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PENTECOSTAL POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THE USA AND THE UK: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Pentecostal Political Activism: An Overview

Pentecostalism is undoubtedly, on a global scale, the fastest growing expression of Christianity. Yet it is a movement in a constant state of transition. The early Pentecostals, with their claimed origins in the Azusa Street revival of 1906 in Los Angeles², believed that they were restoring the early and 'lost' experiences of the first century Church, hence, the movement's emphasis on the Baptism in the Spirit and the 'spiritual gifts' (charismata). Over the decades the movement has also been identified by its 'free' expression of worship, emotionalism, millenarianism, and faith in a global revival before Christ's second coming. The movement's ecstatic enthusiasm was historically accompanied by the tendency towards fundamentalism in its Biblical literalism and frequent sectarian or at least elitist leanings.

In 1906, the Pentecostals constituted less than one percent of the world's Christians.³ In a very short period of time, the movement seemed to sweep all

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² More recently, a 'revisionist' view of the origins of Pentecostalism has come to the fore and has provided evidence that there were parallel Pentecosta-type revivals in parts of India in 1906, the same time that the Azusa Street revival was erupting. The 'Korean Pentecost' of 1907-08 began at a convention in Pyongyang, and followed an earlier revival that began among Methodist missionaries in Wonsan in 1903. See Anderson, A. (2004), *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ Cotton, I. (1995), *The Hallelujah Revolution: The Rise of the New Christians*, Boston, MA: Little & Brown, p. 1

before it and quickly outstripped the older Holiness movement (in which it had many roots) across the world. The statistics are not totally reliable but they do show a rapid proliferation. The total world membership of the Pentecostal movement in the mid-1960s was variously estimated at eight million by Nichol⁴, and at ten million Hollenweger.⁵

In the same decade a new development occurred. Throughout North America and Western Europe, the movement impacted in the form of the Charismatic Renewal (or neo-Pentecostalism) in the mainline denominations.⁶ Later, the complexities of the movement became increasingly evident from the 1980s with yet another and more extensively defined constituent of Pentecostalism typically designated 'the 'Third Wave'. The 'Third Wave' amounts to a second generation of charismatics, along with evangelicals open to the emphasis on 'signs and wonders' and a greater commitment to revivalism. This constituency is not derived from the early Charismatic Renewal movement in the historical churches and is largely separated from it by theological preferences and cultural nuances.

As a result of these developments, according to Barrett, there were 327 million affiliated Pentecostal-style church members in the world in 1988 of which 176 million were 'classical' Pentecostal, 123 million charismatic, and 28 million Third-Wavers.⁷ For the purpose of this paper all three strands will be referred to as the 'Pentecostal movement' unless one particular strand is singled out for specific discussion.

For many a decade the Pentecostal movement, preoccupied with their experiences of God and with a constant eye on heaven, had scant time for the secular politics of fallen creation. Hostility from the social order beyond its sectarian boundaries – 'the powers and principalities', as well as the established churches – alienated the Pentecostals from secularity. Perhaps above all, however, the apolitical stance of Pentecostals can be traced to their dogma concerning the 'rapture', the pre-millenarian teaching which asserted that believers would be miraculously removed from earth before the foretold 'time of tribulation'.⁸ Since Christ was coming again soon, the political issues that concerned the secular world had little consequence. It therefore did not matter too much which politician was in any particular political office and which political party won any particular election.

⁴ Nichol, J. (1966), *Pentecostalism*, New York: Harper & Row.

⁵ Hollenweger, W. (1966), 'The Pentecostal Movement and the World Council of Churches', *The Ecumenical Review*, 18 (3), pp. 310-20.

⁶ This is not to suggest that all neo-Pentecostals are to be found in the historical churches since they also comprise numerous independent churches.

⁷ Barrett, D. (1988), *Statistics, Global*, London: DPCM.

⁸ Shiver, P. (1981), *The Bible Vote*, New York: Pilgrim Press.

