religious Right.

Evangelicals comprise more than 26% of the American population, outranking Catholics and Mainline Protestants as the country's largest religious tradition.<sup>29</sup> Evangelical Protestants are overwhelmingly confined to the South and are mostly white (81%).<sup>30</sup> They are found mostly in the working and middle classes, with 56% having only a high school education or less, and roughly the same proportion making less than \$50,000 per year.<sup>31</sup> The 'Right' of the Religious Right comes from the fact that 52% of evangelicals describe themselves as 'conservative' while only 11% consider themselves 'liberal'.<sup>32</sup> A similar figure (50%) identifies as Republican, compared to 34% Democratic.<sup>33</sup>



Among this cohort, the issues of the 'Culture War' reign and evangelicals hold dramatically different views from other religious groups and the nation at large.

Ruth Murray Brown has identified six areas around which the Religious Right was founded and organised in the 1970s. They were: opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment; Right to Life campaigns; anti-homosexual rights; concern about public schools; outrage about the immorality of TV; and racial segregation in schools.<sup>34</sup> The concerns of the Religious Right have now developed to encompass the following:

## pro-life

Although the Religious Right's favoured Presidents haven't delivered the promised ban on abortion, the effectiveness of the issue as a campaign tool has become abundantly clear. In a recent Pew Forum survey, 45% of Americans said abortion should be made illegal in *all* or *almost all* circumstances. Of that group, more than half said they came to this conclusion for religious reasons.<sup>35</sup> 61% of evangelical Protestants, think abortion should be made illegal in all or most cases.<sup>36</sup> That figure is also a significant distance from the 45% of Catholics, the religious tradition thought most likely to have restrictive views on abortion.<sup>37</sup>

The influence of the Religious Right can also be seen in the language of the Republican platform. In 1976, it said "There are those in our Party who favour complete support for the Supreme Court decision which permits abortion on demand." However, by 1992 it said "We believe the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed."<sup>38</sup> This shows just how effective the Religious Right has been in framing the debate in stark terms to prohibit a compromise position.

## anti-homosexual rights

The importance of opposition to gay marriage to the Religious Right was shown through the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment. Dependent on the support of evangelicals for his re-election, George W. Bush came out in support. Daniel K. Williams says that although the amendment wasn't passed, the muscle of the Religious Right was clearly shown. 'The Republican Party's willingness to acquiesce to the Christian-right on the FMA demonstrated the power that the movement and James Dobson in particular exercised over the GOP.'<sup>39</sup>

Two-thirds (64%) of evangelicals, compared to 40% of the national population, think homosexuality 'should be discouraged by society.'<sup>40</sup> When the question turns to same-sex marriage, 74% of evangelical Protestants oppose allowing gays and lesbians to

marry. That figure is double the opposition of mainline Protestants or Catholics.<sup>41</sup> Even as national trends have moved towards acceptance of gay marriage, and even as support has increased among the main religious traditions, evangelical Protestants have been the outlier: 13% of Evangelicals supported same-sex marriage in 2001, and 14% support the policy now.<sup>42</sup>

## pro-Israel

Implacable support for the state of Israel has become an increasingly important element of the Religious Right's agenda. Founded in 2006, Christians United for Israel is now the largest pro-Israel organisation in America. More than a million evangelicals support the group.<sup>43</sup> Founder Pastor John Hagee has been a vocal Religious Right leader for many years and continues to push Christian Zionism up the agenda of the Religious Right.

On this issue, evangelicals have made an alliance with Jews in support of Israel. 55% of evangelicals 'sympathize more with' the state of Israel in Israeli-Palestinian conflicts – a level second only to the Jews among principal religious groups.<sup>44</sup> The corollary is that sympathy with Palestinians lies at 6%, far lower than any other Christian tradition.<sup>45</sup> Religion is the primary influence of individual attitudes. Nearly half (46%) of evangelicals claim their religious beliefs are the single biggest determinant in forming their opinions on Israel, while 63% of evangelicals assert the modern state of Israel fulfils biblical prophecy about Jesus' second coming.<sup>46</sup> These sentiments translate into 52% of evangelicals (compared to 35% of the national population) suggesting the U.S. should support Israel over the Palestinians as a matter of policy.<sup>47</sup>

## pro-military intervention

Support for the foreign policy interventions of the Reagan and both Bush presidencies has also been an important plank of the Religious Right. A prime example came prior to the Invasion of Iraq in 2003. On the eve of war, five key Religious Right leaders wrote an open letter to George W. Bush advising him that war was permissible and that they were, 'writing to express our deep appreciation for your bold, courageous, and visionary leadership.'<sup>48</sup>

## religious freedom

Religious freedom has become an important battleground for the Religious Right (as well as for liberal groups, like the American Civil Liberties Union). Prayer in schools is now just one among many issues fought over by the two sides. Biblical displays in public

buildings<sup>49</sup> and state-mandated provision of contraception by Religious employers<sup>50</sup> are examples of recent flashpoints.

## anti-evolution

Opposition to the teaching of evolution had remained a concern of fundamentalists and many evangelicals since the Scopes Trial. While literal six-day creationism retained many supporters, Intelligent Design (ID) has become popular with the Religious Right.<sup>51</sup> A Pew Forum survey in 2009 found '64% of Americans support teaching creationism alongside evolution in the classroom.'<sup>52</sup> In 2004, the Dover School District in Pennsylvania insisted that ID be taught in science lessons, so a group of parents took legal action. The judge decided ID was not a valid scientific theory, fuelling Religious Right action on the issue. In the words of Chris Mooney, 'the religious right's 'science' represents just the most recent manifestation of the gradual conservative Christian political awakening.'<sup>53</sup>

Whereas 48% of the American population is content to accept evolution as the 'best explanation for the origins of human life on this earth,' only 24% of evangelicals do so.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, 60% of evangelicals favour teaching creationism instead of evolution in public schools.<sup>55</sup>

## anti-big government

Antipathy to 'big government' is not exclusive to the Religious Right. However, it is important to note that Christian leaders have been some of the staunchest critics of state intervention in macro-economic policy. For example, President Obama's healthcare plans have been repeatedly attacked by the Religious Right. James Dobson typified the kind of language used when he wrote an article on 'Obamacare', "Come and get me if you must, Mr. President. I will not bow before your wicked regulation."<sup>56</sup>

Interestingly, while 50% of evangelicals say the "government should do more to protect morality," and support governmental restrictions on individual behaviour – like prohibiting abortion – many evangelicals (48%) also advocate a "smaller government providing fewer services."<sup>57</sup> Apparently governmental regulation of behaviour does not extend to governmental provision of welfare. This advocacy for a more limited role for government has joined the Religious Right with the Tea Party, making for a strong coalition of social and economic conservatism. Observers now speculate about the effects of this 'Teavangelical' coalition.<sup>58</sup>

## anti-Islam

This has taken several forms, including criticism of Sharia law<sup>59</sup> from leading legislators like Michele Bachmann. Another high-profile example was the campaign against the so-called ‘Ground Zero mosque’. A website run by the Religious Right group the American Family Association even equated building Mosques in America with shrines to Nazism: “Why should communities be forced to have centers for the propagation of anti-Semitic genocide built in their communities, whether it’s of the Nazi kind or the Islamic kind?”<sup>60</sup> It is possible to see this antipathy as an extension of the old hostility to Catholics, Communists and other ‘foreign’ groups.

Since 9/11, the Religious Right has found another fear, in addition to secularisation. The threat of the ‘Islamicisation’ of America has prompted many cities and states to ban (or attempt to) the application of Sharia Law – even without any evidence that judges or courts were using it in their decision-making.<sup>61</sup> Generally, evangelicals are more likely to hold unfavourable views of Muslims (57%) than is the general population (35%).<sup>62</sup> 60% of evangelicals say that Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence.<sup>63</sup>

Of these policy areas, the first two remain the defining issues. Fighting liberalisation in abortion and gay rights legislation remains the *raison d’être* of the Religious Right, though its agenda is much broader.

Policy aside, the primary achievement of the Religious Right has been an upending of the parties’ coalitions. Often against the will of the Republican establishment, leaders of the Religious Right have transformed the Republican Party in under thirty years. By 1992, only 21% of churchgoing evangelicals were Democrats, a decline from 55% in 1960.<sup>64</sup>

Catholics too have moved significantly in their affiliation. Once a reliably Democratic bloc, they are now a swing group, open to appeals by both parties. Indeed, recent Presidential elections have seen more Catholics vote Republican than Democrat.<sup>65</sup> A solid bloc of ‘values voters’ is now firmly in the Republican camp.

Separately, these perspectives are stark; together, they illustrate the reach of the Religious Right, a reach that in three decades has extended beyond a singular religious grouping to affect the nation at large. In 1992, a plurality (43%) of Americans described their ideological views as ‘moderate.’<sup>66</sup> Since then, moderation has become an accusation, not a justification, and conservatism has won the ‘Culture War’ as an increasing proportion

of Americans (40%) now describe their ideology as 'conservative'.<sup>67</sup> As the Religious Right has grown, it has taken the country with it.

By its very nature, a coalition of religious voters and groups will be fissiparous. But though the fundamentalists, evangelicals, Pentecostals and Mormons may differ in which Republican candidate they back during the primary season, they will still be far more likely to support *any* Republican candidate over the Democratic contender on election day.

Inspired by philosopher Francis Schaeffer, Jerry Falwell campaigned against abortion and in the process opened the Moral Majority to Catholics. Catholics would not be as reliable a bloc of votes as fundamentalists and evangelicals, but the level of co-operation was such that in 1994 a document called *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* was signed by the likes of Pat Robertson, Charles Colson and Catholic Cardinals, Bishops and theologians. It wasn't overtly political, but signalled a willingness to put aside differences, something that was unthinkable only 35 years earlier.

Robertson was vital in bringing another large subgroup into the Religious Right. Through his Presidential candidacy, the Religious Right opened up to collaboration with Pentecostal churches and leaders, a growing segment of American evangelicalism.<sup>68</sup>

*The Religious Right is a large-scale, well-organised, well-funded network of groups which has a clear and limited set of policy aims deemed as 'Christian', which it seeks to deliver through the vehicle of the Republican Party.*

This rapprochement was a taste of the vision shared by (Catholic) Paul Weyrich and (Baptist) Jerry Falwell upon founding the Moral Majority. Evangelicals and fundamentalists still make up the core of the Religious Right but they are supplemented by Catholics, Pentecostals and, more recently, Mormons.<sup>69</sup> It is still a mostly 'Christian' movement, though, with Jews remaining unconvinced.<sup>70</sup>

Just as the Religious Right was sparked in opposition to Carter and re-energised in response to Clinton, there are now vociferous voices raised against President Obama. The Religious Right seems stronger playing this role of opposition than when its favourite sons are governing. Indeed, some leaders have been dismayed with the lack of 'progress' on issues of concern. Paul Weyrich suggested many evangelicals were happy simply to have access to the White House and sacrificed their principles for a cosy relationship with power.<sup>71</sup> But even if a wholesale upending of domestic policy has been rejected, there have been successes, such as Bush's ban on Federal funding of embryonic stem cell research and his interference in the infamous Terry Schiavo case.<sup>72</sup> Leaders from within the Religious Right have struggled to break through as

serious candidates for the Presidency, but the likes of James Dobson have been hugely influential behind the scenes.

## conclusion

The Religious Right is not simply socially conservative and Christian. It's a large-scale, well-organised, well-funded network of groups which has a clear and limited set of policy aims deemed as 'Christian', which it seeks to deliver through the vehicle of the Republican Party. Irrespective of short-term trends or electoral cycles, it is now entrenched. It is varied and fissiparous, a coalition of similar interests rather than a single monolith. Nevertheless, when commentators talk of the Religious Right, either the long-standing one in the US or the alleged emergent one in Britain, it is clear that the term is short-hand for a mass movement of Christians that has become a large and influential bloc within a right-wing political party.

## references

- 1 Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 132.
- 2 *Religion & Public Life: A Faith-Based Partisan Divide*, (Washington, DC: Pew Forum, 2005) [http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Issues/Politics\\_and\\_Elections/religion-and-politics-report.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Issues/Politics_and_Elections/religion-and-politics-report.pdf) p. 10. Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 3 Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals website <http://isae.wheaton.edu/defining-evangelicalism/how-many-evangelicals-are-there/> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 4 Gallup Poll, June 2004, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/20242/Another-Look-Evangelicals-America-Today.aspx> Accessed 12 June 2004.
- 5 'Evangelical' and 'fundamentalist' are not synonymous. Sociologist and former Democratic House Candidate Revd Prof Tony Campolo is one of a number to make the point clearly. "There's a big difference between the two... Those Fundamentalists who wanted to engage the world on its own turf would come to call themselves 'evangelicals' and it was only a matter of time before they would become a distinct group." Tony Campolo, *Letters To A Young Evangelical* (New York: Basic Books, 2006) p. 129.
- 6 The extent to which the trial was a genuine confrontation is debated. Many see it as little more than a show trial, drummed up by local businessmen to put a small town on the map. Its impact on the debate over evolution and the wider role of fundamentalist Christians is, nevertheless, important.
- 7 Professor Daniel K. Williams argues that this religious faction never really bowed out of mainstream political involvement, but took until the 1970s to become fully associated with the Republican Party. Williams, *God's Own Party*, pp. 1-6.
- 8 Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: An Evangelical's Lament* (Basic Books, 2006) p. 16.
- 9 United States House of Representatives website, <http://www.house.gov/house/Amendnotrat.shtml> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 10 An amendment to the US Constitution requires ratification by 38 states. Lacking the requisite number by 1982, the ERA was dead in the water. It has been re-introduced in Congress several times since without success.
- 11 Ruth Murray Brown, *For A Christian America: A History Of The Religious Right* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002), p. 21.
- 12 Dan Gilgoff, *The Jesus Machine: How James Dobson, Focus On The Family And Evangelical America Are Winning The Culture War* (St Martin's Press, 2007), p. 79. Bob Jones University opened admission to black students in 1971 but still banned interracial dating and marriage. It sued to regain its tax privileges but eventually lost its case in 1983 when the Supreme Court upheld the IRS policy. In 2000, BJU retracted its ban on interracial relationships but has not applied to reclaim its tax-exempt status as a religious organisation. The IRS action came to fruition during Carter's Presidency but he wasn't responsible for it. Despite this, he was often blamed by leaders of the proto-Religious Right.

- 13 Williams, *God's Own Party*, p. 228.
- 14 Quoted in John Ortved, 'Simpson Family Values', *Vanity Fair*, August 2007, <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2007/08/simpsons200708> Accessed 12 June 2012. Bart's response - 'Hey, we're just like Waltons. We're praying for an end to the depression, too' – was a great deal wittier than the initial statement.
- 15 Nancy L. Cohen, '2010 as 1994? Relax Democrats', *The Los Angeles Times*, 17 January 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/17/opinion/la-oe-cohen17-2010jan17> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 16 Gilgoff, *The Jesus Machine*, p. 7.
- 17 An arcane contrivance of the US Constitution, the requirement of Electoral College votes to win the presidency, means a nominee can win the popular vote but lose the Electoral College vote and thus the election.
- 18 Paul A. Djupe and Laura R. Olson, *Encyclopedia of American Religion and Politics* (Facts On File, 2003), p. 373.
- 19 John K. White, *Barack Obama's America* (University of Michigan Press, 2009), p. 138.
- 20 Williams, *God's Own Party*, p. 261.
- 21 'Haggard admits 'sexual immorality', apologizes', MSNBC.com, 11 May 2006, [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15536263/ns/us\\_news-life/t/haggard-admits-sexual-immorality-apologizes/#.T9yncMBritish2tx](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15536263/ns/us_news-life/t/haggard-admits-sexual-immorality-apologizes/#.T9yncMBritish2tx) Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 22 'Pat Robertson warns of terrorist attack in 2007', MSNBC.com, 2 January 2007, [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16442877/ns/us\\_news-life/t/pat-robertson-warns-terrorist-attack/#.Trvia3JMFBk](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16442877/ns/us_news-life/t/pat-robertson-warns-terrorist-attack/#.Trvia3JMFBk) Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 23 James Dobson, 'Letter from 2012 in Obama's America', WorldNet Daily website, 22 October 2008, <http://www.wnd.com/files/Focusletter.pdf> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 24 'Voting Religiously', Pew Forum website, 5 November 2008, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1022/exit-poll-analysis-religion> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 25 Jim Wallis, 'The Religious Right's Era is Over', *Time*, 16 February 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1590782,00.html> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 26 'American Evangelicalism: New Leaders, New Faces, New Issues', Pew Forum website, 30 June 2008, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/883/american-evangelicalism> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 27 An often-heard term in popular discourse, 'culture war' is the scholarly thesis of James Davison Hunter (*Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, New York: Basic Books, 1991). Hunter describes the battle over American cultural identity between 'orthodox' (those who rely on the absolute truth of religious doctrine to shape their political and social perspectives) and 'progressives' (those who reject absolutes in favour of reason and experience). The culture war theory is controversial - opposition comes chiefly from Morris Fiorina (with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of A Polarized America*, 3rd ed., Boston: Longman, 2005), who suggests the policy differences of 'red' and 'blue' states are not so extensive or intensive after all.



- 28 Scholars classify Protestants among three groupings: Evangelical, Mainline, and Black. Each group is distinct demographically as well as politically.
- 29 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum, 2008) <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 30 Ibid, <http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Brown, *For A Christian America*, pp. 124-131.
- 35 '2009 Religion & Public Life Survey', Pew Forum, <http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Issues/Abortion/abortion09topline.pdf> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 36 Ibid, <http://religions.pewforum.org/comparisons#> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Robin Toner, 'Word for Word: Party Platform; As the Years Pass the Republican Abortion Plank Gets Less Pliant', *The New York Times*, 5 May 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/05/weekinreview/word-for-word-party-platform-years-pass-republican-abortion-plank-gets-less.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 39 Williams, *God's Own Party*, p. 257.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 'Religion and Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Marriage', (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum, 7 February 2012) <http://www.pewforum.org/Gay-Marriage-and-Homosexuality/Religion-and-Attitudes-Toward-Same-Sex-Marriage.aspx> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 42 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 'Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage', (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum) <http://features.pewforum.org/same-sex-marriage-attitudes/slide3.php> - slide 3 - Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 43 Daniel Halper, 'Christians United for Israel Hits a Million', *The Weekly Standard* website, 19 March 2012, [http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/christians-united-israel-hits-million\\_634043.html](http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/christians-united-israel-hits-million_634043.html) Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 44 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 'American Evangelicals and Israel', (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum, April 15, 2005) <http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/American-Evangelicals-and-Israel.aspx> Accessed July 7, 2012.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Richard D. Land et al., 'The Land Letter', The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 3 October 2002, <http://erlc.com/article/the-so-called-land-letter/> Accessed 12 June 2012.

