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## How Firm a Foundation? The Christian Right, the Republican Party, and the South

In the past forty years the South has traveled a slow, and sometimes uneven, path of partisan transition. Once a cornerstone of the New Deal coalition, white southerners are now more Republican than ever before. The GOP's power has continued to expand in the South at all levels of government, and, arguably, the South is now the foundation of the modern Republican Party. Much of the party's leadership is southern—George W. Bush, Dick Arney, Bill Frist, and Tom DeLay—and the region contributes a disproportionate number of the party's presidential electoral votes and congressional seats. More than half (54 percent) of George W. Bush's electoral votes were southern, and one-third of Republican members of Congress are southern.

As the South has become more crucial to the Republicans, conservative Christians have become more vital to the party. Certainly, there is a link between these phenomena, for the South has more conservative Christians than any other section of the country, and given their influence in the region, and the region's influence on the GOP, it is easy to understand their increased importance to the party. The "Christian Right" finds many of its leaders in the South (Falwell, Robertson, and Reed), and many of the highest profile officeholders within the movement—Mike Huckabee (AR), Tim Hutchinson (AR), Joe Barton (TX), Robin Hayes (NC), Fob James (AL), David Beasley (SC), and Dave Weldon (FL)—are

southerners. This overlap between the party's southern roots and the region's religious conservatism causes some observers to view the Christian Right as a source of contention rather than strength. There may be a clash, then, between the socially conservative/policy motivated Christian Rightists and the GOP's more traditional base of economic conservatives. If such a division exists, the electorate should offer ample evidence of this chasm.

A preliminary analysis of the South's electoral context provides some intriguing insights in the Republican Party. To begin, conservative Christian candidates are not very common, even in the South. According to the data (which are based on an examination of U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and gubernatorial elections in the South from 1994-2000) reported in the table, only 8 percent (41 of 499) of all candidates were classified (according to media coverage, interviews, and political experts within the region) as Christian Right candidates. So, it appears the Christian Right is actually under-represented in the politics of the South.

We can get a better handle on the politics of the region by comparing the electoral dynamics surrounding Christian Right Republicans and their Republican counterparts. As seen in the table, both kinds of candidates were roughly equally successful. Christian Right candidates won 59 percent (24 of 41) of their contests, while other Republicans were victori-

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ous in 62 percent (285 of 458) of their races. Real differences emerged, however, beneath the surface of these success rates. Christian Right candidates were slightly more likely to draw primary opposition (41 percent vs. 34 percent). Such opposition, even if minimal, forces Christian Right candidates to expend more resources in the nomination phase of the campaign, leaving fewer political, financial, and personal resources for the general election campaign which could be critical in close general elections. Also, Christian Right candidates did worse as incumbents when compared to fellow Republicans (78 percent to 98 percent). So, once entrenched in office, Christian Right candidates could not, at least to the same extent as their Republican counterparts, capitalize on their incumbency status. Perhaps, though these data do not directly address it, Christian Right office holders alienated portions of the electorate by advocating a Christian Right agenda. Finally, there were significant differences in how Christian Right candidates did in open seat elections. Republicans won open seat contests two-thirds of the time (67 percent), while Christian Right candidates succeeded in only 40 percent of their open seat elections. In the most

competitive circumstances, then, when quality candidates generally emerge from both parties, Christian Right candidates struggled.

Conclusions based on these data must be tentative, but even allowing for such caution, there are significant differences in how the electorate in the South responds to various Republican candidates. These discrepancies, at first blush, may in part be due to how those candidates interact with the more conservative religious elements within their electoral contexts. By advocating the policies most commonly associated with the Christian

Right, whether through electioneering or governance, candidates might risk alienating significant portions of the electorate. This alienation may cost the Republican Party some seats in the South, and fewer U.S. House and U.S. Senate seats in the South could conceivably cost the Republican Party control of these very closely divided chambers. The GOP's southern foundation, then, may not be as stable as often assumed, and this instability might diminish the party's chances to become a majority party in the South and the country.