It was during the 1970s that Pentecostal political activism took off in earnest. A good deal of scholarly attention was drawn to such activism in the Majority World, not least of all Central and Latin America where the movement showed its political credentials, winning political offices and, in some countries at least, changing the complexions of traditional political processes. Such developments more than indicated that the Pentecostals were making wider impact into the wider socio-cultural environment of such countries as Brazil, Argentina and Guatemala.⁹

In the nations of the West, the political activities of the Pentecostals drew little attention from academics, with the exception of developments in the USA where involvement suddenly burgeoned, also in the 1970s. Analysis of the Pentecostal's political views in Western Europe remained muted. To a great degree this was because Western European nations, to one degree or another, had become highly secular in comparison to the religious 'exceptionalism' of the USA. At the same time the Pentecostal movement is to some degree of a different ilk in Europe compared to the USA, so that like cannot not be wholly contrasted with like in political cultures that to a large extent are radically different. There thus remains scope to compare such activism in the USA with that of a more secular Europe. This is the task of this paper that will compare the political orientation, beliefs and tactics of the Pentecostals in the USA and the United Kingdom (UK), and in doing so will acknowledge the contribution of the 'classical', 'charismatic' and 'Third Wave' to Pentecostal political activism in general. Such a comparative analysis will focus upon the inter-related themes of the nature of Pentecostalism, the broader political cultural context, and the secular levels of opposition that present themselves in these two western environments.

The Religious Cultures of the USA and Britain: A Comparative Survey

There are various aspects of the political cultures of the USA and the UK that must be appreciated to understand both the general impact of the broad Pentecostal constituency and the movement's inroad into the political world. These aspects are also supplemented by the nature and penetration of Pentecostalism into these respective political cultures.

The key identifiable factors associated with the religious cultures of these countries have forged the nature of the broad Pentecostal world within them. Thus, the broad Pentecostal/charismatic movement has impacted differentially in the USA and the UK. Certainly, there is good evidence to suggest that the older form or 'classical' Pentecostalism in the UK is less developed in the USA and, historically speaking, it

⁹ Freston, P. (1997), 'Charismatic Evangelicals in Latin America: Mission and Politics on the Frontiers of Protestant Growth' in Hunt, S., Hamilton, M. & Walter T. (eds), *Charismatic Christianity: Sociological Perspectives*, Basingstoke, UK: McMillan.

has also expressed itself in contrasting ways. As much may be said regarding the charismatics and the Third Wave.

There are two cross-cutting factors than inform the contemporary religious culture of the USA. Firstly, by various indices the USA is discernibly a more 'religious' society than the UK and, secondly, this American 'exceptionism' has subsequently led to a vast divergence and plurality of religious belief. One consequence is that Pentecostalism generally has proved to be more varied in the USA than in the UK – creating a greater number of 'streams' in the former. Paradoxically, in relative terms, it can forcefully be argued that Pentecostalism in the USA may be a relatively weaker Christian grouping than in the UK, given that it is forced to compete with other rival forms of Christianity and not least of all in its more conservative expressions.

Britain: A Picture of Religious Decline

Commentators have frequently spoken of the decline of Christianity in Western Europe as practically equaling secularization.¹⁰ However, in this region of Europe the demise of Christianity, if measured in terms of its socio-cultural impact, has not been a straightforward or equal one. In particular, the Catholic faith in countries such as Spain and Italy has fought a more rigorous rear-guard action against the ravages of modernity than those which are traditionally Protestant. Some evidence still points to a Protestant-Catholic divide. The 1999 European Values Survey indicated that from a denominational point of view it was possible to classify the different countries into three groups: Catholic, Protestant and 'mixed'.¹¹ If these countries are arranged according to the level of Christian religiosity, almost the same patterns emerge: Catholic countries are the more religious (Ireland, Italy and Spain) than the predominant Protestant nations (particularly Lutheran Scandinavian countries). In between are the 'mixed' variant such as Germany and the Netherlands. The UK would appear to fit under the latter category.¹²

Despite the evidence provided by revisionists of the secularization thesis including Rodney Stark et al¹³, the reality is that the breaking of the state-Church monopoly

¹⁰ See, for example, Ashford S. and Timms, N. (1992), 'The Unchurched of Europe', in S. Ashford and N. Timms (eds), *What Europe Thinks: A Study of Western European Values*, Aldershot, UK: Dartmouth.

¹¹ Lambert, Y. (2004), 'A Turning Point in Religious Evolution in Europe?', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 19 (1), pp. 204-15.