- 49 Emma Brown, 'Judge orders parties into mediation over 10 Commandments in schools', *The Washington Post* website, 8 May 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/virginia-schools-insider/post/ten-commandments-in-schools-fight-continues-in-federal-court/2012/05/07/gIQRU8P8T\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/virginia-schools-insider/post/ten-commandments-in-schools-fight-continues-in-federal-court/2012/05/07/gIQRU8P8T_blog.html) Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 50 David Morgan, 'Catholic group seeks change in US birth control policy', Reuters website, 16 June 2012, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/06/16/usa-healthcare-contraceptives-idINL1E8HG03B20120616> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 51 An attempt to prove that life on Earth must have had an 'Intelligent Designer', which is rejected by the vast majority of serious academics, both Christian and non-Christian. It has been galvanised by the Discovery Institute in Seattle – a leading centre for Religious Right activity.
- 52 'Overview: The Conflict Between Religion and Evolution', Pew Forum website, 4 February 2009, <http://www.pewforum.org/Science-and-Bioethics/Overview-The-Conflict-Between-Religion-and-Evolution.aspx> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 53 Chris Mooney, 'Research and Destroy', *Washington Monthly*, October 2004, <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0410.mooney.html> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 54 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 'Religious Differences on the Question of Evolution' (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum, February 4, 2009) <http://www.pewforum.org/Science-and-Bioethics/Religious-Differences-on-the-Question-of-Evolution.aspx> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 55 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 'Public Divided on Origins of Life' (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum, 30 August 2005) [http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Issues/Politics\\_and\\_Elections/religion-politics-05.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Issues/Politics_and_Elections/religion-politics-05.pdf) Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 56 James Dobson, 'The President's Obamacare Lies', WorldNet Daily website, 6 April 2012, <http://www.wnd.com/2012/06/the-presidents-obamacare-lies/> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 57 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum, 2008) <http://religions.pewforum.org/comparisons#> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 58 Eric Marrapodi, '5 Reasons 'Teavangelicals' Matter', CNN website, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/27/5-reasons-teavangelicals-matter/> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 59 Russell Goldman, 'Bachmann Opposed to Sharia Law, Say It 'Usurps' Constitution', ABC News website, 11 November 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/11/bachmann-opposed-to-sharia-law-says-it-usurps-constitution/> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 60 Brian Fischer, 'No mosque at Ground Zero? Then why a mosque anywhere?', Rightly Concerned website, 3 September 2010, <http://action.afa.net/Blogs/BlogPost.aspx?id=2147498057> Accessed 12 June 2012
- 61 Kevin Murphy, 'Kansas Governor, Sam Brownback, Signs Anti-Sharia Bill, Effectively Banning Islamic Law', The Huffington Post, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/25/kansas-governor-signs-bil\\_n\\_1547145.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/25/kansas-governor-signs-bil_n_1547145.html) Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 62 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 'Public Expresses Mixed Views of Islam, Mormonism', (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum, 26 September 2007) <http://www.pewforum.org/Public-Expresses-Mixed-Views-of-Islam-Mormonism.aspx> Accessed 7 July 2012.

- 63 The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 'Continuing Divide in Views of Islam and Violence,' (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum, 9 March 2011) <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1921/poll-islam-violence-more-likely-other-religions-peter-king-congressional-hearings> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 64 Williams, *God's Own Party*, p. 232.
- 65 Djupe, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 365-75.
- 66 Gallup poll, 12 January 2012, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/152021/Conservatives-Remain-Largest-Ideological-Group.aspx> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 David J. Marley, *Pat Robertson: An American Life*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) p.133.
- 69 J. McKinley and K. Johnson, 'Mormons Tipped Scale in Ban on Gay Marriage', *The New York Times*, 14 November 2008, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/15/us/politics/15marriage.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/15/us/politics/15marriage.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all) Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 70 The last time a Republican presidential candidate won a plurality of the Jewish vote was in 1920. Michelle Goldberg, 'Christian Wrong', *Tablet*, 25 July 2011, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/72770/christian-wrong> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 71 Randall Balmer, *God in the White House: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush* (Harper One, 2008), p. 122.
- 72 Stephen Bates, *God's Own Country: Tales from the Bible Belt* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2007) pp. 309-13.

# the British picture: size and political characteristics

## introduction

Having examined the Religious Right in the USA, we can now take a closer look at Britain and ask whether a similar movement exists or is developing.

We will do this in two ways. The first will draw on quantitative research to get an idea of the size and concerns of the alleged British Religious Right. This will attempt to answer whether there is such a movement in Britain and if so, how big it is, what its main concerns are and how these differ from the population as a whole. This will be the subject of this chapter.

The following chapter will introduce new research, in which leading figures from each of the main organisations that have been accused of being part of a nascent Religious Right were interviewed, and their (and their organisations') motivations, interests and tactics scrutinised. This will attempt to answer whether the accusations of their being part of (an emerging) Religious Right hold any water.

## size

The 2001 Census saw 71% of the population of England and Wales describe themselves as Christian. By 2011, this figure had fallen to 59%. The meaning of these figures has been much debated but, whatever else may be said of them, they are clearly irrelevant to any calculation of an alleged British Religious Right. There are, however, other data which can help us get some idea of the strength and size of British Christianity.

In 2007, evangelical NGO Tearfund commissioned research that resulted in a substantial report on churchgoing in Britain. While discovering that 53% of those surveyed self-identified as Christian, there was a major drop-off when it came to church attendance, with 15% attending at least once per month and 10% attending weekly.<sup>1</sup>

A year later, Theos found that 60% of a British sample considered themselves to be Christians.<sup>2</sup> In the same survey, 27% of people said they attended a religious (not just

Christian) service once a year or more, while 17% attended at least once per week.<sup>3</sup> Finally, research from the Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science which took place in 2011 reported results which, ironically, painted a picture of more committed church attendance. A similar number of respondents described themselves as Christians (54%), however 50% of all those questioned went to a Church service at least once a year, 29% attended at least once a month and 17% at least once a week.<sup>4</sup>

These figures clearly show a commitment to church attendance that is significant, if much lower than the number of people who call themselves Christian. That noted, simply going to church does not, of course, constitute a reason for being labelled 'Religious Right'.

According to the Tearfund survey, "just over a quarter (27%) of regular churchgoers surveyed self-identified as evangelical", equivalent to around two million people in Britain.<sup>5</sup> Of this group, conservative evangelicals were the largest category, comprising just less than a tenth of the church attending sample, or around 720,000 people.<sup>6</sup>

The same survey reported that "Roman Catholics account for 29% of regular churchgoers", again around two million people. In contrast to this, the 2012 Catholic Directory for England and Wales records an average weekly mass attendance in England and Wales of 885,000,<sup>7</sup> and in Scotland the Bishops' Conference estimates average weekly attendance at Mass at 185,000.<sup>8</sup> When it comes to *non-attending* Catholics, these two sources respectively put the figures at around 3 million in England and Wales, and a further half a million in Scotland.

According to the British Social Attitudes 2008 survey, 10% of the population (or around six million people) agreed with the idea that scripture is 'the actual word of God' and to be taken 'literally', compared with 47% who said it was the 'inspired word of God' but that not everything in it was to be read literally, and 43% who said scripture is 'an ancient book of fables, legends, history.' This question, however, is one in which different religious groups influence the result profoundly. Whereas 8% of (self-designated) Anglicans, 12% of Roman Catholics and 16% of 'Other Christians' fell into the first 'literalist' category, 36% of people from other religions did (as, bizarrely, did 4% of people with no religion).

Depending on how widely one draws the circumference in Britain, therefore, we can say that there are somewhere between 6.5 million<sup>9</sup> and (more realistically) 1.8 million<sup>10</sup> evangelicals and Catholics in Britain. Given that the US Religious Right is comprised primarily of evangelicals and Catholics, this figure is relevant but only a start, for the obvious reason that the Religious Right is Right as well as Religious.

Voting is the obvious, if somewhat blunt, mechanism for assessing political affiliation. However, determining voting behaviour by religious persuasion in Britain is not easy, as British Election Survey (BES) data are somewhat patchy in this area. The most recent wave of this study (for 2009/10) breaks down voting behaviour by a number of religious categories, including Church of England/Anglican/Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian/Church of Scotland, Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed Church, and Free Presbyterianism. These obviously do not map directly onto any 'Religious Right' category and so can only be used loosely and indicatively.

According to political scientist Ben Clements who has analysed the BES results, the data showed that Anglicans were more likely to vote for the Conservative Party than any other religious group (45% said they did), whereas Roman Catholics were, along with the non-religious, least likely (29%). Catholics were more likely to vote Labour (40%), and the non-religious group was reasonably evenly split between the three parties, with a slight preponderance of support for the Liberal Democrats. The 'other Christian denomination' group (i.e. non-conformists, free and independent churches) were also evenly split between the three main parties, with a slight preference towards Conservative (33%). The UKIP earned between 2.7% (other Christian denomination) and 4.9% (Anglican) of votes, whilst the BNP got between 0.2% (other Christian denomination) and 1.2% (no religion) of votes.<sup>11</sup>

The BES asked respondents about more than their voting record. The 2009/10 wave asked opinions of the main party leaders. Reflecting the direction of the political wind, David Cameron was most popular among four of the five groups, the exception being Roman Catholics, who preferred Gordon Brown.

The BES also asked respondents for their general opinion of parties, scoring each on a scale of 0 to 10. On this measure, Anglicans preferred the Conservatives (5.3) and Liberal Democrats (5.2) over Labour (4), whereas Roman Catholics preferred Liberal Democrats (5.1) and Labour (4.9) over Conservatives (4). The 'other Christian denomination' group preferred Liberal Democrats (5.4) over Labour (4.8) and Conservatives (4.4), which was also the order in which the non-religious group ranked the parties.

Finally (in this context), the BES asked people about their general satisfaction with the state of British democracy. This question found that the three Christian groups were most likely to be 'very or fairly satisfied' (from 53% Roman Catholic to 57% Other Christian), whereas the non-religious were least likely (43%) to feel that way. Indeed, the non-religious were the only group to have a majority that was 'a little or very dissatisfied' with the state of British democracy (51%).

Only one of the five BES categories – Roman Catholics – corresponds, in any way, to the groups that comprise the US Religious Right. It is noteworthy, therefore, that this category is also the most consistently left-of-centre of all the five surveyed in Britain. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the accusations of a British Religious Right quoted in the introduction focus on Protestant (evangelical) groups rather than Catholic ones, a fact that is reflected in the choice of interviewees in chapter 3.

Although the BES ‘Anglican’ category was the most consistently Conservative of the five analysed, the alignment between Anglicanism and Conservatism was not comparable to that between evangelicals and Republicans in the US. More Anglicans voted for the two other mainstream parties than they did the Conservatives, and Anglicans were generally as positive about the Liberal Democrats as they were the Tories.

Religious affiliation is more than just voting and opinion, of course. According to BSA 2005, 63% of the non-religious voted in the General Election of that year, compared with 78% of those who were religious and attended regularly or frequently, and a similar balance of activity is in evidence in other areas. According to the same survey, in response to ‘a government action which you thought was unjust and harmful’, people who are religious and frequently attend a place of worship are more likely to have contacted their MP (or MSP), formed a campaign group, contacted a government department, and spoken to an influential person than is someone of no religion. In particular, someone from the former group is much more likely to have raised an issue in an organisation to which they already belong.

When it comes to party membership, accurate membership figures analysed according to religiosity are very difficult to determine. What can be said with confidence here is that there has been a precipitous decline in *all* party membership levels over recent decades, a European-wide phenomenon. In 2010, the Conservative Party had 177,000 members, down from a high of nearly three million in the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats can tell a similar story. Even allowing for the emergence of the UKIP and its 15,000 members,<sup>13</sup> this is a comparatively low level of political activism for a population of over 60 million.

It may be the case that a disproportionate number of Conservative Party Members are Christian (figures are not available) and that, accordingly, the Conservative Party is disproportionately influenced by its Conservative Christian Fellowship, an implication of several of the ‘exposés’ mentioned above, and a question to which we shall return in the next chapter. It certainly appears to be the case, as political scientist Martin Steven, and others, have reported, that Christians “are an extremely reliable source of democratic engagement – and linked to that, wider social capital”.<sup>14</sup>

However, this level of activism appears to be seen across the board (both Labour and Liberal Democrat parties have active Christian constituencies), perhaps reflective of the generally more positive attitude to the state of British democracy exhibited by Christians, as recorded by the BES study. The unavoidable conclusion is that if once parties could rely on massive bloc support, both at the ballot box and beyond, motivated by social or economic factors, that is no longer the case – on the basis of class or even religion.

Two other factors also bear brief mention. The first is the insignificant showing of ‘US-style Religious Right’ issues at election time in Britain. Neither parties nor manifestos emphasise (and some don’t even mention) the ‘moral’ issues that are seen to characterise ‘Religious Right’ interests, favouring instead an emphasis on the economy and the state of public services. US elections are, of course, focused on economic competence and promises, but the contrast is still palpable.

*The number of people in Britain who might qualify as of the Religious Right – in as far as they are seriously Religious (meaning, in this instance, practicing Catholic or evangelical) and seriously Right (meaning active in their support of a right wing party) is small.*

The second is the insignificant showing of the two Christian political parties at the 2010 General Election. Between them, the Christian Party and Christian Peoples Alliance fielded 88 candidates out of a possible 650, with their share of the total vote coming in under 0.1%.<sup>15</sup> There are different ways of interpreting this and we will discuss these Christian parties later in the report, but this electoral record may serve as further evidence for a lack of support among Christians for an identifiably ‘Christian’ policy platform.

We would be the first to admit that there is too much generalisation and estimation in this analysis, borne primarily of the lack of hard data in this area, a fault that will be addressed in some way in a forthcoming monograph and Theos report looking specifically at religion and voting in Britain. Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that the number of people in Britain who might qualify as of the Religious Right – in as far as they are seriously Religious (meaning, in this instance, practicing Catholic or evangelical) and seriously Right (meaning active in their support of a right wing party) is small.

## characteristics

The above section did not seek to define the alleged Religious Right by its view of the key issues outlined in the previous chapter, as to do so would have been to engage in circular reasoning: defining a phenomenon according to its social views and then exposing what its social views were. Nonetheless, it is important to (attempt to) get



some idea of British public opinion on the archetypal Religious Right issues according to religious affiliation.

Given the difficulty in identifying a clearly-defined Religious Right category, there is as much complexity here, analysing characteristics, as there was in the previous section, which analysed size. Once again, however, there are some studies and data sources that can offer useful indicators.

According to one recent report, it appears that among British Christians there is actually a bias towards left-wing or progressive politics. In early 2012, the think tank Demos produced a report entitled *Faithful Citizens*, which argued that British people of faith are, “more likely to hold progressive political values on a number of important political and economic questions at the heart of twenty-first-century policy.”<sup>16</sup> While acknowledging that correlation does not necessarily indicate causation, the report also went on to argue that, “our findings also confirm prior research and contradict the common assumption that religious citizens are more inclined towards conservative causes than non-religious citizens.”<sup>17</sup>

The annual British Social Attitudes survey offers a further, and valuable, data source to assess British political and social opinions by religion – not by evangelicalism, or Roman Catholicism, as with much of the Pew data used in the previous chapter, but by how frequently a person attends a religious service.

The BSA asks respondents how often they attend services or meetings connected with their religion, thereby allowing analysis by frequency of attending a religious service.<sup>18</sup> As with the proxies used in the previous section, this is a frustratingly inexact measure, incorporating as it does people of all religious faith. However, according to BSA, 75% of all frequent attenders (i.e. people who attend a religious service every fortnight or more often) are Christians, meaning that the data from this analysis should give some idea of ‘practising’ Christians’ opinions on key issues, even if not of the ‘Religious Right’ opinion.

The first objective is to assess whether those who are religious and frequently attend a service differ from the rest of the population on the right-left political scale. According to BSA in 2008 43% of frequent religious observers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off.’<sup>19</sup> This was in contrast with 38% of those who said they had no religion and 36% of the general population. (Those groups that were categorised as ‘Religious but limited attendance’ and ‘Religious and regular attendance’ were the ones who tended to disagree more with the statement).

In the same year, BSA asked whether people thought that “government should provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed”. Nearly two thirds (64%) of the ‘Religious and frequent attendance’ group either agreed or agreed strongly with this (16% disagreed/strongly), compared with 47% of the no religion group (of whom 21% disagreed/strongly).

Similarly, when asked whether they thought it was “the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes”, 67% of the ‘Religious and frequent attendance’ group either agreed or agreed strongly (17% disagreed/strongly) whereas 62% of the no religion group felt the same way (and 20% disagreed/strongly).

Finally, the 2008 survey also asked how respondents felt about the statement that, “the creation of the welfare state is one of Britain’s proudest achievements.”<sup>20</sup> Over a half (58%) of frequent religious observers either agreed or strongly agreed. Again, this figure is much larger than those who said they had no religion (33%) and the general population (50%). These four examples suggest that far from being ‘on the right’, strongly religious people take a notably more economically left-wing approach.

*Far from being ‘on the right’, strongly religious people take a notably more economically left-wing approach.*

These issues do not make up the full picture, of course, as the conservatism of the US Religious Right is as much social as it is economic. Sexual ethics is an obvious category here. When BSA asked whether and/or how wrong it was for “a married person having sexual relations with someone other than his or her partner”, the results by religiosity<sup>21</sup> show that 74% of the ‘Religious and frequent attendance’ group thought this was ‘always wrong’ (and 1% ‘rarely’ or ‘not at all’ wrong), compared with 52% in the ‘no religion’ group (and 3% ‘rarely’ or ‘not at all’ wrong). It is a similar story for pre-marital sex.<sup>22</sup> Over four in ten (43%) of the ‘religious and frequent attendance’ group thought this was always or mostly wrong, compared with 5% of the no-religion group. By comparison, 33% of the former group thought it was ‘rarely or not at all wrong’, compared with 87% of the latter.

Although not such a major focus of the Religious Right in the US, attitudes to crime and punishment also serve as a common cipher for ‘conservatism’. In Britain, there is little difference in attitudes to punishment by religiosity: 81% of the ‘religious and frequent attendance’ group and the same proportion of the ‘no religion’ group agree/strongly that “people who break the law should be given stiffer sentences”. By comparison, while 56% of the general population agree or agree strongly that “for some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence”,<sup>23</sup> for the ‘religious and frequent attendance’

group this figure stands at 45% (38% disagree/strongly), whereas for the 'no religion' group it is 62% agreeing/strongly (with 26% disagreeing/strongly).