### Christian Right Republican Candidates Compared to Other Republicans in Southern Elections, 1994-2000 (U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and Gubernatorial Elections)

	<i>Christian Right Republican Candidates</i>	<i>Republican Candidates</i>
<b>Number of Candidates</b>	41 (8%)	458 (92%)
<b>General Election (% won)</b>	24 (59%)	285 (62%)
<b>Primary Opposition (% of total candidates)</b>	17 (41%)	156 (34%)
<b>Incumbent Elections (% won)</b>	14/18 (78%)	242/246 (98%)
<b>Open Seat Elections (% won)</b>	6/15 (40%)	31/46 (67%)

## Cooperative Research Project on Clergy in American Public Life

The Henry Institute has been coordinating a major cooperative study project on the role that clergy play in American religious and public life. The project has engaged different scholars to study the particular denominations with which they are associated. The study, using primarily a common core questionnaire, has involved surveys of clergy from the following religious bodies: American Baptists; Southern Baptist Convention; Disciples of Christ; Churches of Christ; Evangelical Lutheran Church of America; Lutheran Church, Missouri

Synod; Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.; Presbyterian Church in America; Reformed Church in America; Christian Reformed Church in North America; United Methodist Church; Nazarene Church; Assemblies of God; Evangelical Free Church; Mennonite Church; Church of God in Christ; African Methodist Episcopal; Roman Catholic Church; as well as rabbis from various different Jewish traditions.

Panels devoted to presentations related to the project have been held at the American Political Science Association,

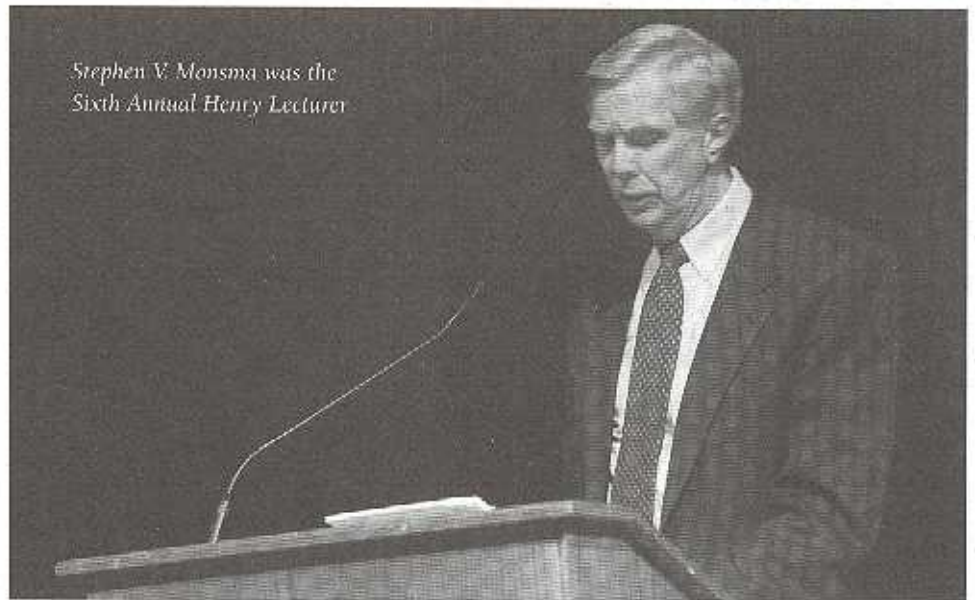
the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Southern Political Science Association, and the Symposium on Religion and Politics. In addition, papers from the cooperative project will be published in a theme issue in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Spring 2004). It is anticipated that several volumes will be forthcoming from the project, including an initial edited volume with chapters that will focus on clergy from each of the denominations studied.

# Myths, Lies, and Soundbites: Reactions to President Bush's Faith-Based Initiative

Each year, The Henry Institute sponsors the annual Henry Lecture that features a noted Christian practitioner to address some aspect of the interplay between the Christian faith and politics. In order to keep the lectures nonpartisan, the Institute has established a yearly rotation, with a Republican speaking one year and a Democratic official the next. On April 29, 2002, Professor Stephen V. Monsma of Pepperdine University delivered the sixth such lecture, following former U.S. Senators Mark Hatfield of Oregon, Paul Simon of Illinois, Dan Coats of Indiana, U.S. Representative John Lewis of Georgia, and Paul Hillebrands, former Speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives. A Democrat, Dr. Monsma had been, prior to his accepting his position at Pepperdine University, a colleague of Paul Henry both at Calvin College and in the Michigan Legislature. Between 1972 and 1987, he served in the Michigan legislature, both in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, and then in the state executive branch, as a member of the Michigan Natural Resources Commission and then in the Michigan Department of Social Services. Since 1987, he has served at Pepperdine University. He is the author of many books, including (but not limited to): *The Challenge of Pluralism: Church and State in Five Democracies*; *When Sacred and Secular Mix: Religious Nonprofit Organizations and Public Money*; *Positive Neutrality: Letting Religious Freedom Ring*; and *Pursuing Justice in a Sinful World*.