¹² The role of the Catholic Church in the province of Northern Ireland has proved to be different however. It remains an enduring component of political differences (albeit stripped of much of their sectarian violence) as part of an ethnic and communal identity – reinforcing divides with the Protestant community. Thus, church attendance levels remain impressive (nearing 50 percent) for largely historical reasons linked to the Protestant and Catholic cultural cleavage.

¹³ See, for example, Stark, R. and Iannaccone, L. (1994), 'A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularization" of Europe', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 33, pp. 230-52.

has not increased the level of religiosity in the UK as defined by adherence to the Christian faith. Even if the evidence is confined to comparisons of religiosity in 1951, 1900 and 2000, the trend is of clear and dramatic decline. Up-to-date data on church membership and attendance shows the long-stable trend and suggests that the major denominations may cease to exist by 2030. Bruce puts the situation succinctly when he argues that 'organized Christianity in Britain is in serious trouble'.¹⁴

In the UK, the Pentecostal and charismatic groupings have proved to be significant Christian constituencies in recent times. To be sure, the traditional Pentecostal churches are an important component of UK Christianity. The UK is one of the four countries that have adherents totaling more than 400,000.¹⁵ This Pentecostal growth has partially benefited from Afro-Caribbean migrants and Pentecostal/Holiness churches that have enjoyed a 3 percent growth per annum throughout the 1970s.¹⁶ For instance, the Church of the Nazarene has expanded from around 1000 members in 1940 to 5000 in 1990. In terms of ageing demographic features the only exception to the general ageing profile of the great majority of UK churches are Pentecostal churches congregations mainly from the Afro-Caribbean population¹⁷ and to which may be added the more recent establishment of West African congregations.¹⁸

The growth of the Pentecostal churches and the rise of neo-Pentecostalism in the UK since the 1960s has been against a backdrop of significant religious decline and proved to be in marked contrast to the USA despite evidence of some demise in that country. Many involved in Charismatic Renewal in the mainstream churches, where neo-Pentecostalism first took root, hoped that their movement could reverse the fortunes of the denominations. However, Renewal was not to save church attendance and forestall Christianity's declining social influence.

The Renewal movement was rivaled, in the 1970s onwards, by a fresh form of charismatic sectarianism in the growth of the so-called 'house churches' that came to constitute the UK's version of the 'Third Wave'. Nonetheless, the movement contributed to the decline of denominational attendance by drawing at least some of its adherents, particularly the charismatically inclined, into its ranks. Throughout the

¹⁴ Bruce, S. (1999), *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 1.

¹⁵ Johnstone, P. and Mandryk, J. (2001), *Operation World: 21st Century Edition*, Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press. The other three countries are Romania, Russia and the Ukraine.

¹⁶ Ward, J. (1997), 'Pentecostal/Holiness Churches', *Prospects for the Eighties: From a Census of the Churches in 1979*, London: SPCK, p. 41.

¹⁷ McRobert, L. (1989), 'The New Black-Led Pentecostal Church in Britain', in P. Badman (ed), *Religion, State and Society in Modern Britain*, Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellen.

¹⁸ Hunt, S. (2001), 'The British Black Pentecostal "Revival": Identity and Belief in the "New" Nigerian Churches', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24 (1), pp. 104-24.

1980s, the 'house churches' were to face their own demise despite their transformation into the re-labeled 'New Churches'.

Although there were inroads by the Pentecostal/charismatic sector into organized religion in the UK, it by no means reversed the general malaise of the Christian churches. For example, in 1979 there were 39,000 churches in England, with the adult church attendance rate standing at 11 percent. By the end of the century it was closer to seven percent.¹⁹ Fifty years of detailed and reliable opinion polls in the UK show that the proportion of people claiming religious and specifically Christian belief is considerably higher than those attending church. But the data began to show a decline in the beliefs as well. In 1991, the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS) showed that a little under one-third believed in a personal God and only a quarter subscribed to the full range of Christian beliefs when these were taken to include hell and the devil. Such results were taken to imply widespread rejection of the traditional Christian paradigm.²⁰ Put succinctly, the UK had become a post-Christian society.