A final example can be drawn from the subject of censorship. In 2009, when asked whether 'censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards', 78% of frequent religious observers either agreed or strongly agreed. This compares to 53% of the non-religious population and 64% of general respondents.<sup>24</sup>

From these data points (the BSA study offers more but for reasons of length we shall not analyse them here), we can begin to build up a picture of religiously observant people in Britain (of whom three quarters, as noted, are Christian). The data suggest that they tend to be more left-of-centre on economic issues, but more right-of-centre on social issues, although not necessarily consistently so. This slightly more complex picture can again be tested by a direct look at some of the issues which particularly animate the US Religious Right.

*Religiously observant people in Britain tend to be more left-of-centre on economic issues, but more right-of-centre on social issues, although not necessarily consistently so.*

Firstly, abortion: in 2005, BSA asked, "Do you think the law should allow an abortion when...the woman decides on her own she does not wish to have the child?"<sup>25</sup> Nearly two thirds (64%) of the general population answered that the law should allow abortion in those circumstances. This rose to 74% of non-religious people but fell to 34% frequent religious attendees.

Looking at the same data by denomination, self-designated Anglicans are closest to the general figure (with 68% saying the law should allow an abortion in these circumstances), with Catholics (49%) and other Christians (54%) being less supportive. Thus, while it is clear that Christians are less 'pro-choice' than those without religious faith, the difference appears to come with frequency of attendance (presumably a cipher for religious commitment) rather than with self-designation.

Second, homosexuality: the BSA data show very clearly that disapproval of homosexual activity is informed by religiosity. Thus, in 2005 (survey data do not allow for a more recent comparison), 66% of the 'religious and frequent attendance' group thought that 'sexual relation[s] between two adults of the same sex' was 'always or mostly wrong', compared with 28% of the 'no religion' group and 39% of the overall population (a figure that had fallen to 30% by 2010).

Gay marriage is the presenting issue at the time of writing. According to BSA 2008, 11% of Anglicans who attended church at least once a month agreed that gay couples

should be allowed to marry, compared with 25% of Anglicans who attended less often or never.<sup>27</sup> More recently, British Religion in Numbers reports that “public support for gay marriage appears to be confirmed in a OnePoll survey... 59% of respondents said that they supported plans to allow gay couples to marry.”<sup>28</sup> It then goes on to observe, “Churchgoers, by contrast, seem hostile to the whole concept of legalizing same-sex marriage. 83% were against the idea according to the ComRes Cpanel study of October 2011, and over two-thirds of evangelicals were *strongly* opposed in November 2011.”<sup>29</sup> By comparison, the Catholic Voices poll on this issue in March 2012 found 70% of the British public agreeing that, “Marriage should continue to be defined as a life-long exclusive commitment between a man and a woman.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, although (committed) Christian opinion is more conservative on this issue than the public at large, it is also the case that there is a degree of public uncertainty and confusion and therefore we can’t be certain about how ‘out of step’ is Christian opinion on the issue.

The third key issue is evolution. The 2008 Theos/ComRes survey is the most comprehensive source of information in this area and yields some surprising results. In general, in this survey Christians did tend towards more support for creationism and intelligent design (ID), but there was some significant crossover with the opinions of those without a faith. While 7% of Christians agreed that “evolution is a theory which has been disproved by the evidence,” 6% of those who said they had no faith held the same position.<sup>31</sup> This is backed up by another question which asked whether ID should be taught alongside evolution in science lessons. Nearly a third (29%) of Christians agreed – as did 26% of atheists, 25% of agnostics and 21% of those with no faith position. Once again, the clear cut picture of a Religious Right position (or at least inclination) on the issue, is somewhat muddled by the rather confused general public opinion.

## conclusion

This chapter has been a necessarily brief foray into a data field that is, in itself, incomplete. If there is one clear message to be heard above all others, it is that we need more research. That acknowledged, we feel that three tentative conclusions are merited.

Firstly, there is very strong evidence to suggest that committed Christians represent a much smaller proportion of Britain electorate than that of the US.

Second, the views of those within this smaller group are not as easy to categorise as simply ‘right wing’. Christians in Britain appear to be more socially conservative than the general public, but their economic bias seems to be left-of-centre, arguably more so than those of no religious faith.

Finally, British Christians are not as fixated on a particular set of specific issues as the US Religious Right. While abortion and gay marriage may not be popular among Christians here, evolution, Israel and small government are not major battlegrounds. Moreover, even issues like abortion and gay rights do not appear to be defining the political terrain in the way they are in the USA.

## references

- 1 *Churchgoing in Britain* (Tearfund), 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03\\_04\\_07\\_tearfundchurch.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03_04_07_tearfundchurch.pdf) p. 6. Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 2 *Rescuing Darwin* Data Tables (Theos/ComRes, October 2008) <http://campaigndirector.moodia.com/Client/Theos/Files/TheosFinalFullDataSetDarwinTabsJan09.pdf> p. 168. Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 119.
- 4 *Religious and Social Attitudes of British Christians in 2011*, Ipsos MORI for Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, 14 February 2012, [http://c3414097.r97.cf0.rackcdn.com/IpsosMORI\\_RDFRS-British\\_Survey\\_Topline\\_14-02-2012.pdf](http://c3414097.r97.cf0.rackcdn.com/IpsosMORI_RDFRS-British_Survey_Topline_14-02-2012.pdf) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 5 *Churchgoing in Britain*, p. 16.
- 6 It is important to note that in this instance 'conservative evangelical' is a theological term and not a political one: being a conservative evangelical does not mean voting Conservative or even automatically indicate any political engagement.
- 7 C. D. Field, *Catholic Directory, 2012*, British Religion in Numbers, 28 January 2012, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2012/catholic-directory-2012/> Accessed 19 July 2012.
- 8 The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland website, <http://www.bpsconfscot.com/CatholicScotland/tabid/57/Default.aspx> Accessed 19 July 2012.
- 9 Based on the calculation of the total number of Catholics and evangelicals in England, Wales and Scotland.
- 10 Based on the calculation of the total number of mass-attending Catholics in England, Wales and Scotland and the total number of conservative evangelicals.
- 11 Ben Clements, 'Religious Affiliation and Political Attitudes: Findings from the British Election Study 2009/10', British Religion in Numbers, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2010/religious-affiliation-and-political-attitudes-findings-from-the-british-election-study-200910/> Accessed 23 July 2012.
- 12 Parliamentary research briefing 'Membership of UK political parties – Commons library standard note', <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05125> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 13 Parliamentary research briefing 'Membership of UK political parties – Commons library standard note', <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05125> p. 5. Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 14 Martin H. M. Steven, *Christianity and Party Politics: Keeping the Faith* (Routledge, 2011).
- 15 The Electoral Commission website, 'General Elections: 2010 election results (British general election 2010 results for analysis (XLS))', [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/results/general\\_elections/](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/results/general_elections/) Accessed 7 July 2012; BBC website, 'Election 2010: National Results', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/election2010/results/> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 16 *Faithful Citizens*, Demos, 2012, [http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Faithful\\_citizens\\_-\\_web.pdf?1333839181](http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Faithful_citizens_-_web.pdf?1333839181) p. 17. Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 17 *Ibid.*

- 18 The categories are: Frequent attendance: 'Once a week or more' or 'At least once in two weeks'; Regular attendance: 'At least once a month'; Limited attendance: 'At least twice a year' or 'At least once a year'; No attendance: 'Less often' or 'Never'.
- 19 British Social Attitudes Survey website, <http://www.britsocat.com/Body.aspx?AddMap=REDISTRB&control=BritsocatMarginals&AddSeries=12&JumpCrossMarginals=yes> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 20 British Social Attitudes Survey website, <http://www.britsocat.com/Body.aspx?AddMap=PROUDWLF&control=BritsocatMarginals&AddSeries=12&JumpCrossMarginals=yes> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 21 Unfortunately, only analysable in the 2005 dataset.
- 22 Also only analysable in the 2005 dataset.
- 23 2009 data used for purposes of comparison. In 2010, the figure had fallen to 55%.
- 24 British Social Attitudes Survey website, <http://www.britsocat.com/BodySecure.aspx?control=BritsocatMarginals&var=CENSOR&SurveyID=26> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 25 British Social Attitudes Survey website, <http://www.britsocat.com/Body.aspx?AddMap=ABORT1&control=BritsocatMarginals&AddSeries=12&JumpCrossMarginals=yes> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ben Clements, 'Anglicans and Attitudes towards Gay Marriage', British Religion in Numbers website, 14 September 2012: <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2012/anglicans-and-attitudes-towards-gay-marriage/> Accessed 17 December 2012.
- 28 C. Field, 'Gay Marriage Revisited', British Religion in Numbers website, 6 May 2012 <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2012/gay-marriage-revisited/> Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Catholic Voices/ComRes, March 2012, [http://www.ComRes.co.uk/polls/Marriage\\_Tables\\_March\\_2012.pdf](http://www.ComRes.co.uk/polls/Marriage_Tables_March_2012.pdf) Accessed 7 July 2012.
- 31 *Rescuing Darwin* Data Tables (Theos/ComRes, October 2008), <http://campaigndirector.moodia.com/Client/Theos/Files/TheosFinalFullDataSetDarwinTabsJan09.pdf> p. 66. Accessed 7 July 2012.

## the British picture: organisations, campaigns, finance

One of the most comprehensive critiques of the perceived emergence of a British Religious Right came in *The Guardian* on 29 August 2011. A series of amendments to the government's Health and Social Care Bill were due to be debated in Parliament, the most high-profile of which dealt with the availability of counselling services to those considering abortion. Conservative backbencher Nadine Dorries proposed that organisations which carry out abortions shouldn't be counselling women at the same time, and that those considering a termination should have independent counselling offered to them. In the House of Commons, Labour shadow minister Dianne Abbott described it as "an attempt to import American sensationalism into abortion issues."<sup>1</sup>

Abbott's contention was picked up by *The Guardian* and turned into an examination of the influence of some Christian groups in abortion policy and beyond. The article not only suggested that British groups were borrowing heavily from the tactics of similar US-based organisations, but also that they were finally beginning to have real access to power after a 40-year quest: "many often-interconnected individuals and organisations pursuing a Christian agenda dot the political and legal landscape. Crucially, the Tories now have a strong socially conservative current."<sup>2</sup>

The *Guardian* article was certainly more thorough than some of those cited in the Introduction. It traced the origins of some of the groups it referred to and showed some understanding of the history of evangelical involvement. Yet perhaps because of its brevity, it still contained much presumption, lumping together disparate groups and treating them as if they were part of a coherent bloc with a well-defined agenda.

This chapter will look at seven of the groups mentioned in the *Guardian* article and elsewhere as being part of an alleged British Religious Right. By means of secondary research and one-to-one interviews with leading members of these organisations, we hope to answer whether such allegations are justifiable.



## CARE

CARE has its origins in the 1971 Nationwide Festival of Light.<sup>3</sup> By 1983, it had morphed into Christian Action Research and Education and since moving to Westminster in 1988, it has expanded its portfolio of interests. These include abortion, end-of-life issues, bioethics, education, and family issues, as well as others like gambling and human trafficking (CARE provides the secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade).

CARE's activities in Westminster, in common with many other organisations, include lobbying MPs and Peers, testifying before Parliamentary committees, giving comment to the media and producing resources to be used by churches and politicians. It also has offices in Belfast, Glasgow and Brussels, playing a role in the political life of Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and the European Union.

One area of CARE's work that has come in for sustained criticism is its Leadership Programme. Since its inception 20 years ago, this scheme has seen over 220 young people complete a 10-month stint of work experience, training and theological study. Some interns are given placements in the offices of MPs, while others are placed with media organisations and the third sector.

In 2008, *The Independent on Sunday* ran (what it claimed was) an exclusive,<sup>4</sup> revealing that at least eight MPs had researchers provided by CARE. The newspaper said this was an attempt by CARE to persuade MPs to vote against elements of the upcoming Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. It suggested that CARE "shares many of the characteristics of – indeed, it explicitly models itself on – the religious right in the US, a phenomenon often regarded with distaste in this country."<sup>5</sup> It then described the presence of eight young people in the offices of MPs as a "highly motivated campaign" giving CARE "disproportionate leverage in the cockpit of democracy." A leader article in the same edition suggested CARE may have breached Charity Commission guidelines: "a charity must not give support or funding to a political party, nor to a candidate or politician."<sup>6</sup>

Only half the story was told by the newspaper, however. The headline 'Evangelicals Fund MPs ahead of Embryo Vote' implied that the internship scheme had been created to influence this particular vote. The fact that the scheme had been operating for 16 years was barely mentioned. More misleadingly, the article described CARE as a 'right wing Christian group', a problematic description given that CARE interns were working with MPs from the Labour and Liberal Democrat benches as well as Conservatives.

Chief Executive Nola Leach picked up this point when we interviewed her, emphasising that the organisation's link with all major parties is the same:

We worked with the Charity Commission very closely. The graduates are not there in any sense to lobby on behalf of CARE...they are working for that MP... Everything is declared, open and above board in the register of interests in Parliament. We are responsible to the Charity Commission and keep them informed all the way along the line of what's happening.<sup>7</sup>

Leach also argued that CARE's programme isn't deserving of special attention:

There are all sorts of interns in Parliament. There are very clear rules and regulations, quite rightly, about how interns are used in Parliament. It's a little bit fatuous to single out a particular programme... There is nothing hidden about the Leadership Programme... We do a lot of work with MPs before they take a graduate to explain exactly how they have to declare it... We're providing an educational programme for young people who perhaps otherwise wouldn't necessarily have it.

There is no reason to doubt the truth of this statement, although it is possible for the Leadership programme to be interpreted in a different way. In a letter to supporters in July 2011, Executive Chairman Revd Lyndon Bowring spoke about the genesis of the programme. Bowring recalls having lunch with an MP in the House of Commons Dining Room, and asking him what could be done "to stem the relentless tide of secularism that was pervading Parliament. He paused and then, indicating the MPs at tables all around us, said, 'Until you change the composition of this House we will be defeated again and again.'"<sup>8</sup>

This is precisely the kind of language that opponents seize on as evidence of a nascent and shadowy Religious Right movement. The attenuating fact is that the MP in question was the Liberal Democrat David Alton, latterly ennobled as Baron Alton of Liverpool (sitting on the crossbenches). The idea of changing the "composition of [the] House" was a clarion call from a Liberal rather than a Conservative.<sup>9</sup>

We spoke to a former CARE intern about the Leadership Programme and asked if there was any truth to the idea that they were sent into MPs' offices to apply pressure. "I don't think there were explicit expectations made of you. Certainly not that you would influence [the MP]...as to what they did, or [how they] voted." When asked whether she ever requested that the MP vote a certain way, the response was categorical. "No, I never did that...you would have been told in no uncertain terms that that wasn't part of your role."<sup>10</sup> It was a similar response to the question of whether CARE had solicited such intervention or even asked interns to promote the organisation. "I was never asked to...I don't think there was an explicit expectation that you would go out into the world and spread the message of CARE."

The organisation was clearly not ashamed of its core issues. “[They said] ‘this is our agenda, we’re aware there are plenty of other issues out there but we focus on these things and this is why.’” Interns were required to recognise this but not to abandon their own concerns in the process. “It was very much ‘this is who we are and you’re a part of us, you do represent us,’ but it’s not like ‘you take the dollar and this is what you’ve got to do.’” CARE says its guidance to interns makes it clear they are, “explicitly forbidden to lobby MPs on CARE’s behalf.”<sup>11</sup>

In spite of this, CARE, (specifically its Leadership Programme), has come under further scrutiny recently. A conference it co-sponsored was criticised for hosting speakers who have been involved in ‘reparative therapy’ for homosexuals. The event took place in 2009, but adverse publicity only came in 2011-12.<sup>12</sup> Pressure was exerted on MPs not to accept CARE interns and some Labour MPs such as David Lammy and Sharon Hodgson, as well as Liberal Democrat President Tim Farron, disassociated themselves from the Leadership Programme.<sup>13</sup> This means CARE may have to readjust the number of graduates it places in Parliament so as to maintain the balance of the parties whose MPs have an intern.

Nola Leach was reluctant to speak specifically about the conference in question simply saying, “I think it’s very unfortunate that there’s been a lot of...sloppy interpretation...of what we did and what we do.” Of the fallout she commented that the loss of support from some MPs wouldn’t prevent the programme continuing, despite the fact that interns are divided up among the parties according to their share of MPs in the Commons. “We can’t operate with an imbalance... We’ve talked to the Charity Commission about it... We can’t operate with partisan bias, and we wouldn’t. There’s a proportional balance to the number [of MPs] in the House... If we couldn’t have the balance, we’d have to go back to the Charity Commission and say ‘We haven’t got the balance, we can’t operate the programme, what do we do in this situation?’”

CARE undoubtedly campaigns against liberalisation in legislation on homosexuality and life issues. However, the language used by spokespeople is more moderate and consensual than in the US, while maintaining a socially conservative line on issues like gay marriage and abortion. Leach told us:

When CARE started, it would be true to say that CARE staff would, on occasion, march – perhaps with a banner saying ‘abortion kills’... Very quickly we said we wouldn’t ever do that again because what does that say to the woman who’s standing by the road?... There will be Christians who will say either we’ve gone too soft and lost it...but then we’ll be attacked from the other side who say we’re pro-life and therefore we’re not caring for women.

This attitude provides an important counterpoint to (some of) the US Religious Right's leading figures. In her opinion, it is not just tone but political landscape that is different in Britain.

I can understand why people looking on might say, 'the natural ally is the Conservative Party,' because they're more likely to espouse those 'traditional' values. I think when you dig a bit deeper; the evidence is that just isn't the case... Some of the arch-proponents of valuing life before birth are...from the Labour Party, from the Liberal Party,...crossbench Peers and so on.

CARE fits the model of a Religious Right group in as far as it has an active interest in socially conservative issues such as abortion, bioethics and family life. Other issues, like campaigns against prostitution and people trafficking take it beyond traditional Religious Right concerns. More importantly, however, CARE's longstanding relationship with MPs and Peers from across the political spectrum makes it difficult to label it as a Religious Right organisation. Moreover, its determination to maintain links with all parties, despite its loss of support from some MPs over the internship scheme, suggests that CARE is reluctant to become a politically exclusively right wing organisation, despite being labelled as such by critics.

## The Christian Institute

The Christian Institute was founded in 1990 and has become one of the most high-profile protagonists in the emerging national debate over 'religious freedom.'