In his address, Professor Monsma noted that President Bush's faith-based initiative has been attacked by those on both sides of the political spectrum. While those on the left fear that Bush's program would abdicate the government's responsibility to care for the poor, those on the right dislike the proposal because they fear it would give the government too much influence over religious organizations.

Monsma noted that opponents advance four main myths with regard to



*Stephen V. Monsma was the Sixth Annual Henry Lecturer*

the initiative. The first myth is that such an initiative is unconstitutional. Monsma attacked this myth by noting that church-state law tends to be ambiguous, with many past Supreme Court decisions related to the establishment clause being somewhat winding, if not contradictory, in nature. In addition to this legal ambiguity, Monsma further noted that the funding of public services provided by a charitable organization is far different than the funding of the core rituals of a religious tradition. The former may well be constitutional, while the latter clearly is not.

A second common myth is that there is no evidence that faith-based social services are more effective than secular social services. Monsma generally dismissed this myth. He first discussed such faith based programs as Teen Challenge and Prison Fellowship—programs that have proven records of success. Then he noted that Catholic schools in the inner city often outperform their secular counterparts. And, finally, he pointed out that personal religiosity is consistently associated with many desirable social behaviors. Thus, while there have been relatively few careful, empirical, comparative program evaluation studies as yet,

Monsma's review of the available evidence strongly suggests that programs that incorporate a faith component can, and frequently do, reveal an effectiveness that is unmatched when less holistic approaches are adopted.

The third myth is the most serious, and damaging, misconception of charitable choice—namely that the initiative would give charities a new avenue by which to practice discrimination in employment. Monsma noted that the legal facts show otherwise, as faith-based agencies have long had the right to consider religious affiliation when making employment decisions. Moreover, this right has been upheld by a unanimous Supreme Court ruling in *Corporation of Presiding Bishop v. Amos* (1986).

Finally, the fourth common myth is that the funding of faith-based charitable agencies radically departs from existing practice. Once again, an examination of current practices reveals that many faith-based organizations have long received governmental funding for their social-service programs. Thus, the faith-based initiative proposal, according to Monsma, would only solidify the basis on which such agencies receive governmental funds.

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In the second half of his address, Dr. Monsma outlined two different perspectives that generally undergird the intense opposition to the President's proposal: libertarianism and statism. Libertarians tend to assume that relying on faith-based organizations to provide social services will result in a reduced role for government as well as lower taxes. When this does not happen, their support tends to wane. Those with a statist perspective tend to expect that faith-based organizations will act as agents of the government. When they find that these organizations maintain their distinct religious perspectives, they believe that this results in "discrimination and favoritism."

A more reasonable framework by which to approach the issue, according to Monsma, is a pluralist perspective.

Pluralists typically prefer a more extensive, yet less intensive, role for government. The government should, according to this perspective, play a role in coordinating social services by empowering, not replacing or supplanting, other social structures. Under this rubric, government would give nonprofit organizations as much independence as possible, while still holding them accountable to public needs. This roughly parallels both Abraham Kuypers's idea of sphere sovereignty and the Catholic concept of subsidiarity.

Monsma concluded by contending that the pluralist understanding of government and society is valuable and consistent with the Christian faith. Politics is important, he declared, and for the Christian it is a special calling. However, a sense of balance is necessary, rightfully

discerning what can be accomplished by social structures and what can only be accomplished by God. Christians know that peace, justice, and equity can never be achieved by public policy alone. Human knowledge is not unlimited; our fallibility is too great. Changes wrought by humans come unsteadily, and often even the smallest changes are accomplished only with great effort. However, working to better the condition of mankind, while still cognizant of human fallibility and tough opposition, is the task to which Paul Henry and other Christians are called. Professor Monsma ended his talk by exhorting Christian believers to answer that call.