The demise of Christian institutions and religious socialization in the UK, alongside increasing pluralism, has not led, as has been the case in the USA, to a political Rightist Christian movement of any considerable weight. At the same time, the secular political world had increasingly retreated from the religious sphere. The gradual distancing of the churches from the state, and the freeing of nonconformist denominations from close ties with political parties which might form the government, did not allow the UK churches to rediscover either a conservative or liberal prophetic role for religion. Nevertheless, conservative Christians, evangelical, fundamentalist and Pentecostal Protestants, began to mobilize against liberalizing trends within the Christian churches at large. It was not until the 1970s that some, but by no means all, began to become involved in the political sphere. This activism, as suggested below, has however remained rather muted.

American 'Exceptionism'

Seemingly challenging the 'hard' secularization thesis, the USA, as the most developed industrialized country on earth, would appear by various criteria to be a more 'religious' nation than other western societies. Hence, cultural and historical legacy apparently cuts across the linear equation that 'development' – economically, socially and politically – equals religious decline. Above all, the level of expressed belief in the Christian faith in the USA appears an anomaly of considerable proportions.

¹⁹ Brierley, P. (2000), *The Tide is Running Out*, London: Christian Research Association.

²⁰ Gerard, D. (1985), 'Religious Attitudes and Values', in M. Abrams, D. Gerard and N. Timms (eds), *Values and Social Change in Britain*, London: Macmillan.

Various explanations have been advanced for the greater religiosity to be found in the USA. One observation is that the country has long enjoyed a greater religious liberty as defined by its Constitution, the absence of a state church, and where the denomination form has provided the institutionalized mainstay of Christian life. Simultaneously, the fully pluralist but Protestant-dominated USA encouraged the tolerance and sustaining of various expressions of Christianity. More specifically, there are those factors related to the apparent greater level of religiosity in the USA which 'hold up' the process of secularization. David Martin offers a wide range of additional variables in his account: the strength of religious minorities and their geographical dispersion, the relationship between religious groupings and the dominant elites, and the inherent character of the religious traditions.²¹

In the apparent thriving religious economy of the USA, there are definite winners and losers. This is an important consideration in relation to the context in which the Pentecostals and charismatics have become active in a political sense. Beginning in the 1950s and extending into the early 1960s, some voices on the American 'scene' called attention to the cultural capitulation of the liberal mainstream churches who themselves faced congregational decline. They seemed feeble and lacking in the requisite power to supply moral force in molding national life.

There was more to the equation however. The decline in religious, specifically Christian beliefs, was a development acknowledged by the American population from the late 1970s with many citizens concerned with the implications. Sixty-four percent of the American people believed that religion was 'under attack', according to a poll released by the Anti-Defamation League in 2005.²² The perceived decline of Christianity and religion in general was, from the 1970s, to lead to the more conservative cadres increasingly entering the nation's political sphere through the rise of so-called the Moral Majority and the onset of what became known as the 'cultural wars'.

The term 'cultural wars' suggested a conflict which related cultural lifestyle issues to the political arena.²³ Most fully described by J. D. Hunter in his book by the same name, this military metaphor evoked images of irreconcilable conflict over basic American values.²⁴ Hunter saw the rise of two new rival coalitions under-girding this new struggle with an 'orthodox' alliance of traditionalists from many religious backgrounds facing a 'progressive' amalgamation of religious modernists and secularists of equally diverse origins.

²¹ Martin, D. (1978), *A General Theory of Secularisation*, Oxford: Blackwell.

²² Anti-Defamation League Poll (2005), 21st November, ADL.

²³ Johnson, S. and Tamney, J. (1984), 'Support for the Moral Majority', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 23 (2), pp. 183-96.

²⁴ Hunter, J. (1991), *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, New York: Basic Books.

In the USA, cultural conflict meant a struggle for identity and a battle to re-define the nation. The cultural wars touched many individual lives and institutions, not least of all the family in so far as they related to sexuality, gender roles, child-raising and even definitions of the family itself. The conflict also impacted what happened in public education. While these kinds of disputes were hardly new in American history, the reappearance of 'political religion' was far from anticipated. Even if Hunter has overstated his case, his explorations of the cultural wars said a great deal of the increasingly secular nature of America and the evidence of a reactionary backlash which often took a religious form and seemed to draw conservative Christian groupings into the political arena, Pentecostals and charismatics among them.