In an echo of the Christian Coalition in the USA, the Christian Institute produces a guide to how each Member of Parliament has voted. This is not a comprehensive guide, only featuring marriage and family issues; pro-life; drugs; religious liberty; education; and the constitution. It categorises how all 650 MPs have voted on a series of complex and often inter-connected pieces of legislation with a tick or cross. A tick indicates a 'morally right' vote and a cross indicates a 'morally wrong' vote.<sup>14</sup>

Mike Judge, Head of Communications for the Institute, told us the similarity to the Christian Coalition was merely a coincidence:

The fact that an organisation puts together a list of where MPs have voted on issues that the organisation is campaigning on – I don't think that's rocket science... You don't necessarily need to have seen it done elsewhere... I don't see that that's any indication that we're following an American model.<sup>15</sup>

The Institute has welcomed US theologian Wayne Grudem who gave a series of lectures sponsored by it in 2010. Grudem is a conservative Biblical scholar who endorsed Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney<sup>16</sup> and whose work is promoted by Religious Right groups such as the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF).<sup>17</sup> His insistence that man-made climate change isn't happening<sup>18</sup> and his consistent support for Republican policies make it clear where he thinks Christians should place their vote:

The Republican Party has been dominated by people favoring smaller government, lower taxes, strong defense, traditional moral standards regarding abortion and marriage, the promotion of democracy and the promotion of free market economies. These stances seem to me to be consistent with Biblical teachings on government and a Biblical worldview.<sup>19</sup>

Despite this, and other informal links, Mike Judge told us that it isn't appropriate to accuse his organisation of being part of a British Religious Right:

We don't get funding from the US and there's very little connection with what happens in the US because the US situation is so different to Britain ... It's a myth to lift the accusations of the partisan Christian Right in America and land it on what's happening in Britain, because the situations are utterly different.

Whether this claim stands up to scrutiny is more debatable. If Britain is so utterly different from the USA, why would the Institute invite Grudem to tour round the country talking about his views on politics?

Judge also gave us his view on why so many journalists are presuming that there is a Religious Right in Britain, and cited a topic familiar to the US Religious Right, the alleged 'marginalisation' of Christians:

It's a way of marginalising Christians who engage in public life... A way of marginalising and pushing Christianity out of that public sphere is to say that any Christian who's engaged in the public sphere is just a kind-of Christian Right that we see in America.

In a 2009 pamphlet, the Christian Institute concluded, "The marginalisation of Christians is increasing at an alarming rate," while suggesting "local authorities have displayed an astonishing level of intolerance against Christians."<sup>20</sup> It also claimed that "in employment there has been a sharp rise in religious discrimination cases coming before employment tribunal,"<sup>21</sup> without acknowledging that the Institute itself was responsible for bringing several of these cases.<sup>22</sup>

In some instances of legal action, the outcome has been swift, and the Christian in question has been found to be without error. So it was in the case of a Blackpool café owner who showed DVDs with Bible verses on. Police officers told him he had breached 'public order law'. When the case was publicised by the Christian Institute, there was out cry from sections of the media, and former Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe claimed the owner was being 'persecuted'.<sup>23</sup> Lancashire Constabulary subsequently apologised.<sup>24</sup>

In other instances, though, cases have been taken through the courts. A prime example is Lillian Ladele, a Christian registrar in Islington, North London, who refused to carry out gay civil partnership ceremonies. She claimed she was harassed and discriminated against by Islington council. This was upheld by an employment tribunal, but that decision was subsequently overturned by an appeal tribunal. The Appeal Court upheld that ruling and the Supreme Court refused her permission to challenge it.<sup>25</sup> Her case was one of a number brought before the European Court of Human Rights in 2012/13.

These cases are just two examples of the increasing number of legal battles taken on by The Christian Institute. In a similar fashion to the Christian Legal Centre (see below), recourse to litigation is swift. In fact, this is something the Institute has in common with the National Secular Society. In the midst of a legal battle over prayers at the start of town council meetings in Bideford, Devon, the *New Statesman* commented on both the NSS and The Christian Institute disparagingly, "the issue represents yet another opportunity for two legally-obsessed pressure groups to go head-to-head, a depressingly recurrent feature of our modern human rights culture."<sup>26</sup>

The Christian Institute also played a role in agitating Christians to oppose *Jerry Springer: the Opera*. It claimed to have helped encourage thousands of Christians to protest outside some of the venues showing the performance.<sup>27</sup> It was a key player in the campaign to retain Section 28, in fact arguing for it to be extended,<sup>29</sup> and issuing warnings about the consequences of repeal such as "school children in England and Wales could be told to buy condoms for homework if Section 28 is repealed." The Institute also funded one of the only attempts to use Section 28 while it was still on the statute books.<sup>30</sup>

The Christian Institute has almost 30,000 people on its mailing list, meaning that although many outside of the Church will never have heard of it, its reach into the evangelical community is significant.<sup>31</sup> It has been criticised by the Charity Commission for coming too close to political campaigning<sup>32</sup> and was also the subject of a strong rebuke from two members of the House of Lords and a senior Anglican Cleric. Labour's Baroness Massey and Liberal Democrat Baroness Walmsley were both targeted over the issue of sex education in schools by a letter writing and phone campaign organised by the Christian Institute. The Church of England Newspaper reported that Lady Massey had never known "such a sinister and vicious campaign that has sought to misinform others," while Lady Walmsley

said there had “been wicked insinuations”. The Bishop of Leeds, the Rt Revd John Packer, felt the need to apologise to them on behalf of Christianity, despite not being linked to the Institute himself.<sup>33</sup>

The Christian Institute has been heavily involved in the Coalition for Marriage, alongside a number of other Christian organisations. At the time of writing, this has attracted more than half a million signatures, making it the most popular petition of recent years (the highly-popular ‘Drop the Health Bill’ e-petition currently stands at 180,000 by contrast). This is clearly the most co-ordinated and popular action undertaken by the supposed British Religious Right, supported by a number of MPs and peers, alongside ecclesiastical figures from different denominations. It is not clear, however (at least, again, at the time of writing), that it will derail the Coalition Government’s stated aim to introduce same sex marriage.

Mike Judge told us that the Coalition for Marriage was needed because:

Politicians have chipped away a little bit at marriage over the years and thought ‘well now this is just a little step further.’ What they failed to realise is that the silent majority have gone along with the undermining of marriage but are not happy with it, just not really raising their voice.<sup>34</sup>

If the Coalition for Marriage really was the vanguard of the British Religious Right, it would need to convert the many names and signatures it has accrued into a wider network. However, Mike Judge said there was little appetite for this:

The 600,000 people who’ve signed up to the C4M is far greater than the mailing lists of any of the evangelical organisations, and they’ve signed up to a very narrow-focused petition... I can’t see that having a wider remit – that’s not what people signed up for... The support base is much broader than the support base of the evangelical Christian organisations.

This is hardly fighting talk. The Coalition for Marriage has certainly been led by evangelical groups. But its appeal has seemingly broadened to encompass a wider pool of the British population. In a way, this proves the limits of the power of these groups. They can only achieve widespread popularity when their concerns chime with a broader audience.

With its focus on life issues, religious freedom, family and gay rights, the Christian Institute appears to be the quintessential Religious Right institution in Britain. It is deeply embedded in the North East of England and has widespread support. It also has mirrored the ‘check-list’ approach pioneered by the Christian Coalition to assess whether an elected politician is ‘trustworthy’ in the way s/he has voted.

Even here, however, the comparison is not entirely accurate. The Christian Institute engages in comparatively little *political* activity short of letter-writing and petitions. Its chosen method of challenging laws of which it disapproves is in the courts, rather than by legislation and it has little profile in Westminster (which, again, marks it out as distinct from comparable US organisations).

Mike Judge told us that although the Institute has provided briefing materials for politicians, his organisation actually has little power in Westminster:

We simply do not have any entry into any political party that has any sort of influence. You look at the gay marriage issue and all three leaders of the main political parties are in favour of it. The idea that Christians coming together and engaging in that debate somehow have this significant political power is just nonsense.

Through its leadership of the Coalition for Marriage, The Christian Institute is attempting to steer the course of political debate and has gone some way to uniting the groups involved in a common cause. As such, it is easy to see why critics accuse it of being a nascent Religious Right. However, it has failed so far to find a route to have meaningful influence on the legislative process and until it does, direct comparisons to the Religious Right are only partially apposite.

## Christian Concern/Christian Legal Centre

Less than a decade into its existence, Christian Concern has 35,000 supporters on its mailing list and was recently able to co-ordinate a campaign of 150,000 postcards being sent to Downing Street. It began in 2004 as a committee within the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship. In the aftermath of the Channel Four *Dispatches* documentary which featured Andrea Minichiello Williams, Christian Concern became a separate entity.

Christian Concern has since created a further organisation, the Christian Legal Centre. Together, the two groups fight legal cases on behalf of Christians who claim to have been discriminated against because of their faith, while also publicly advocating against liberalisation in laws on abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia.

The major success of Christian Concern in the last five years has been its ability to command the media agenda. On numerous occasions, stories originated by Christian Concern have appeared prominently in *The Daily Mail*, *The Mail on Sunday*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph* (this also applies to the Christian Institute). In the past five years, our research suggests *The Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday* have run at least 45 stories which



have quoted Minichiello Williams, while the two *Telegraph* titles have run at least 30 stories with a comment from her. (The *Mail* papers have carried around 55 comments from Mike Judge of the Christian Institute during the same period, while he commented 65 times in *The Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph*).<sup>35</sup> To put this in context, during the same period, the CEO of Christian NGO Tearfund was mentioned only once in both the *Telegraph* and *Mail* titles, while the Director of the Evangelical Alliance was quoted around 10 times by the *Telegraph* papers and five by *The Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*.<sup>36</sup>

These right-of-centre newspapers have developed a narrative that Christians are discriminated against in Britain and have used the numerous examples provided by Christian Concern to feed it.<sup>37</sup> The relationship between the newspapers and pressure groups has become symbiotic, with the groups feeding stories for an agenda the papers want to promote and the papers providing a platform for the groups' profile to grow. This media campaign has been an essential vehicle for Christian Concern to promote its world-view:

In the last few decades the nation has largely turned her back on Jesus and embraced alternative ideas such as secular liberal humanism, moral relativism and sexual licence. The fruit of this is rotten, and can be seen in widespread family breakdown, immorality and social disintegration. Yet we believe that this nation has a hope, and that hope can be found in Jesus Christ. On this basis we seek to awaken the Church.<sup>38</sup>

Christian Concern has defined what it feels to be 'Christian values' which it claims are 'under increasing attack' from 'liberal-tyranny'.<sup>39</sup> These issues are very similar to those on which the US Religious Right has carved out a similar narrative – abortion, bio-ethics, end-of-life and homosexuality. In the black and white world of Christian Concern, Britain is steadily walking away from Christian values and as a result is leaving itself open to takeover from militant Islam.

Christian Concern runs a training course for young Christians known as the Wilberforce Academy, which includes training in law, politics and education. It is run in conjunction with the Alliance Defense Fund. The Fund was set up by a group of senior figures from the US Religious Right, including Dr James Dobson. It has funded legal cases in the USA in an effort to prevent gay marriage<sup>40</sup> and restrict abortion,<sup>41</sup> and has even begun taking action in cases in Europe.<sup>42</sup>

Exeter College's decision to host the Wilberforce Academy has provoked outcry from liberal commentators, including a graduate, who returned his degree to the Oxford College in protest at "the widespread offence caused by them hiring out the college to a fundamentalist Christian group."<sup>43</sup>

The Christian Legal Centre has also been behind many of the legal cases which have hit the headlines involving Christians in recent years, including those of Olive Jones,<sup>44</sup> and Lydia Playfoot.<sup>45</sup>

What exactly is the nature of Christian Concern's relationship with the United States? Andrea Minichiello Williams told us. "There was no looking to America and seeing what they were doing... I think we're ahead of America. I think America can look to us in terms of the dismantling of the fundamental rubric of the society."<sup>46</sup> What about the funding from the Alliance Defense Fund?

We look to the Alliance Defense Fund as an amazing organisation which has created a legal alliance across the world...which seeks to train lawyers to speak truth in the public sphere, to defend religious liberty. They give us small amounts of money – a thousand pounds here and a thousand pounds there on a case... We have, like every Christian organisation, the very occasional major donor who will write us a cheque for which we're very grateful. A big cheque for us would be £10,000 or £30,000. We've had occasional cheques over that – £50,000 maybe very occasional.<sup>47</sup>

Minichiello Williams told us that the reason Christian Concern is doing its work is that there is a 'Christian bar to office,' elaborating: "if you think a child is best raised with a mother and a father, that is deemed to be discriminatory. Someone might say 'this is scaremongering, this is right-wing or something.'" She doesn't agree:

It's almost as if there's a special hostility reserved for Christians... What very often happens when people are against us is that they will distort the truth. I'm a lawyer, it pains me to say this, but I used to think that judges would be impartial and truthful, but there's a distortion of the truth and there's also name calling... 'The Fundamentalist organisation Christian Concern.'

But isn't she a Fundamentalist?

I'm Fundamentalist about the fundamentals, yes...I have not got a problem with those terms. But the way in which they are used is generally to put us down and make our arguments be dismissed. I actually believe that what we stand for is entirely mainstream Biblical.

One of the most controversial terms used in debates over religious freedom is 'persecution'. We asked Andrea if she thinks it's an appropriate term for the way Christians are treated in Britain:

Disinformation leads to discrimination, discrimination then leads to arrest and silencing and then persecution. We have cases where people do spend the night in cells because they're preaching on the streets... The thing I believe about these people is [those] who are prepared to stand for Jesus today in this way will be the ones who will take the bullets.

It's easy to see why Christian Concern might be branded as part of a nascent British Religious Right. The funding and support from the Alliance Defense Fund is one of the only concrete links between groups in Britain and US. In addition, the style of its campaigning and its swift recourse to legal action are a carbon copy of the way organisations like the ADF operate.

The growth of the organisation in terms of membership and media profile has also been significant. Going from a standing start less than a decade ago to become a group often quoted in the mainstream press and with support from senior clerics like George Carey and Michael Nazir-Ali means Christian Concern looks like a potential lynchpin in Britain's own version of the Religious Right.

However, when we look closely at the access and influence the organisation actually has, a slightly different story emerges. Much has been made of the link between Christian Concern and Tory MP Nadine Dorries. This relationship was featured in the *Dispatches* documentary. But when compared to the United States, we see how insignificant this relationship really is. Dorries is an MP who isn't part of the Government and has no obvious prospect of promotion.<sup>48</sup> Her attempts to influence abortion law have failed to gain significant support.<sup>49</sup>

The central 'scoop' of David Modell's *Dispatches* was a clip of Andrea Minichiello Williams asking Lord Tebbit to put down an amendment to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill to lower the time limit at which abortion is legal. Footage shows him agreeing and the audience is left with the impression that Tebbit will do this. Modell wrote in *The Independent* that, "Lord Tebbit seems persuaded and agrees to the request. Andrea (our lobbyist) wastes no time in whipping out her pre-drafted amendment and hands it to Tebbit, who dutifully takes it away with him. Job done."<sup>50</sup>

This sounds as if Williams successfully managed to get Tebbit to table an amendment written by her. However, we found no evidence of Tebbit ever tabling an amendment to that Bill. It may be surprising to see the ease with which he appears to acquiesce to the demands of Christian Concern, but the fact that he didn't follow up with concrete action undermines Modell's contention that he'd seen concrete evidence of his claim that, "radical Christian groups are not in America – they are here and are aiming to change the laws of our land."<sup>51</sup> However, it is worth noting that there were attempts made to amend the

HFE Bill to lower the number of weeks at which abortion is legal. These amendments were tabled in the House of Commons by Conservative MPs including Christians Edward Leigh, Mark Pritchard and Nadine Dorries. There is no suggestion that these amendments were directly influenced by Christian Concern.<sup>52</sup>

Of course, Christian Concern's links with Dorries and Tebbit show that the group has some influence and access. But to suggest this proves the existence of the kind of Religious Right network seen in the USA is vastly over-stating the case. Dorries is not an influential MP, while Norman Tebbit's days of power are in the past. It will be interesting to chart the course of Christian Concern's growth, but to suggest the activity of this organisation is proof of a large and co-ordinated Religious Right movement existing in Britain is to push the evidence further than it warrants.

## Christian Voice

Another who featured heavily in *Dispatches* was Stephen Green of Christian Voice.<sup>53</sup> Run by Green from a small office in South Wales, Christian Voice has garnered headlines and attention well beyond what would normally be expected of a small fringe group.

Established in 1994 after a Parliamentary attempt to reduce the age of consent for gay sex to 16,<sup>54</sup> it came to national prominence in 2005 over protests against *Jerry Springer: the Opera*. The musical contained scenes which some Christians deemed to be offensive. Green's decision to campaign against the BBC and picket theatres gave him media attention.

*Jerry Springer* had been popular in both Edinburgh and London when the BBC decided to broadcast it on Saturday, 8 January 2005. Premier Christian Radio co-ordinated a complaints campaign,<sup>55</sup> while the Christian Institute attempted to launch a judicial review.<sup>56</sup> However, Christian Voice went much further by publishing the personal details of BBC executives on its website, which led to them receiving threats.<sup>57</sup> BBC Director General Mark Thompson told the audience at the Theos Annual Lecture in 2008 that he had to have a security guard outside his house.<sup>58</sup>

After a series of rallies outside BBC buildings, pickets followed the 2006 national tour of the show. Stephen Green's campaign was joined by Revd George Hargreaves of the Christian Party, John Beyer from Mediawatch UK and James Dowson, from the anti-abortion group UK Lifeleague. The protests varied in size from a few committed souls to large rallies with more than a thousand in attendance.

Green continued the legal fight against the BBC but the House of Lords eventually ruled that the High Court and City of Westminster Magistrates had been correct to say there was no case for the BBC to answer on charges of blasphemy. Ironically, the blasphemy laws themselves were struck from the statute book later in 2008, something which the Christian Institute, among other groups, campaigned hard against.