The full text of the lecture can be found on our website at [www.calvin.edu/henry/](http://www.calvin.edu/henry/)

## Pollsters and Parishioners: A Graduate Student Workshop on Survey Research and American Religion

The Henry Institute is sponsoring its second summer workshop on the use of survey research in the study of American religion. The workshop will be held at Calvin College from Saturday, July 19, to Saturday, July 25, 2003, and led by Corwin Smidt, Director of The Henry Institute. In addition, John Green (tentative) of the University of Akron, along with James Guth and Lyman Kellstedt of Furman University, will participate in leading the workshop.

The workshop will combine instruction on the conceptualization and measurement of religion in survey research with major segments of time devoted to

data analysis using major data sets on religion and politics. The instructors will work closely with small groups of participants.

Graduate students and recent Ph.D. graduates in sociology, political science, and related disciplines are invited to apply. Preference will be given to current graduate students. The selection process is competitive, and twelve participants will be chosen from the pool of applicants. The Henry Institute will provide travel costs to Calvin College as well as room and board on campus at Calvin's new Prince Conference Center. Participant qualifications include an interest in the study of American religion

in the mass public and familiarity with personal computers and SPSS software.

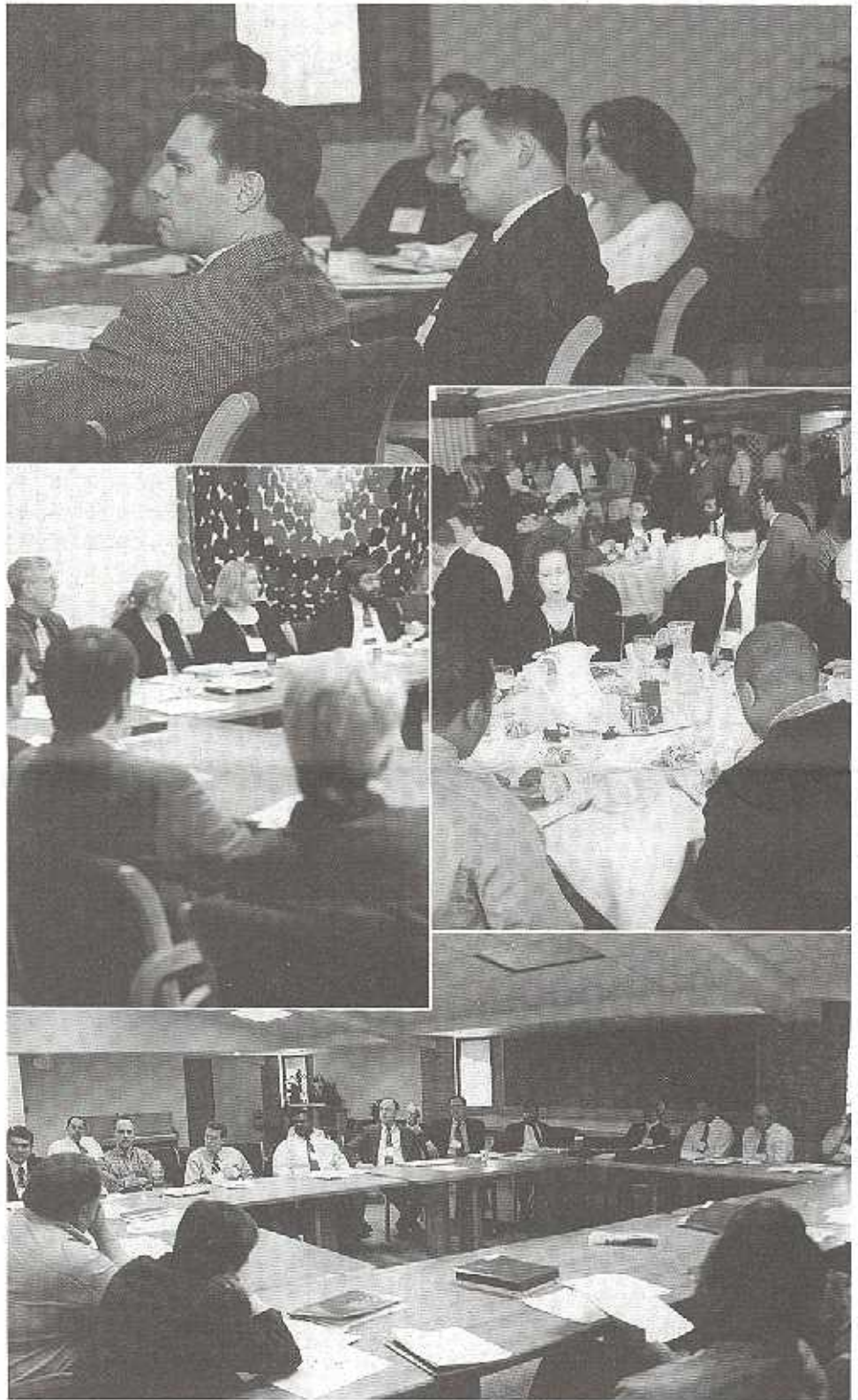
Prospective participants should submit a letter of interest, curriculum vita, one letter of recommendation, and one sample of scholarly writing to: Corwin Smidt, Director of The Henry Institute, Calvin College, 3201 Burton St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.