Green has written of his support for a theocracy in the United Kingdom, saying in an article entitled 'A Model Nation' about Old Testament laws in April 2010, "if those laws were as righteous as the Psalms, the Prophets, our Lord and His Apostles say they were, in Bible times, why would they not be so today?"<sup>59</sup> It is this kind of theology which has brought him severe rebuke from many inside the Church. Former Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church Revd Dr David Peel said Christian Voice was a "small, self-selecting group distinguished mainly by its absurd claim to represent Christians."<sup>60</sup> Revd Joel Edwards, former General Director of the Evangelical Alliance has described Green as a "fundamentalist...extremist" and "the eccentric fringe."<sup>61</sup>

With membership numbers of a few hundred,<sup>62</sup> Green and Christian Voice should be merely a footnote in this discussion, but the level of media exposure he has been given means his public persona is out of proportion with the level of his supporter base. He's been invited to appear on flagship BBC Current Affairs programmes such as *Question Time*<sup>63</sup> and *Newsnight*.<sup>64</sup> National newspapers consult him for his opinion as if he was a spokesperson for mainstream Christian opinion in Britain. One example from December 2009 saw *The Sunday Express* splash its front page with the headline 'Fury Over BBC's Nativity Insult'. It opined, 'The BBC has angered Christians with a TV drama in which the Virgin Mary is branded a prostitute and sex cheat.'<sup>65</sup> The piece gave front page exposure to Stephen Green, who claimed, "You have a huge proportion of militant, liberal atheists who are keen to dump on Christianity."<sup>66</sup> Green later admitted he hadn't seen the programme.

Christian Voice is the organisation which most closely personifies the fears of the secular commentariat in Britain. In it, they see an organisation which would like to see Old Testament laws applied directly and without modification to the twenty-first century United Kingdom. Stephen Green has made pronouncements that mix intolerance and ignorance and has campaigned in many of the same areas as the more vociferous parts of the US Religious Right. His access to mainstream media is not insignificant and some of his campaigns do pre-empt other, more influential organisations (Christian Concern now campaigns on Halal meat, while the Coalition for Marriage petition arrived months after Green had started his own – although Green is not involved in the Coalition for Marriage).

However, the group needs to be put in its context. Without the media exposure given because of Green's outlandish statements, Christian Voice would be a nonentity. His tiny operation has no political influence. Politicians and the vast majority of Christians go out

of their way to disassociate themselves from him. There is no way Christian Voice can really be considered a serious player in any alleged British Religious Right, because it is so cut off from many of its potential 'fellow travellers.' Despite the support of a few hundred like-minded souls, Green is essentially a one-man band, conducting all of Christian Voice's public activities. However distasteful his campaigns are, to compare him to the influential and well-connected groups of the US Religious Right is almost laughable.

## Christian Peoples Alliance/Christian Party

The Christian Peoples Alliance began as an offshoot of the all-party Movement for Christian Democracy in the mid-1990s. A prominent member of the MCD who was instrumental in its founding told us he was surprised to see a separate political party set up, because that had never been its purpose.<sup>67</sup> Some members felt otherwise, however, and since 1999 the CPA has fought local, London and General elections with some limited success.

In the London Mayoral election of 2000, Party Leader Ram Gidoomal came in fifth place, beaten only by the major parties and Ken Livingstone.<sup>68</sup> This result was notable because it saw the newly formed CPA ahead of the more established Green Party, United Kingdom Independence Party and British National Party. New leader Alan Craig won a council seat in Newham in East London in 2002 and was joined by two colleagues in 2006. They provided the only opposition to the ruling Labour group until all three lost their seats in 2010.<sup>69</sup>

In reality, the CPA is a tiny organisation, with no full-time staff.<sup>70</sup> However, the outspoken opinions of its leader have led to media attention. Craig was issued online death threats after leading the campaign against proposals to build a large Mosque near the London Olympic site.<sup>71</sup> He gained more publicity in 2011 when he used a column in the *Church of England Newspaper*<sup>72</sup> which was headlined 'Confronting The Gaystapo.' In the piece, he railed against gay activists, repeatedly comparing them to Nazis. According to Craig, gay rights campaigners wanted to "capture our culture at its deepest level...reconfigure relationships, eliminate the traditional family and hence eradicate stable upbringing for our children." Phrases such as "gay rights stormtroopers," "gay Wermacht" and "pink jackboot" caused a storm, while his conclusion stated that "the hidden hegemonic ambitions of the Gaystapo have been exposed by their plans to annex and redefine marriage."<sup>73</sup> It drew stinging criticism, not least from the Bishop of Buckingham.<sup>74</sup>

Alan Craig told us he wasn't surprised by the uproar. "When I started raising the whole mega Mosque issue [people said] 'racist, Islamophobic, right wing', I was written off." At this point he was keen to draw a distinction between his campaign and that of Christian Voice.

They have a much more theocratic view of society... That is not me. I'm a Christian democrat. In other words I want Christianity to infuse the place but it's not by imposing it... For instance on marriage, I don't use the argument about gay marriage that it's against Gods law – although it is – but I need to persuade you that it's harmful for society, it's harmful for children.<sup>75</sup>

However, when given the chance to row back on his outspoken view of gay rights campaigns, he chose not to, instead adding to his list of accusations.

I believe the gays are at the cutting edge of the attack on Christianity... If you're gay, bless you, that's your choice of lifestyle, I'm very happy to go to dinner with you, go on holiday, I have no problems with gays themselves. I have a huge problem with the gay agenda, which is much, much more than just getting equality for gays.

He was keen to expand on his thesis:

They have a quite deliberate agenda to destroy the family as we understand it... to sexualise our children so that their prime identity is their sexualisation [sic]... Those two are utterly, utterly corrosive to our society.

On the core question of whether there is a Religious Right in Britain, and whether he is part of it, though, Craig was less sure. "When you start talking about the Religious Right people immediately start talking about the BNP... or the EDL. I have to be quite careful in using categories because I absolutely stand against the BNP!"

So why doesn't he think the label applies here? "You won't find a Religious Right here attached to a major party because those that believe what I believe to be good biblical values aren't particularly 'Religious Right'. Quite often I find myself in agreement with the Lib Dems, for instance."

Such an admission – that a liberal party could have the support of a Christian politician for some of its agenda – would of course be anathema to the US Religious Right, but there is reason to believe it is more than simply rhetoric, when placed alongside some of the more 'left wing' aspects of the CPA. Trade Union campaigns are often supported by CPA candidates,<sup>76</sup> the Party's press releases have condemned cuts in public services,<sup>77</sup> while pro-environmental policies have been adopted.<sup>78</sup>

Craig's own personal track record of campaigning against the arms trade, against corporate take-over of local markets and for the rights of poorer people in his ward must also be noted. While his more outlandish statements bore the marks of the Religious Right in the

US, he has worked in other areas which do not fit the bill. He has now left the leadership of the party.

The other explicitly political group in Britain is the Christian Party. Its platform is eclectic but could be summarised as socially and politically conservative. It has proposed a flat rate of income tax, privatisation of the NHS and a referendum on EU membership. Policies which mirror the American Religious Right's concerns include the introduction of education vouchers, the withdrawal of government aid from any agency which promotes abortion or euthanasia, and an end to compulsory sex education.<sup>79</sup>

Leader George Hargreaves gave up a career as a pop songwriter to go into Christian ministry and then politics. He was the headteacher of the East London Christian Choir School which used the Accelerated Christian Learning programme imported from the home-school movement in the USA and was criticised by OFSTED for numerous breaches of regulations.<sup>80</sup>

Hargreaves has been involved in public protests against government policy, for example in January 2007 when he picketed the Houses of Parliament during the passage of the Sexual Orientation Regulations.<sup>81</sup> Dressed in an orange jumpsuit (an allusion to the uniforms worn at Guantanamo Bay) Hargreaves repeated the dire warning he'd given to the *London Evening Standard*: "I have already bought my orange jumpsuit, for no doubt prison awaits us as we fight against the tyranny of the Sexual Orientation Regulations."<sup>82</sup> He is yet to be sent to prison.

Hargreaves first stood for Parliament for the anti-EU Referendum Party in 1997. After brief spells with the Liberal Democrats and the Christian Peoples Alliance, he formed Operation Christian Vote which became The Christian Party. In 2005 he stood as a candidate in the General Election, coming fourth (with a share of 7.6%) in the Scottish seat of Na h-Eileanan an Iar and pushing the Conservatives into fifth place.<sup>83</sup> In the 2009 European Elections, the Christian Peoples Alliance and the Christian Party ran on a joint ticket and polled over a quarter of a million votes.<sup>84</sup>

It is easy to see how the presence of these two parties on Britain political scene make secular liberals (not to mention many Christians) nervous. The rhetoric of both tends to be sensationalist. Superficially, they seem to epitomise a US-style Religious Right, apart, of course, from their size.

However, there is one crucial difference. One of the key characteristics of the US Religious Right is its link to the Republican Party. That is one vital source of power (the other being sheer numerical weight). The comparison with Britain is telling. The fact that both the Christian Party and Christian Peoples Alliance even exist shows a *lack* of co-operation with



mainstream British parties. This means that while many of their views match up with US Religious Right groups (although the CPA has a streak of Social Democracy) their chosen method is entirely different. Despite some minor successes, these parties are electorally insignificant and have a tiny supporter base and it is hard to see how they have had any impact on national policy or even the direction of national political debate.

## Conservative Christian Fellowship

A serious indication of a British Religious Right would be the appearance of the kind of rhetoric used by the Christian Party or the Christian Peoples Alliance in a mainstream British political party. As mentioned in the Introduction, all three main Westminster parties have Christian groups closely affiliated to them. The Liberal Democrat Christian Forum (LDCF) and the Christian Socialist Movement (CSM) cover their respective parties, but for obvious reasons, our interest falls on the group most likely to foster a political and theological nexus on the right of the spectrum: the Conservative Christian Fellowship (CCF).

Founded in 1990 by David Burrowes and Tim Montgomerie, the CCF has grown to become a potent and high-profile group within the Conservative Party. Burrowes has been MP for Enfield-Southgate since 2005 and is still chair, while Montgomerie founded the successful Conservative Home website. The CCF is based at the heart of the Conservative Campaign Headquarters (as the CSM is at Labour HQ).

The growth of the CCF in a relatively short time from an organisation started by two students to a significant group within the Party has caused media speculation over the nature of its role. A major article in *The Financial Times* in 2010 suggested Montgomerie “had been influenced by US Christian conservatism.”<sup>85</sup>

The Executive Director of the Conservative Christian Fellowship, Colin Bloom, gave us a frank assessment of the role of his group: “CCF is the bridge between the Party, Number 10 and Parliament and the mainstream Christian world – churches, charities, media, and Christian leaders. We don’t lobby and we don’t write policy.”<sup>86</sup>

Doesn’t the CCF wield some influence within the Party? “Of course we do, we’re at the heart of what you see here [at CCHQ] but we’re very careful to respect the fact that ours is just a voice – the Conservative Muslim group, women’s group, Conservative Future all have a voice.” Bloom suggests that even the presence of the CCF in the building is enough to worry liberal commentators.

We don’t recognise what *The Guardian* writes about us as being this powerhouse who has hundreds of Members of Parliament, some kind of Bilderberg group<sup>87</sup>

within the Conservative Party. If only we had that much influence!... We're not given preferential treatment... We do most of our arguing and persuading in private and that's how it should be.

Bloom gave some of the other Christian groups discussed in this report short shrift, describing them as "our more exotic brethren." Interestingly, he does believe they constitute a Religious Right in Britain but:

They are so marginalised where it matters that they're irrelevant. They're only relevant to a lazy journalistic clique that try and create a polemic for good TV or good radio... They want to get the most extreme voices and say 'you represent the Evangelical Christian Right' – and these people are mad! I'm not going to name names; I have to work with these people!

While he freely admits close links with the Republicans in the USA, Bloom also rejects a central conceit of the American Religious Right – that for an evangelical Christian support for the Republican Party is obligatory.

It would just be offensive in the extreme to suggest that, and I think that's where the Americans probably do go too far... That's neither the British way, nor the Christian way. It would be completely wrong of me to say 'you cannot be a Christian if you vote Labour,' I would never say that... Am I glad that people like Stephen Timms, Gavin Shaker, Jim Dobbin and David Lammy are in the Labour Party? Yes I am...in the same way we've got David Burrowes, Claire Perry, Gary Streeter, Fiona Bruce and loads of other Christian Conservatives.

Bloom suggested why he perceives a difference from the USA: "In the States, it is the pro-life argument that is the most divisive. If you're pro-choice you're 99% guaranteed to be a Democrat. If you're Christian and pro-life you really are corralled into [being Republican]."

Tim Montgomerie remains an important and influential individual in the Conservative and Christian scene, with access to ministers and favour with rank and file members through his Conservative Home website. The site is bankrolled by Tory donor Lord Ashcroft, and his patronage further bolsters Montgomerie's influence.

However, any straightforward association of Montgomerie with a Religious Right vanguard within the Conservative Party is somewhat undermined by his pro-gay marriage intervention, in February 2012, in which he said that "marriage is probably the most important Conservative institution and excluding people from it is therefore excluding people from Conservatism to a significant extent."<sup>88</sup> This is not the kind of rhetoric found on the US Religious Right. In fact, *The Independent* was so taken aback that it announced,

“Prominent Conservative has broken ranks with his allies on the ‘religious right’ by declaring his support for the Government’s controversial plans to legalise gay marriage.”<sup>89</sup>

Elsewhere within the Conservative Party, the right-leaning Cornerstone Group has significant Christian membership. The group is focussed on some of the same ground as the US Religious Right. Its slogan is ‘Faith, Flag and Family’, and its website claims the group stands for “traditional marriage, family, proper pride in our nation’s distinctive qualities, lower taxation and deregulation.”<sup>90</sup> It also has some high-profile Christian members. Chair Edward Leigh MP is a committed Catholic while Fiona Bruce MP, David Burrowes MP and Nadine Dorries MP are among the well-known Christian faces. It’s from among the membership of right-leaning groups like Cornerstone that opposition to David Cameron’s support for gay marriage has been strongest.<sup>91</sup>

In our interview with him, Colin Bloom remarked that a number of the groups interviewed for this report “define themselves by what they’re against” rather than what they are for.<sup>92</sup> This was a telling and perceptive remark, providing an important point of comparison with the broad agenda of organisations like the CCF and one that can be seen in the debate around ‘Christianophobia.’

A letter to *The Daily Telegraph* in 2006 accused the Labour Government of ‘Christianophobia.’<sup>93</sup> Signed by, among others, Ade Amooba from Christian Concern and George Hargreaves of the Christian Party, it was used in the context of the Sexual Orientation Regulations. The use of this term was significant because within a year it was being used in Parliament. Conservative MP Mark Pritchard initiated a Westminster Hall debate (a Parliamentary device for gaining attention for an issue, which *The Guardian* immediately labelled as potentially “the first stirrings of a US-style political religious right”)<sup>94</sup> during which he and others spoke of “increasing marginalisation of Britain’s Christian history, heritage and traditions.”<sup>95</sup>

The issue of whether, as the debate claimed, there is an “assault...on [Britain’s] much-loved Christian heritage and traditions”, is beyond the scope of this report. What is relevant and is worth noting is that Alistair Burt, a Conservative MP and former member of the Council of the Evangelical Alliance, who took part in the debate, remarked that “the Christian faith has faced much more serious attacks than the odd rant from secular or humanist groups in British society.”<sup>96</sup> If we see in the activity of some Christian groups a narrow agenda and defensive tone that is also typical of the US Religious Right, we also see, particularly within the activity of many Christians within the Conservative party, a sense of perspective (such as Burt’s) and a breadth of agenda (such as Bloom’s and Montgomerie’s) that is an important counterpoint.

Concrete evidence of a concerted and successful effort by the Conservative Party to promote socially conservative values at the behest of Christians would be a serious

indication of the existence of a Religious Right in Britain. But there isn't sufficient proof that there is any such effort.

Undoubtedly, there are elements within the Conservative Party who would like to see a more socially conservative agenda. However, these are not limited to the Conservative Party, as the faith, family and flag rhetoric of the Blue Labour movement, or the cross-party membership of the All-Party Pro-Life group should remind us. Moreover, as outlined in the introduction, having a socially conservative agenda should not, in itself, be treated as something inherently suspect: democracy not only permits but needs different groups with different commitments to advocate and campaign for their concerns.

In addition to this, it is worth noting that, at the moment, the religiously-motivated, socially-conservative element within the Tory party appears to be at odds with party leadership. David Cameron's willingness to seek acceptance for gay marriage and his apparent lack of interest in abortion law reform may be partially explained by the coalition with the Liberal Democrats. However, it appears that those who would push a more socially conservative line are swimming against the tide in the Conservative Party.

This is where the comparison between the US and British is perhaps starkest. The right-of-centre party in the USA is clearly the home for conservative Christians who want a repeal of abortion rights and a restriction of gay marriage. The right-of-centre party in Britain is certainly home to some who hold these views, but their influence and numbers are so much smaller, that claims of a fully-fledged Religious Right in Britain appear to be fanciful.

## Evangelical Alliance

The Evangelical Alliance has a history stretching back to 1846 and today claims to represent around two million evangelicals in Britain.<sup>97</sup> The EA lobbies in Parliament and makes contributions to the legislative process in areas like gay marriage but maintains a lower profile than other organisations. It also campaigns on a number of other areas which wouldn't be considered 'Religious Right', such as adoption, alcohol pricing and poverty.

The Alliance played an important role in assisting Conservative MP Gary Streeter and the cross-party Christians in Parliament group in their inquiry into whether British Christians are marginalised.

A key finding of the report was that "Christians in Britain face problems in living out their faith and these problems have been mostly caused and exacerbated by social, cultural and legal changes over the past decade."<sup>98</sup> It also claimed that:

There is a problem with how Christianity is understood and handled in Britain today. This problem is legal and cultural. It plays out on a national, local and personal level through laws, policies and regulations that restrict the freedom of Christians to articulate and live out their beliefs.<sup>99</sup>

Although this is a conclusion that would be supported by many of the organisations discussed in the report, there are important differences. First, the language is cautiously considered and care has been taken not to paint in broad brushstrokes. The report goes on to say:

In some cases considerable effort is made to accommodate religious belief, with employers willing to make arrangements to ensure that employees do not have to participate in activities which would infringe their convictions. [However] in many cases, there is a failure to achieve sufficient accommodation, and in some cases to even attempt to understand or accommodate belief and its manifestation.<sup>100</sup>

Second, the report makes clear that to use the word ‘persecution’ is “to minimise the suffering of Christians in many parts of the world who face repression, imprisonment and death if they worship, preach or convert.”<sup>101</sup> In a vital contradistinction to (and in a sense, rebuke of) the position of some other groups already discussed, the report goes on to say ‘Some of the legal activity, associated campaigning and media coverage has been unwise and possibly counter-productive to the positive role that Christians play in society.’<sup>102</sup> This reasoned tone, sense of perspective and guarded criticism of fellow Christians represents a significant difference from the US Religious Right.

We spoke to the General Director Steve Clifford to ascertain how he feels about claims of a Religious Right in Britain. He said the press misunderstood the situation and that although British evangelicals had “common ground with North American evangelicals in certain areas, there are also very, very significant differences,” not least in the understanding of what being ‘evangelical’ entailed. “The word [evangelical] at times is difficult, because although there are things that we hold common in terms of theological statements, how that is outworked in political practice and social engagement would be different.”<sup>103</sup>

Clifford said that far from replicating the Religious Right, many British evangelicals are actively looking to avoid such a situation.

My experience is that a lot of the evangelicals that I hang out with – from quite a wide cross-section – shake their heads and say ‘we really don’t want to go down that pathway – the culture wars-type approach is not something that we want to copy from our brothers and sisters in North America’.

However, unlike his predecessor Joel Edwards, Clifford was reluctant to criticise or repudiate the tactics of British-based groups like Christian Voice: "We're family together. I look across the Christian community and I see us as the body of Christ". He did though outline the EA's particular approach to public activity:

We want to model a way of engagement at Westminster and the media, both national and local, which is gracious in tone, is prepared to bring a challenge, to be a prophetic voice, but to do it in such a way which is acknowledging that we're committed to the well-being of all, not simply to our particular group.<sup>104</sup>

He is also clear about being part of the mainstream political process, rather than a factional lobbying group, in language that is far removed from the US Religious Right (and, indeed, some British Christian groups):

We would approach engagement with Westminster on the basis that Britain isn't a Christian country but there is a wonderfully rich heritage which has made us who we are today. We would want to remind Britain of its heritage, of its culture, tradition, its Christian influence that's been there but at the end of the day recognise that we live in a democratic nation and at times decisions will be made with regard to legislation which we might not agree with.<sup>105</sup>

So is the Evangelical Alliance part of a Religious Right? There is some evidence to suggest that it is interested in many of the same policy areas as the American Religious Right. The involvement of the EA in the Coalition for Marriage, for example, indicates that it is willing to be part of a broader federation of Christian groups which seek a socially conservative agenda.

However, the Alliance's insistence that poverty alleviation and care for the environment are of importance to evangelicals places it at odds with the classic Religious Right position. In addition to this, we come up against a familiar problem. The Evangelical Alliance is not officially or unofficially affiliated to a party. To describe an organisation as 'Religious Right' as the term is understood through the American experience, it must have concrete links with a right-wing political force. Although the EA does have close relationships with Conservatives such as Gary Streeter, this is not to the exclusion of other parties. Indeed, the Council of the Evangelical Alliance contains a sitting and former Labour MP as well as the President of the Liberal Democrats.<sup>106</sup>

Religious Right organisations seek to win power for conservative Republican candidates on the basis that they, and they alone, will legislate in the 'right way'. This is clearly not part of the Evangelical Alliance's goals or strategy. It seeks to support and be supported by politicians of all stripes, regardless of party affiliation.

## questions of finance

When proposing the existence of a British Religious Right, it is often suggested that there is a network of well-resourced organisations. ‘Well funded and well organised’ is the commonly-used phrase, with the implication being that they have a special advantage as against other campaigning groups in civil society. In the light of this, it is important to ask how well funded are the organisations in question?

The first thing that must be noted is that there are various kinds of organisations represented in this report: some are charities, others are private companies, others political parties. With different accounting procedures for charities and companies, it is hard to draw firm conclusions on the financial strength of organisations.

Christian Concern/Christian Legal Centre is a registered company. Alongside the company there operates a charity called Faith, Truth and Hope. In the year ending March 2011 that charity had an income of £195,000. In the table below, we have combined this figure with annual turnover of the company from annual accounts lodged at Companies House. These data show that Christian Concern/Christian Legal Centre increased their overall income considerably between 2009 and 2011. This increase should not be surprising as it coincides with a period of greater activity and publicity, but it is still worthy of note and, alongside a commensurate increase in Christian Institute’s income, is perhaps one of the factors that most stimulated speculation about the growth of US-style ‘Religious Right’ in Britain.

The Christian People’s Alliance – which until recently was led by one of this report’s interviewees, Alan Craig – is a (small) registered political party. Financially speaking, its ‘high water mark’ came in 2004, when its total income was £141,117. This had dipped to just over £26,000 by 2006, then recovered to nearly £50,000 in 2007. As we see below, it has subsequently struggled financially and at the ballot box (donations have dropped, and the party has lost all of its council seats).

*Fig. 1. Annual income/turnover of Christian organisations*

Financial year ending	Evangelical Alliance	The Christian Institute	CARE	Christian Concern etc.	Christian Peoples Alliance
2012	2,359,693	Not yet filed	2,411,206	Not yet filed	Not yet filed
2011	2,523,292	2,406,104	2,118,332	906,937	17,949
2010	2,229,941	1,739,107	2,317,087	/	7,810
2009	2,654,134	1,625,150	2,573,694	296,669	7,269
2008	2,562,989	1,462,134	2,431,642	/	6,129

In terms of annual income, organisations like CARE and the Evangelical Alliance would sit amongst the largest 5% of charities in the United Kingdom, with voluntary income exceeding £2 million per annum. That said, they are not amongst those that attract the most support from the public – i.e., the top 1% of voluntary sector agencies that according to the Charity Commission attract a remarkable 68% of all British charitable income.

Indeed, the largest explicitly religious charity in Britain is the Salvation Army. Its voluntary income in year ending March 2011 was £98,000,000, dwarfing all the organisations together which are said to constitute the ‘well funded’ and ‘well organised’ Religious Right. In fact, there are individual church congregations whose voluntary income exceeds that of any single organisation said to be part of the Religious Right. It must also be noted that among the agencies mentioned in this report, some are exclusively focused on campaigning on public issues (e.g., Christian People’s Alliance) while others (e.g., the Evangelical Alliance) operate a range of activities, some of which have little to do with public affairs as such. The resources at their disposal are not necessarily focused on campaigning.

Amongst other – even opposing – interest groups, charities or campaigns, do the organisations that are said to constitute an emerging US-style Religious Right wield exceptional financial power? Do they out-earn and out-spend other campaign groups? As we see from the table below, while the groups said to constitute a Religious Right certainly have substantial resources at their command they do not stand out as particularly well-funded.

Fig. 2. Annual income/turnover of other organisations

Financial year ending	British Refugee Council	Campaign to Protect Rural England	Stonewall	British Humanist Association
2012	Not filed	Not filed	Not filed	Not filed
2011	16,526,000	4,887,406	3,859,996	1,105,342
2010	20,103,000	3,720,877	3,847,241	931,317
2009	18,024,000	3,477,143	3,843,063	885,105
2008	18,820,000	4,259,717	3,059,255	942,245

Of course, the amount of money that the organisations have at their disposal is not the only issue of interest. It is worth asking where they get the money from. Do they receive large sums from a small number of wealthy benefactors, or are they in fact relatively broad-based movements which are funded by small supporter donations? Do they receive state funding? Do they receive money from overseas?

On this last point, it’s often suggested that some groups receive funding from like-minded, but better funded, groups in the United States. This implies improper foreign influence,



and reflects the familiar complaint that the causes of the Religious Right organisations are not home grown, but imported or copied from the United States. A money trail would be firm evidence in favour of these claims.

Of the agencies we interviewed, only one (Christian Legal Centre) said that it had received funds directly from the United States (the Alliance Defense Fund). In financial terms, the ADF dwarfs the groups that are said to constitute a British Religious Right (with an annual income of around \$35,000,000). The interviewee stated that the donations from ADF amounted to ‘a thousand pounds here or there or a thousand pounds there’. As we have seen elsewhere in this report, others (e.g., the Christian Institute) deny that they receive financial support from the US.

Domestically, there are less than a handful of individuals who are known to be interested in funding religiously-linked, socially-conservative causes. Scottish businessman Brian Souter, founder of the Stagecoach group, funded a private referendum on the retention of Section 2A (the Scottish equivalent of England’s Section 28). Latterly, however, he has turned his personal attention to funding the Scottish National Party while the Souter Charitable Trust focuses on poverty relief initiatives both here and overseas. The Vardy Foundation has funded schools that have been accused of teaching creationism (though *Tribune* magazine settled out of the High Court in a libel action brought by Peter Vardy against their claims that he was promulgating creationism in academies funded by the Vardy Foundation). Tory Peer Lord Edmiston is a philanthropist, funding a network of evangelical media charities. None of these are engaged in campaigning activity.

In short, some of these agencies are reasonably well funded, while others are not. Nor does it seem that they are inappropriately funded. It’s worth noting that none of them receives money from either central or local government, and all are funded largely through private subscription and donation. Moreover, evangelical money – whether in large or small donations – naturally follows evangelical interests. Since evangelical interests in the United Kingdom have remained broad, and not solely ‘political’ in the sense of being orientated around public campaigns on socially conservative issues, major donors are as likely to be funding poverty relief, public education or evangelism as they are to be funding campaigning activities.

## references

- 1 BBC Website, 7 September 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/British-politics-14817816> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 2 Ben Quinn, 'Christian activists poised to win concessions on abortion after 40 years', *The Guardian*, 29 August 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/28/christain-activists-grab-moral-agenda> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 3 For information on this see John Capon *And There Was Light: The Story of the Nationwide Festival of Light* (Lutterworth, 1972); Amy C. Whipple, 'Speaking for Whom? The 1971 Festival of Light and the Search for the 'Silent Majority'', *Contemporary British History*, 24.3, p. 319-39.
- 4 'Evangelicals fund MPs ahead of Embryo Vote', *The Independent on Sunday*, 30 March 2008, p. 1.
- 5 Leading article, 'An unsuitable case for charity', *The Independent on Sunday*, 30 March 2008, [www.independent.co.uk/opinion/leading-articles/leading-article-an-unsuitable-case-for-charity-802528.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/leading-articles/leading-article-an-unsuitable-case-for-charity-802528.html) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Nola Leach, interviewed April 2012 in Westminster.
- 8 Letter to supporters from Revd Lyndon Bowring, July 2011, CARE website, <http://www.care.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Lyndon-Letter-June2011web.pdf> p. 2. Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 9 Alton later left the Liberal Democrats and continued his career in Parliament as an independent.
- 10 Former CARE intern interviewed March 2012 in London.
- 11 Email from Nola Leach, September 2012.
- 12 Advert for 'Sex and the City: Redeeming sex today' conference, Anglican Mainstream Website, 29 December 2008, [www.anglican-mainstream.net/2008/12/29/sex-and-the-city-redeeming-sex-today/](http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/2008/12/29/sex-and-the-city-redeeming-sex-today/) Accessed 17 June 2012
- 13 R. Booth and J. Ball 'Gay cure' Christian charity funded 20 MPs' interns', *The Guardian*, 14 April 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/13/gay-cure-christian-charity-mps-interns> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 14 Christian Institute website, <http://www.christian.org.uk/mpvotes.php> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 15 Mike Judge, interviewed by telephone July 2012.
- 16 Sarah Pulliam, 'Romney's Speech Strengthens Theologian's Endorsement', *Christianity Today*, 12 July 2007, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/decemberweb-only/149-53.0.html?start=1> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 17 'Religious Freedom Hinges on the Courts', Alliance Defense Fund website, [www.alliancedefensefund.org/Home/Detail/4420](http://www.alliancedefensefund.org/Home/Detail/4420) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 18 Sheryl H. Blunt, 'Cool on Climate Change', *Christianity Today*, 26 September 2006, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/october/8.26.html> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 19 Wayne Grudem, *Politics: According to the Bible*, (Zondervan, 2010) p. 574.
- 20 *Marginalising Christians*, (The Christian Institute, 2009) pp. 71-73.

- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Christian Institute Trustees' report and financial statements 2010, Charity Commission website, [www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends74%5C0001004774\\_ac\\_20101231\\_e\\_c.pdf](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends74%5C0001004774_ac_20101231_e_c.pdf) p. 21. Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 23 Ann Widdecombe, 'Christianity targeted by the police yet again', *The Daily Express*, 28 September 2011, [www.express.co.uk/ourcomments/view/274073](http://www.express.co.uk/ourcomments/view/274073) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 24 BBC website, 'Christian cafe 'warned over homophobic Bible verses'', [www.bbc.co.uk/news/British-england-lancashire-15072408](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/British-england-lancashire-15072408) Accessed 17 June 2012 (The Institute's claim that the police had 'banned' the Bible is misleading: Christian Institute website, 'Video: Police ban Bible from Christian cafe' [www.christian.org.uk/news/video-police-ban-bible-from-christian-cafe/](http://www.christian.org.uk/news/video-police-ban-bible-from-christian-cafe/)) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 25 BBC website, 'Supreme Court rules against Christian registrar', 9 March 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/8557966.stm> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 26 Nelson Jones, 'Praying for an end to prayers', New Statesman website, 2 December 2011, [www.newstatesman.com/blogs/nelson-jones/2011/12/council-prayers-local-nss](http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/nelson-jones/2011/12/council-prayers-local-nss) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 28 The Christian Institute, Trustees' report and financial statements 2006, Charity Commission website, [http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends74%5C0001004774\\_AC\\_20061231\\_E\\_C.PDF](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends74%5C0001004774_AC_20061231_E_C.PDF) p. 6. Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 29 *Bankrolling Gay Proselytism*, (The Christian Institute, 1999), [www.christian.org.uk/html-publications/bankrollinggayproselytism.htm](http://www.christian.org.uk/html-publications/bankrollinggayproselytism.htm) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 30 Christian Institute press release, 'Graphic sex lessons to follow Section 28 repeal', 28 March 2001, [www.christian.org.uk/press-releases/graphic-sex-lessons-to-follow-section-28-repeal/](http://www.christian.org.uk/press-releases/graphic-sex-lessons-to-follow-section-28-repeal/) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 31 BBC website, 'Gay groups claim court victory', 6 July 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/821896.stm> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Victoria Combe, 'Campaigning charity told to steer clear of politics', *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 August 2001, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/1338340/Campaigning-charity-told-to-steer-clear-of-politics.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/1338340/Campaigning-charity-told-to-steer-clear-of-politics.html) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 34 'Cruel' campaign leads to apology, *The Church of England Newspaper*, 4 November 2011, [www.religiousintelligence.org/churchnewspaper/news/%E2%80%98cruel%E2%80%99-campaign-leads-to-apology/](http://www.religiousintelligence.org/churchnewspaper/news/%E2%80%98cruel%E2%80%99-campaign-leads-to-apology/) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 35 The old problem for socially conservative pressure groups rears its head here. If the 'silent majority' really is in agreement with 'Christian values,' why are so few of them actually in any way demonstrating their Christian faith through Sunday attendance?
- 36 Source: [www.telegraph.co.uk/www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/www.dailymail.co.uk) – January 2012.
- 37 Source: [www.telegraph.co.uk/www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/www.dailymail.co.uk) – December 2011.
- 38 We don't aim to judge the merits of the argument, merely to note it.

- 38 Christian Concern website, [www.christianconcern.com/about](http://www.christianconcern.com/about) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 39 Andrea Minichiello Williams, 'Is this equality? As a lawyer I never thought I'd have to defend Christians in a Christian nation', *Mail On Sunday*, 24 April 2011, [www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1379970/Is-equality-As-lawyer-I-thought-I-d-defend-Christians-Christian-nation.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1379970/Is-equality-As-lawyer-I-thought-I-d-defend-Christians-Christian-nation.html) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 40 'Judges rule to redefine marriage', Alliance Defense Fund website, <http://www.alliancedefensefund.org/Marriage> Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 41 'Guarding the sanctity of human life', Alliance Defense Fund website, [www.alliancedefensefund.org/Life](http://www.alliancedefensefund.org/Life) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 42 'The Threat of the ACLU, Planned Parenthood, and their Radical International Allies', Alliance Defense Fund website, <http://www.alliancedefensefund.org/Global> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 43 Michael Amherst, 'Exeter College should not welcome these Christian fundamentalists', *The Guardian* website, 23 March 2012, [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2012/mar/23/exeter-college-christian-fundamentalists-protest?CMP=twtd\\_fd](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2012/mar/23/exeter-college-christian-fundamentalists-protest?CMP=twtd_fd) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 44 Nigel Bunyan, 'Christian teacher sacked for offering to pray for sick pupil', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 20 December 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/6850604/Christian-teacher-sacked-for-offering-to-pray-for-sick-pupil.html> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 45 'Purity' ring case in High Court', BBC website, 22 June 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6229098.stm> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 46 Andrea Minichiello Williams, interviewed July 2011 in central London.
- 47 Ibid. We have been unable to verify these figures.
- 48 Indeed, the Prime Minister made a joke at her expense in the House of Commons (Hélène Mulholland, 'Nadine Dorries storms out of PMQs after David Cameron quip', *The Guardian*, 7 September 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/sep/07/nadine-dorries-david-cameron-quip> Accessed 17 June 2012), while she had the Conservative whip withdrawn after entering the reality television programme, 'I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here' in November 2012 ('Nadine Dorries suspended as Tory MP in I'm a Celebrity row', BBC website, 6 November 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/British-politics-20217901> Accessed 10 November 2012).
- 49 'MPs reject call to change abortion advice', BBC website, 7 September 2011, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/British-politics-14817816](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/British-politics-14817816) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 50 David Modell, 'Dispatches: Making a giant leap of faith', *The Independent*, 19 May 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/dispatches-making-a-giant-leap-of-faith-830550.html> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 51 David Modell, 'Christian fundamentalists fighting spiritual battle in Parliament', *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 2008, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/1975933/Christian-fundamentalists-fighting-spiritual-battle-in-Parliament.html?pageNum=2](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/1975933/Christian-fundamentalists-fighting-spiritual-battle-in-Parliament.html?pageNum=2) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 52 Hansard, HC (series 5) vol. 476, cols. 166-286 (20 May 2008) <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080520/debtext/80520-0021.htm>, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080520/debtext/80520-0021.htm>

- parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080520/debtext/80520-0022.htm,  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080520/debtext/80520-0023.htm>,  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm071205/halltext/71205h0001.htm> - 07120550000001 Accessed 10 November 2012.
- 53 Although it shares its name with a defunct American group, there are no links.
- 54 Stuart Jeffries, 'The moral minority', *The Guardian*, 11 January 2005, [www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jan/11/broadcasting.bbc1](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jan/11/broadcasting.bbc1) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 55 Dominic Timms, 'BBC escapes censure over Springer broadcast', *The Guardian* 9 May 2005, [www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/may/09/bbc.broadcasting](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/may/09/bbc.broadcasting) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 56 'Springer Opera legal bid rejected', BBC website, 16 June 2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/4098752.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/4098752.stm) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 57 Steven Morris and Owen Gibson, 'Christian protest targets BBC boss', *The Guardian* website, 11 January 2005, [www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jan/11/broadcasting.religion1](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jan/11/broadcasting.religion1) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 58 Martin Beckford, 'BBC boss says Islam should be treated more sensitively than Christianity', *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 October 2008, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/3198804/BBC-boss-says-Islam-should-be-treated-more-sensitively-than-Christianity.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/3198804/BBC-boss-says-Islam-should-be-treated-more-sensitively-than-Christianity.html) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 59 Stephen Green, 'A Model Nation', *Christian Voice*, April 2010, [www.christianvoice.org.uk/?page\\_id=949](http://www.christianvoice.org.uk/?page_id=949) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 60 Terry Kirby, 'Christian Voice director escapes prosecution over anti-gay literature', *The Independent*, 29 September 2006, [www.independent.co.uk/news/British/crime/christian-voice-director-escapes-prosecution-over-antigay-literature-418003.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/British/crime/christian-voice-director-escapes-prosecution-over-antigay-literature-418003.html) Accessed 17 June 2012
- 61 Joel Edwards, 'Rev Joel Edwards responds to Dispatches episode: 'In God's Name'', *Christian Today* website, 28 May 2008, <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/rev.joel.edwards.responds.to.dispatches.episode.in.gods.name/19105.htm> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 62 Jeffries, 'The moral minority', [www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jan/11/broadcasting.bbc1](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jan/11/broadcasting.bbc1) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 63 'This week's [Question Time] panel', BBC website, 28 September 2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/question\\_time/4286546.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/question_time/4286546.stm) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 64 'Thursday 16 December 2010', BBC website, 16 December 2010, [www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/fromthewebteam/2010/12/thursday\\_16\\_december\\_2010.html?postId=104262215](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/fromthewebteam/2010/12/thursday_16_december_2010.html?postId=104262215) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 65 David Stephenson, 'Fury over BBC's Nativity insult', *The Sunday Express*, 19 December 2010, <http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/218290/Fury-over-BBC-s-Nativity-insult> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Interviewed January 2012.