Materials must be received by Monday, February 17, 2003. Participants will be selected by Monday, March 17, 2003. For further information, contact Corwin Smidt at the above address, by phone at 616.957.6233, or via email at [smid@calvin.edu](mailto:smid@calvin.edu).

# First Biennial Religion and Politics Symposium

The Henry Institute hosted its first biennial Symposium on Religion and Politics, May 3-4, 2002. The symposium brought together more than 100 scholars from the fields of political science, sociology, history, and religious studies. Scholars came from across the United States and Canada, with even some international representation outside the North America continent. Approximately 25 panels, involving more than 75 papers, were arranged as part of the program.

The intent of the symposium is provide a distinct opportunity for scholars working in different disciplines to come together in order to present papers related to their current research, foster personal and professional networks, facilitate joint research endeavors, and learn about research opportunities in the field. While the symposium drew considerable interest among established scholars in the field, it particularly attracted interest and involvement among graduate students and young scholars. It is hoped that the Symposium on Religion and Politics will play an important role both in encouraging young scholars and in fostering research in the field. Mark your calendars for the Second Biennial Symposium on Religion and Politics which is scheduled to be held at the new Prince Conference Center at Calvin College, April 29 - May 1, 2004.



**Henry Website**

For more information on Institute publications and other activities of the Henry Institute and its staff, be sure to see our website at [www.calvin.edu/henry](http://www.calvin.edu/henry) or contact us at (616) 957-6870

# Scholarly Presentations and Discussions

**Sept. 25, 2002.** James Penning and Corwin Smidt, Calvin College, "Evangelicalism: The Next Generation."

**Oct. 9, 2002.** Abram Van Engen, Calvin College McGregor Scholar, "The Trajectory of Two Mentalities: The CRC and RCA Past and Future."

**Oct. 10, 2002.** Candidate Debate for 75th Michigan House of Representative Seat: State Rep. Jerry Kooiman and Peter VanderMeulen.

**Oct. 23, 2002.** Matthew Dowd, White House Pollster, "The Midterm Elections."

**Nov. 8, 2002.** Paul Liu, Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of the Social Sciences, Beijing, China, "The Pattern of Church-State Relations in China Today."

**Nov. 20, 2002.** Don Luidens, Hope College, "Religious Identifications and Loyalties among CRC and RCA Clergy and Parishioners."

**Dec. 3, 2002.** Max Laskaris, Policy Planning Committee of U.S. Dept. of State, "The Peace Process in the Democratic Republic of Congo."

**Feb. 13, 2003.** Corwin Smidt and James Penning, Calvin College, "The Theological Beliefs of CRC and RCA Clergy and Parishioners."

**Feb. 24, 2003.** Ogbu Kalu, McCormick Theological Seminary, "Faith and the Gospel: The New Political Theology of Engagement in Nigeria."

**March 12, 2003.** Roger Nemeth, Hope College, "The Religious Practices of CRC and RCA Clergy and Parishioners."

**March 26, 2003.** Rosetta Ross, United Theological Seminary, "Women, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement."

**April 10, 2003.** Eric McDaniel, University of Illinois, "Politics in the Pews: The Creation and Maintenance of Black Political Churches."

**April 28, 2003.** Tim Goeglein, Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of the White House Office of Public Liaison, 7th Annual Henry Lecture.

**July 19 - July 25, 2003.** Graduate Student Workshop "Pollsters and Parishioners."

**April 29 - May 1, 2004.** Symposium on Religion and Politics.

The Paul B. Henry Institute for the  
Study of Christianity and Politics  
3201 Burton, S.E.  
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