- 68 BBC website, 'Livingstone triumphs in London', [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/British\\_politics/vote2000/london/](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/British_politics/vote2000/london/) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 69 'Alan Craig and CPA Councillors Lose Seats in Newham Labour Tsunami', Christian Peoples Alliance website 7 May 2010, [http://www.cpaparty.org.uk/index\\_printsafe.php?page=news&id=348](http://www.cpaparty.org.uk/index_printsafe.php?page=news&id=348) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 70 Christian Peoples Alliance website, 'CPA Party People', [www.cpaparty.org.uk/?page=people](http://www.cpaparty.org.uk/?page=people) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 71 Stephen Adams, 'YouTube 'obituary' for anti-mosque councillor', *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 November 2007, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/1568614/YouTube-obituary-for-anti-mosque-councillor.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/1568614/YouTube-obituary-for-anti-mosque-councillor.html) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 72 An evangelical publication, independent of the Church itself.
- 73 Alan Craig, 'Confronting the Gaystapo', *The Church of England Newspaper*, 28 October 2011.
- 74 Alan Wilson, 'Hitler and the 'Gaystapo' have no place in gay rights debate', *The Guardian* website, 9 November 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/nov/09/gaystapo-alan-craig-gay-rights> Accessed 10 June 2012.
- 75 Alan Craig, interviewed December 2011 in east London.
- 76 'Murdoch and Cameron Attack on BBC Must be Reversed say Christian BBC trade unionists', CPA website, 15 July 2011, <http://www.cpaparty.org.uk/index.php?page=news&id=386&highlight=trade%20union> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 77 'Call for Churches to Combat Government cuts and Join Striking Workers', CPA website, 22 September 2011, <http://www.cpaparty.org.uk/index.php?page=news&id=392&highlight=cuts> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 78 'A New Ecology for Living', CPA website, <http://www.cpaparty.org.uk/index.php?page=issues&id=19&further=1> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 79 'Policies', The Christian Party website, <http://www.christianparty.org.uk/policies.html> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 80 East London Christian Choir School Independent school progress monitoring inspection report July 2011.
- 81 These regulations outlaw discrimination by businesses on the grounds of sexual orientation.
- 82 'Anglican bishop threatens to close youth clubs in protest at gay rights', *London Evening Standard*, 28 November 2006, [www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-23376257-anglican-bishop-threatens-to-close-youth-clubs-in-protest-at-gay-rights.do](http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-23376257-anglican-bishop-threatens-to-close-youth-clubs-in-protest-at-gay-rights.do) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 83 'Constituency profile: Na h-Eileanan an Iar', *The Guardian* website, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/constituency/1433/na-h-eileanan-an-iar> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 84 BBC website, 'European Election 2009: British results', 8 June 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/elections/euro/09/html/Britishregion\\_999999.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/elections/euro/09/html/Britishregion_999999.stm) Accessed 12 June 2012.
- 85 Chris Cook, 'Christian Tories rewrite party doctrine', *The Financial Times Magazine*, 12 February 2010, [www.ft.com/cms/s/0/12400596-16ac-11df-aa09-00144feab49a.html](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/12400596-16ac-11df-aa09-00144feab49a.html) Accessed 17 June 2012

- 86 Colin Bloom, interviewed December 2011 in Westminster.
- 87 A secretive meeting of politicians and economists.
- 88 Andrew Grice, 'Prominent Tory disowns 'religious right' and supports gay marriage', *The Independent*, 6 February 2012, [www.independent.co.uk/news/British/politics/prominent-tory-disowns-religious-right-and-supports-gay-marriage-6579531.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/British/politics/prominent-tory-disowns-religious-right-and-supports-gay-marriage-6579531.html) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Cornerstone Group website, <http://cornerstone-group.org.uk/about/> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 91 Andrew Grice, 'Tory MPs go to war over gay marriage', *The Independent*, 17 January 2012, [www.independent.co.uk/news/British/politics/tory-mps-go-to-war-over-gay-marriage-6290679.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/British/politics/tory-mps-go-to-war-over-gay-marriage-6290679.html) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 92 Colin Bloom, interviewed December 2011 in Westminster.
- 93 'Letters to the Daily Telegraph: Anti-Christian law', *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 July 2006, [www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/3626342/Letters-to-The-Daily-Telegraph.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/3626342/Letters-to-The-Daily-Telegraph.html) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 94 Mike Ion, 'Christianophobia? I don't think so', *The Guardian* website, 6 December 2007, [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/dec/06/christianophobiaibritaini](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/dec/06/christianophobiaibritaini) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 95 *Hansard*, 5 December 2007, [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm071205/halltext/71205h0001.htm#07120550000001](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm071205/halltext/71205h0001.htm#07120550000001) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 'About us', Evangelical Alliance website, <http://www.eauk.org/connect/about-us/> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 98 'Clearing the Ground Inquiry: Executive Summary', <http://eauk.org/current-affairs/publications/upload/Executive-summary.pdf> p.1.
- 99 Ibid. p.2.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Ibid. p.1.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Steve Clifford, interviewed March 2011 by telephone.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 'Council members', Evangelical Alliance website, [www.eauk.org/connect/about-us/whos-who/council-members.cfm](http://www.eauk.org/connect/about-us/whos-who/council-members.cfm) Accessed 27 June 2012.

## is there a Religious Right in Britain?

Having considered the case of some of the main groups that are perceived to be part of a British Religious Right, we will now look to provide an answer to the question we set out with. Is there any validity in the claim which has been made repeatedly that there is an emerging Religious Right in Britain?

### examining characteristics

In order to answer this question fully, we must first return to our definition of the US Religious Right:

The Religious Right is not simply socially conservative and Christian. It's a large-scale, well-organised, well-funded network of groups which has a clear and limited set of policy aims deemed as 'Christian', which it seeks to deliver through the vehicle of the Republican Party.

In this short taxonomy, there are five separate conditions which must be met if claims of a British Religious Right are to be justified.

#### 1) a limited agenda of interests

This certainly describes some of the groups we examined. Social issues such as abortion and gay rights feature heavily in their work. However, as pointed out, some of them have a brief which goes well beyond what would be considered 'home territory' for a US Religious Right group, for example the environmental, poverty-fighting causes of the Evangelical Alliance, or the anti-slavery work of CARE.



## 2) mono-party affiliation

While this obviously pertains to the Conservative Christian Fellowship, none of the other groups studied has exclusive ties to the Conservative Party. Those that do have some links (CARE, Evangelical Alliance) also have links to Labour and other parties. There was no evidence of a public or private preference for the Conservative Party from any of our interviewees or their organisations. Even the head of the Conservative Christian Fellowship openly expressed the importance, indeed theological necessity, of Christians being active across the political spectrum.

## 3) significant funds

Andrea Minichiello Williams' attempt to tell us that Christian Concern was poorly funded was somewhat undermined by her admission to occasionally receiving individual donations of £50,000. Some of the other groups spend significant sums on legal cases and campaigns but others are run on a shoestring. However, all are dwarfed by the American Religious Right.

## 4) broad support within the Christian Community (and wider population)

While the Evangelical Alliance claims to speak for two million evangelicals, these people are only affiliated via their church or denomination, so it is not necessarily a strong tie, and there are no fee-paying individual members. Other groups have tens of thousands on their e-mail databases, but few provide publicly available numbers of fee-paying supporters. As we said in chapter 2, there is somewhere between 6.5 million and (more realistically) 1.8 million evangelicals and Catholics in Britain. In comparison, the USA has a plethora of Religious Right organisations and a pool of around 155 million evangelicals and Catholics from which to draw support.<sup>1</sup> Even given the five-fold difference in population size between the two countries, there is clearly a massive difference here.

## 5) access to executive and legislative power

Significantly, very few of these groups have serious access to power. While the Conservative Christian Fellowship includes many Christian MPs and Peers, it is not a campaigning organisation. The more strident campaigning organisations such as the Christian Institute have limited influence on policy and limited access to the corridors of power.

It should be clear from the above summary that none of the groups we have studied entirely fits the bill of the Religious Right. For example, Christian Voice holds to theonomistic views,

reading from the pages of the Bible a direct model for the construction of contemporary society, but has no influence in Parliament, link with a political party or breadth of support. Meanwhile, the Evangelical Alliance has some access to power and a large number of supporters, but is carefully non-partisan and has a wider range of interests than a classic Religious Right group.

In the light of this, it is simply not good enough to assume that a British Religious Right exists. The groups studied in the previous chapter do have interactions from time to time, and in some cases will work closely together. But others are antagonistic to one other and there is no permanent alliance that has gained serious traction in Westminster. In addition, the dismissal of some of these groups as an irrelevance by the Director of the Conservative Christian Fellowship indicates there is no substantial possibility of the CCF developing a serious working relationship with them.

*It is difficult to see how we can speak of a British Religious Right without radically altering the meaning of that term.*

The Religious Right in the USA has been defined by its symbiotic relationship with the Republican Party. If we see no firm evidence of a similar relationship here, it is difficult to see how we can speak of a British Religious Right without radically altering the meaning of that term.

While there are certainly many evangelicals and other Christians within the Conservative Party, any thought that they are having undue influence on policy would surely be scotched by the view of a number of senior Tories, including the Prime Minister, on gay marriage. This is a policy decision that has attracted serious opposition from Christian groups, but which the government is set to press ahead with regardless. Even in the face of opposition from Tory Party Treasurer Michael Farmer,<sup>2</sup> who is an evangelical, at the time of writing the legislation looks likely to proceed, hardly a sign that a 'Religious Right' is having its way in the Conservative Party.

## examining issues

We can also assess whether a British Religious Right exists by comparing the primary interests of the American Religious Right and assessing the extent to which they are demonstrated by the groups we have analysed.

### pro-life

Opposition to abortion is a common thread running through many of the British groups. In comparison to the US, however, the profile of abortion as an everyday issue of political debate is tiny. One of the most high-profile and controversial ways of campaigning in the

USA has been to hold vigils and protests outside abortion clinics. This has been virtually unheard of in Britain, at least until recently when clinics in Brighton and London have been picketed, prompting counter-protests and sparking a media debate over whether American tactics are being directly imported to the pro-life campaign in Britain.<sup>3</sup>

## anti-homosexual rights

We have seen how a vigorous campaign against gay marriage had been backed by a broad coalition of groups including many of those we studied. In addition, the likes of the Christian Institute were firm defenders of Section 28 when it was on Britain statute books. Campaigners from Christian Concern, The Christian Party and others were instrumental in the fight against the Sexual Orientation Regulations, which made it illegal for businesses to discriminate against customers on the grounds of sexual orientation. This is clearly a concern for many British Christian groups as it is in the US.

## religious freedom/persecution

The narrative of 'persecution' of Christians for simply stating their views in public has become ingrained in the discourse of the Christian Institute, Christian Concern and Christian Voice. To a lesser extent, other organisations have joined in with this, although they avoid such stark terminology. Whereas 'persecution' is clearly a grossly exaggerated term for the status of Christians in Britain, there is a live debate over the issue of religious freedom. This is understandably a focus for domestic Christians, as it is in the US, but it is worth noting that others have also expressed concern. Even gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell has spoken out in support of some Christians whose freedom of expression has come under threat.

## pro-Israel

Zionism is the default position for Religious Right groups in the USA. In Britain, however, Israel/Palestine is not a significant campaigning issue for Christian groups. There are some outlets for Christian Zionism, but they are tiny compared to their US counterparts, and have little traction with the larger groups we have mentioned in this report. British evangelical leaders do not automatically embrace the Zionist cause, and indeed some oppose it.

## military intervention

When it comes to advocacy of war, there is another sharp division between the American and British contexts. While the Religious Right in the USA is supportive of military

intervention overseas, and actively celebrates the work of the US military, the same cannot be said for Britain. None of the British groups we have analysed speak with any frequency about foreign policy. The war in Iraq did not have obvious cheerleaders from among the British evangelical community in the same way as it did in the USA. In a similar fashion, the voices that are raised in support of a pre-emptive military strike on Iran often come from within the fold of the American Religious Right. There is no comparable situation in Britain, with Christian organisations remaining mostly silent on the issue.

## creationism/anti-evolution

There is good evidence that anti-evolutionary positions are increasingly common in Britain. The 2009 Theos report, *Doubting Darwin: Creationism and evolution scepticism in Britain today*, which interviewed the leading British evolution sceptics reported that:

There are certainly [British] organisations with links to the US, such as Answers in Genesis, and there are individuals who communicate with key players in, say, the Discovery Institute, but there were just as many who had no link to (or any particular reverence for) US-based creationists and evolution sceptics. In fact, the US was not always considered a good role model for British creationists, and associations with it are understood, by some, to have a negative impact on the image of creationism and evolution scepticism in Britain.<sup>5</sup>

Attacking evolution is a vital element of the Religious Right in the USA and it appears to be a growing factor within Britain scene (although, as noted above, not as an exclusively Christian, or even religious, phenomenon). That recognised, in spite of some vigorous and high-profile attempts to prove the contrary, there is little evidence that the teaching of evolution in schools is under threat. The area of evolution-scepticism is one in which the influence of the US upon Britain is clearest, changing the shape and concerns of some British Christian groups and it is certainly worthy of continued vigilance.

## anti-big government

This facet of the American Religious Right is almost totally missing from the discourse of all the groups we have written about. Amid all their policy concerns, they do not cite 'big government' as a problem, nor do they see the free market as a panacea. When there is criticism of government, it comes in the form of specific social policies like abortion, gay rights, gambling, alcohol, etc. A philosophical critique of an over-mighty state is virtually non-existent.

## anti-Islam

We have seen that the likes of the Christian Peoples Alliance and Christian Voice have sustained campaigns against the ‘mega Mosque’ in East London. Christian Voice and Christian Concern have also been keen to highlight their opposition to Halal meat being widely available in British outlets. Christian Concern patron Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali has been outspoken in his opposition to extremist Islam, and drew criticism for his suggestion that there were ‘no go areas’ where “those of a different faith or race may find it difficult to live or work...because of hostility to them and even the risk of violence.”<sup>6</sup> His rhetoric has been echoed by some others within the evangelical community (and beyond), but such voices remain muted.

Indeed, there is little sustained anti-Islamic feeling from the Christian groups we monitored. In direct contrast to the so called ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ campaign, which received vast publicity from the Religious Right in the US, the London ‘mega Mosque’ campaign has not gripped the imagination of most Christian groups, let alone the general public.

Two further attenuating points are also worth mentioning at this juncture. First, anti-Islamic feeling is clearly not confined to British Christians. To take just one example, when BSA asked people how ‘favourable and warm’ they felt to different groups, including Muslims, on a scale of 0-100,<sup>7</sup> self-identified Anglicans<sup>8</sup> scored 44, whilst people of no religion scored 45. Second, the Coalition For Marriage has welcomed the involvement of Muslims and Islamic institutions. Indeed, the Coalition issued several press releases in which Muslim opposition to gay marriage was highlighted.<sup>9</sup>

## if not a Religious Right, then what?

The articles we highlighted in the introduction seemed certain that the groups and trends they identified constituted a Religious Right. While we refute that, we recognise that they *are* identifying something of note.

The authors of many of those pieces may have been attempting to understand the mindset of British evangelicals, but failing to do so accurately. As seen in chapter 2, while church-attending British Christians are indeed more socially conservative than the wider population, they are also more left-of-centre on economic issues. This is in direct contrast to the situation in the heartlands of the Religious Right, where *laissez faire* economic policy goes hand-in-hand with social conservatism.

It may simply be that the lack of religious literacy of some British journalists and commentators is to blame for this. They have identified a socially-conservative strand of

British Christianity, and presumed that this camp will endorse the more wide-ranging agenda of the US Religious Right. In fact, although there is common ground on issues such as abortion and gay marriage, there is divergence on economic policy, not to mention much lower levels of interest in issues like support for the state of Israel, support for overseas military intervention, and evolution scepticism.

*The Guardian's* Comment is Free religion editor, Andrew Brown, has been among those identifying these increasingly prominent socially-conservative commitments within sections of Britain church. However, tellingly, he eschews the term 'Religious Right'. Writing in advance of the last General Election, he said:

Just in time for the election, we can watch the emergence of a fairly coherent right-wing bloc in British Christianity. It is nationalist, socially conservative, suspicious of markets, critical of Islam, authoritarian...but what distinguishes it from the UKIP, or even the BNP, is that it has a large and powerful black membership.<sup>10</sup>

Brown's analysis and careful language are telling. No student of the American Religious Right and its leaders could ever come to the conclusion that they were 'suspicious of markets.' Moreover, no good list of US Religious Right concerns would omit hostility to evolution or support of Israel.

Steve Clifford of the Evangelical Alliance identified similar differences when we interviewed him:

If you were to take most [British] evangelicals, and transport them across the Pond, I think the vast majority of us would be viewed as 'left-wing' in our political allegiance... When I speak to my friends from North America and reflect some of the views that would be mainstream within evangelicalism in Britain, they at times shake their heads because they can't quite believe that there are evangelical Christians that hold those views within a European setting.

This is a crucial point. The political and social opinions of British evangelicals, let alone British Catholics, who, as we saw, are historically consistently left-of-centre, are not identical to those of their American counterparts. Any analysis that fails to recognise this is wilfully ignoring a critical factor.

As Andrew Brown rightly noted, there is a socially conservative movement in British evangelicalism. Given the level of support for the Coalition For Marriage, it is possible to argue that this strand is beginning to co-ordinate its activities better and becoming more successful at marketing its goals. It would, therefore, make sense to talk about a socially

conservative bloc of Christians, which transcends party politics, and doesn't (yet?) have a large influence upon it, rather than a 'Religious Right'.

It is in this context that it is worth noting an important moment of co-ordination between British Christian groups in the run-up to the 2010 General Election. Taking inspiration from the Manhattan Declaration – a document produced by US Religious Right leaders<sup>11</sup> – the Westminster Declaration was launched with signatures from high profile leaders. As Jonathan Chaplin noted in *The Guardian* at the time, this was a significant moment, with “the list includ[ing] 5 senior clerics, a peer, the chair of the Mission and Public Affairs Committee of the Church of England [and] the principals of 3 theological colleges.”

*If you were to take most [British] evangelicals, and transport them across the Pond, I think the vast majority of us would be viewed as 'left-wing' in our political allegiance.*

Chaplin suggested this was “a response to the growing experience among Christians with theologically orthodox and socially conservative leanings of being unacceptably constrained or marginalized in key areas of public life.”<sup>12</sup> The aim was to get Christians to pledge their support to a socially conservative agenda that would prove how important these issues were to voters.

The fact and fate of this initiative is instructive. Here was a united intervention in a General Election by a coalition of Christian groups which shared in common their belief in pursuing socially conservative public policy. Is this not the kind of activity indicative of a British Religious Right?

The document was indicative of the kind of coalition that has marked US Religious Right activity over recent decades. But it encompassed issues and people (namely the “sick, disabled, addicted, elderly, in single parent families, poor, exploited, trafficked, appropriately seeking asylum, threatened by environmental change, or exploited by unjust trade, aid or debt policies”) rarely heard in typical US Religious Right rhetoric; it ignored some issues (such as Israel and evolution) that usually are; it made no obvious attempt to identify its agenda with that of a particular party; and it was, essentially, a failure, gaining some attention at the time but failing to attract sustained media attention or much popular support (fewer than 70,000 people signed).<sup>13</sup>

What the Westminster Declaration shows is that, while it is not impossible that a co-ordinated Religious Right evolves in Britain, it hasn't done so to date and would, if it did materialise, look rather different from the US version.

## why is there not a comparable Religious Right in Britain?

Having established that insinuations of a British Religious Right are erroneous, it is worth considering why there is not such a phenomenon in Britain. Given that our political culture sometimes seems to follow the where the US leads, why has Britain remained resistant to the formulation of a cohesive Religious Right? We tentatively offer five arguments, each of which could easily be developed into a major study of its own.

Firstly, there is an obvious difference in the number of Christians in the two countries. This point is well observed to the point of becoming hackneyed but the contrast between the two countries becomes clearer still when we look at the *importance* of religious views on political decision making. When asked by the Pew Forum in 2008 which factor influenced their political decision-making the most, 27% of weekly worshippers in the US cited their faith.<sup>14</sup> The British Social Attitudes Survey of 2008 reveals that only 9% of British people with a religious affiliation said religion was 'very important' in making decisions on political issues.<sup>15</sup> Britain not only has a much smaller religious constituency than the US, but within it, a smaller proportion of believers sees faith as a direct influence on their political behaviour.<sup>16</sup> Given this double-whammy, we can begin to understand why a powerful Religious Right has not, and is unlikely to evolve in Britain.

The second major reason why Britain has not followed the US in developing a Religious Right is the difference in leadership of the evangelical community in the two countries. The US Religious Right was led and shaped by figures such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and James Dobson, people who were, ecclesiastically speaking, their own bosses. Unconstrained by denominational oversight, they were able to step out and respond to the overtures presented by the likes of Paul Weyrich. Vitally, they were able to bring their congregations, audiences and followers with them.

There are no directly comparable figures from the history of evangelicalism in Britain. Religious broadcasting was non-existent until 1990 and the number of megachurches is still dwarfed by those in the USA. In other words, not only was there not a significant quorum of Christians, but also there have never been leaders of a large enough profile to create a movement.

The key factor here is that the most influential evangelical voice in Britain during the latter half of the twentieth century was John Stott. Though his writing did engage with moral, social and political issues, he never endorsed a specific party or attempted to convince those loyal to his teaching that they should vote for one party at all costs.<sup>17</sup> This was undoubtedly driven by considered theological reflection, as was all of Stott's work, but it is



also explained by his position within the Church of England, where as Rector of All Souls, Langham Place, he was a high-profile but comparatively low-ranking clergyman in the established church. Perhaps not surprisingly, Stott's successors as Britain's most prominent evangelical figures have mostly been non-partisan. Contemporary evangelicals such as theologian Tom Wright and well-known vicar Nicky Gumbel have followed in his footsteps by rarely commenting on party political issues, and steering well clear of supporting one specific party.

Stott's influence brings us to the third factor mitigating against the creation of a Religious Right in Britain, the Establishment of the Church of England. This profound difference between the two countries should not be underestimated. The US Religious Right was galvanised by the claims made by Paul Weyrich that the Church and its private schools were under attack from the Carter administration. Even though the claim was erroneous, it was credible and gained traction. The fact of Establishment, with the role of the Monarch, the position of the bishops and the existence of church schools has made such claims less credible across Britain, and especially within England.

More specifically, establishment has meant that the form of Christianity that interacts most closely with government is not the kind of autonomous evangelicalism that forms the backbone of the US Religious Right, but, rather, a broad and inclusive Anglicanism, whose position has long been tied to its responsibility to serve the entire community.<sup>18</sup>

A fourth major reason for the lack of a Religious Right in Britain is the difference in the media environment. Since deregulation in 1990, several Christian companies have begun broadcasting. There are two national radio stations in Britain (Premier Christian Radio and UCB) and a few smaller local ones. Christian TV has also grown in the years since deregulation, with God TV and Revelation TV being the main broadcasters. While these activities may sound as though they constitute a thriving Christian media sector, the figures pale into insignificance when compared to the 1,500 Christian radio stations in the USA.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, there is a distinct lack of 'personalities' emerging from Britain Christian media. While the likes of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson built huge followings and launched their (unsuccessful) electoral careers by broadcasting to millions of Americans, there is no-one who fits this bill in Britain. The sector is too small, as the potential audience of Christians is also much smaller. Any attempt to use Christian media to build a large following which could be then be turned to political advantage would be a long battle indeed.

It is also worth considering the role the BBC plays in British life. If the Church of England could be said to insulate the British political arena from the more strident voices of Christian pressure groups, the same could be argued for the BBC. Significant chunks of BBC output are devoted to faith and, in many cases, Christian faith. Songs of Praise, Thought for the Day and The Daily Service are the target of gentle mocking, and persistent campaigns by angry

secularists. However, the very fact that they exist could be said to keep the more vociferous members of any would-be Religious Right away from the microphone and camera.

The fifth and final reason for the absence of a British Religious Right lies in the historically left-of-centre allegiance of British Catholics. Professor Peter Pulzer once remarked that “class is the basis of British political parties; all else is embellishment and detail.”<sup>20</sup> The fact that the vast majority of British Catholics are from immigrant stock and, accordingly, lower socio-economic groups, made the Labour Party the natural home for Catholics for the best part of the twentieth century.

The fact that this was also the case in the US, and that class no longer dominates Britain political scene in the way it did until the last decades of the twentieth century serves as a powerful reminder that this is not necessarily a stable status quo. It is quite possible that British Catholics could lose their historic left-of-centre allegiance and make common cause with socially-conservative evangelicals as they did in the US two generations ago. Even if British Catholics were minded to do this, however, the traditional strength of left-of-centre opinion among them means that they are a very long way from forming the nucleus of a British Religious Right.

## final remarks

This report has examined the American Religious Right, assessed claims of a British equivalent and found them wanting. While there is undoubtedly an active, socially conservative movement among British Christians, elements of which would be keen to gain political power, there seems to be a particular dynamic at work: those Christian organisations that are most shrill, narrow, defensive, or theonomistic in their tone and focus are furthest from the political centre, whereas those that are closest to Westminster and Whitehall are the most measured, broad, positive and co-operative. This conclusion provokes two suggestions which may serve as a terminus for this report.

Firstly, we would counsel journalists and commentators to exercise caution before applying terms which are appropriate in one context but ill-suited in another. It is obvious why terms such as ‘Religious Right’ are used. They are a useful – and somewhat alarming – shorthand. This, however, is not sufficient reason to use an inaccurate term.

A lack of religious specialists in the British press may go some way to explaining such inaccurate usage. More ominously, some appear keen to undermine the arguments of socially-conservative Christian groups by misleadingly labelling them as ‘Religious Right’, playing the man rather than the ball, to use a sporting analogy. This is not only morally

dubious but arguably counterproductive, in danger of provoking the very thing that such critics claim to want to avoid.

Secondly, we would urge caution upon many of the organisations analysed here and other Christian pressure groups. The American Religious Right has a poor reputation in Britain for good reason. Its belligerent tactics, myopic agenda and wild rhetoric have done the Christian Gospel much harm.

More broadly, the idea that Christians can only engage with democratic politics via one political party has been shown to be incorrect. For every Christian giant of the Conservative Party such as William Wilberforce, there is an equivalent in the Labour Party, such as Keir Hardie; for every Shaftesbury, there is a Lansbury.

The strength of the Christian involvement in British politics is its multi-party spread, borne of the recognition that the Gospel is bigger than any one party's agenda. Christian groups would do well to reject any attempt to move Britain in the direction the USA has travelled, whether deliberately or in reaction to inaccurate or malign accusations. There are many things to envy about the American church and American politics but the influence of the Religious Right over the last forty years is not one them. It has allowed the development of a narrative that suggests only one party is deserving of a Christian's support. This has never been the case in Britain and, in spite of some journalistic suggestions to the contrary, there are few signs that it is the direction in which we are heading.

## reference

- 1 Our figure. Estimated using Pew Forum's finding that 26.3% of the US population self identify as Evangelical and 23.9% as Catholic - <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports/> and the United States Census Bureau POP Clock projection - <http://www.census.gov/population/www/popclockus.html> Both accessed 27 June 2012.
- 2 Robert Watts, 'Conservative treasurer joins campaign against gay marriage', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 9 June 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/9321407/Conservative-treasurer-joins-campaign-against-gay-marriage.html> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 3 Bim Adewunmi, 'The pro-choice fightback', *The Guardian*, 15 March 2012 [www.guardian.co.uk/world/shortcuts/2012/mar/14/pro-choice-fightback?INTCMP=SRCH](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/shortcuts/2012/mar/14/pro-choice-fightback?INTCMP=SRCH) Accessed 27 June 2012; Ben Quinn, 'Pro-choice supporters plan first ever protest against anti-abortion activists', *The Guardian*, 22 March 2012, [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/21/pro-choice-protest-anti-abortion?CMP=tw\\_t\\_fd](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/21/pro-choice-protest-anti-abortion?CMP=tw_t_fd) Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 4 'Law banning insulting words and behaviour 'has to end'', BBC Website, 16 May 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/British-politics-18084081> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 5 Robin Pharoah, Tamara Hale and Becky Rowe, *Doubting Darwin: Creationism and evolution scepticism in Britain today* (London: Theos, 2009) p. 112.
- 6 Michael Nazir-Ali, 'Extremism flourished as British lost Christianity', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 6 January 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Britishnews/1574695/Extremism-flourished-as-British-lost-Christianity.html> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 7 "Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favourable and warm toward the group. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favourable and don't care too much for that group. You would rate the group at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the group." BSA website.
- 8 Unfortunately, the data cannot be analysed by religious attendance.
- 9 'Imams urge all Muslims not to vote for candidates who support redefining marriage', Coalition for Marriage website, <http://c4m.org.uk/2012/04/imams-urge-all-muslims-not-to-vote-for-candidates-who-support-redefining-marriage/> Accessed 27 June 2012; 'Largest Muslim group opposes redefining marriage', Coalition for Marriage website, <http://c4m.org.uk/2012/03/largest-muslim-group-opposes-redefining-marriage/> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 10 Andrew Brown, 'The multicultural Christian right', *The Guardian* website, 5 April 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/apr/05/religion-christianity-andrew-brown> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 11 Manhattan Declaration website, <http://manhattandeclaration.org/home.aspx> Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 12 Jonathan Chaplin, 'The Westminster declaration defended', *The Guardian* website, 7 April 2010, [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/apr/07/religion-christianity?utm\\_source=twitterfeed&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/apr/07/religion-christianity?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter) Accessed 17 June 2012.

- 13 Westminster Declaration website, [www.westminster2010.org.uk/declaration/](http://www.westminster2010.org.uk/declaration/) Accessed 17 June 2012.
- 14 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2008, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf> p. 78. Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 15 British Social Attitudes Survey 2009, 'How important is religion to you in making decisions on political issues, if at all?' <http://www.britsocat.com/Body.aspx?AddMap=RelDec2&control=BritsocatMarginals&AddSeries=12&JumpCrossMarginals=yes> Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 16 Of course, the influence of the Religious Right on this figure itself is open to discussion.
- 17 There is an interesting comparison here with the American leader whose ministry most closely reflects that of Stott, Billy Graham. Graham, burned by his closeness to President Nixon during the Watergate Scandal, was an advocate for evangelical Christian faith, rather than support for the GOP. Accordingly, he was never a key player in the Religious Right, despite his high profile and media access.
- 18 The political role of the Established Church has always been complex and although for much of its recent history it was considered to be the Tory Party at prayer, since the 1980s, it – or rather its hierarchy – has widely been seen as leaning towards the political left.
- 19 Bates, *God's Own Country*, op. cit., p. 6.
- 20 Peter Pulzer, *Political Representation and Elections in Britain* (Allen and Unwin, 1967).



## Previous Theos reports:

### ***“Doing God”***

A Future For Faith in the Public Square  
Nick Spencer | 978-0-9554453-0-9

### ***Coming off the Bench***

The past, present and future of  
religious representation in the House  
of Lords  
Andrew Partington and Paul Bickley  
978-0-9554453-1-6

### ***Neither Private nor Privileged***

The Role of Christianity in Britain today  
Nick Spencer | 978-0-9554453-3-0

### ***Talking God***

The Legitimacy of Religious Public  
Reasoning  
Jonathan Chaplin | 978-0-9554453-4-7

### ***Rescuing Darwin***

God and evolution in Britain today  
Nick Spencer and Denis Alexander  
978-0-9554453-5-4

### ***Faith and Darwin***

Harmony, conflict or confusion?  
Caroline Lawes | 978-0-9554453-6-1

### ***The National Lottery***

Is it Progressive?  
Paul Bickley

### ***Religion and Identity***

Divided loyalties?  
Sean Oliver-Dee | 978-0-9554453-7-8

### ***The Politics of Christmas***

Stephen R Holmes | 978-0-9562182-7-8

### ***Discussing Darwin***

An extended interview with Mary  
Midgley  
978-0-9554453-9-2

### ***Doubting Darwin***

Creationism and evolution scepticism  
in Britain today  
978-0-9554453-8-5

### ***Mapping the Field:***

A review of the current research  
evidence on the impact of schools with  
a Christian ethos  
Researcher: Dr Elizabeth Green  
Research Supervisor: Dr Trevor Cooling  
978-0-9562182-0-9

### ***Free to Believe?***

Religious Freedom in a Liberal Society  
Roger Trigg | 978-0-9562182-1-6

### ***Wholly Living:***

A new perspective on international  
development  
Cafod, Tearfund and Theos  
978-0-9562182-2-3

### ***Doing God in Education***

Trevor Cooling | 978-0-9562182-3-0

### ***Give us our Ball Back***

Reclaiming Sport for the Common  
Good  
Paul Bickley and Sam Tomlin

### ***Turbulent Priests?***

The Archbishop of Canterbury in  
contemporary English politics  
Daniel Gover | 978-0-9562182-5-4

### ***From Goodness to God: Why Religion Makes Sense of our Moral Commitments***

Canon Dr Angus Ritchie | 978-0-9562182-9-2

# Is there a 'Religious Right' Emerging in Britain?

Recent years have seen an increasing number of claims that a US-style Religious Right either exists or is rapidly emerging in Britain. This report examines whether or not the claims are accurate.

Superficially, it argues, the case looks quite strong: there is evidence of greater co-ordination among Christian groups with a strong socially-conservative commitment, in particular relating to human sexuality, marriage, family life, and religious freedom, about which they are vocal and often willing to resort to legal action. This is a familiar picture within US politics.

However, on closer inspection, research and analysis suggest that it is highly misleading to describe this phenomenon as a US-style Religious Right. For a number of reasons – economic, social, ecclesiastical and theological – Britain does not have, and shows few signs of developing, the kind of theo-political culture that has characterised American politics since the late 1970s.

Drawing on electoral and social data, and a number of interviews with those organisations accused of being part of the nascent British Religious Right, this report is a vital contribution, and corrective, to a debate that is growing in importance and temperature.

**Andy Walton** is a writer and broadcaster, and works for the Contextual Theology Centre in east London.

**Andrea Hatcher** is Associate Professor at Sewanee: The University of the South.

**Nick Spencer** is Research Director at Theos.

This report gives a reliable overview of evidence concerning the purported rise of the Christian Right in Britain. Drawing on new research, it profiles several new Christian groups. By placing them in context, it shows why rumours that an American-style movement is crossing the Atlantic are greatly exaggerated.

**Linda Woodhead, Professor of Sociology of Religion, Lancaster University**

This is a measured and thoughtful piece of research, contributing to a topic where there is too much heat and too little light in contemporary debate. It assesses the presence – or, rather, the current absence – of a coherent 'Religious Right' in British politics through a detailed comparison with the characteristics of the movement in the US. This report should be read in its entirety by academics researching the role of religion in British life as well as by journalists, commentators and members of civil society groups who engage with faith issues.

**Ben Clements, Lecturer in Politics, Leicester University**

The notion of a 'Religious Right' in this country makes good copy. That is why the idea is appropriated – or more accurately misappropriated – by the media. This carefully researched report suggests a more apposite interpretation of the data. It is to be warmly welcomed.

**Grace Davie, Professor of Sociology, University of Exeter**

£5

ISBN: 978-0-9574743-0-7