Pentecostalism and Conservative Christianity in the UK

The link between evangelicalism and political activism is far from unknown in the UK. In the nineteenth century many evangelicals were members of the House of Commons in the nation's Parliament. Issues concerning the evangelicals ranged from factory reforms to campaigns for the abolition of slavery. Such campaigns, however, tended to be void of the revivalist rhetoric that accompanied moral/political campaigns in the USA and constituted the preserve of the liberal-minded rather than that of the conservative evangelicals.

In the early twentieth century the moral indignation displayed by conservative Christians in the UK resulted from the erosion of the Christian faith by greater levels of secularity. Political campaigning however remained restrained. As Thompson notes²⁵, conservative Christians in at the beginning of the twentieth century did not have to launch extra-Parliamentary campaigns when one hundred evangelical MPs sat in the House of Commons. By the 1960s, when conservative Christians began to mobilize in moral campaigns, they had largely lost their political support in Parliament. The Pentecostal movement, as in the USA, remained politically silent. Even the predominantly Afro-Caribbean Pentecostal churches, representing the new wave of immigration from the 1950s, eschewed political processes to express felt feelings of racial discrimination and they retreated into their sectarian enclaves.

From the 1970s the situation began to slowly change and this was not merely because the 'classical' Pentecostals wished to challenge the increasing secular nature of UK society and its perceived moral ineptitude; there were also changes within the broad Pentecostal movement itself. From 1960s a greater ecumenical dialogue emerged not only among leading Pentecostal bodies themselves, such

²⁵ Thompson, W. (1997), 'Charismatic Evangelicals in Latin America: Mission and Politics on the Frontiers of Protestant Growth', in Hunt et al, *ibid.*

as the Assemblies of God (AOG) and Elim, but between them and the mainstream denominations. By 1980 the AOG had joined the Evangelical Alliance, the largest umbrella organization of evangelical churches of a conservative disposition. At this time, with the exception of the Afro-Caribbean congregations, a good number of the major Pentecostal bodies had evolved from sectarian forms of Christianity into 'respectable' conservative denominations. By the 1990s, the 'classical' Pentecostals, charismatic and Third Wave churches constituted some four-fifths of the Evangelical Alliance that was beginning to spearhead the inroad of conservative churches into political campaigns in the UK.

The Christian Conservative Sector in the USA

A similar path was trod by the Pentecostal movement in the USA. This was in the context of wider developments within conservative Christianity that must also be acknowledged. The growing strength of the conservative Christian political lobby was paralleled by the significant proliferation of conservative churches. The expansion of the conservative Christian churches since 1950 is seemingly related to the declining membership of the liberal churches and the marked de-mobilization of long-established denominations.²⁶

Many conservative churches, with their moral strictness and tendency towards theological intolerance, have increased their membership. The Southern Baptists, in particular, grew steadily, forming numerous new congregations in recent decades. Their fifteen million members now constitute the largest Protestant denomination in the USA overtaking the Methodists churches, while those churches within the Convention have increasingly displayed all the characteristics associated with sectarian fundamentalism.²⁷ The Pentecostal churches have also experienced growth with the largest Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God, quadrupling its membership over the last quarter of a century from 572,000 to 2.1 million. Nonetheless, Pentecostalism appeared to be only one vibrant form of conservative Christianity and a minor one at that. Its growth and impact, then, was always relative to other less liberal forms of the faith.

Whatever their number of churches and precise theological disposition, the conservative evangelical/fundamentalist constituency in the USA has expanded and subsequently become more visible and politically active. At the same time, there were also observable changes in the Pentecostal movement. In the mid-twentieth century,

²⁶ Bibby, R. (1978), 'Why Conservative Churches are Really Growing: Kelley Revisited', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 17 (2), pp. 127-38.

²⁷ Ammerman, N. (1987), *Bible Believers*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Pentecostalism in the USA, on the other side of the Atlantic, entered a 'settling down' period and experienced a gradual modification of its once characteristically sectarian traits.

Among such developments in the USA was the decisions of the white dominated Assemblies of God and the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) to join the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1943 – a major grouping that was characterized by its insistence that all members should subscribe to the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. This newly emerging organization allowed the opportunity for Pentecostals to redefine their movement. It also meant the acceptance of the Pentecostal bodies throughout America into the evangelical mainstream. The cost of such developments was the movement's observable routinization and institutionalization. Increasingly, respectability, institutional growth, and the organization structures mobilized for its prevailing desire for evangelism seemed to be in stark contradiction to what Pentecostalism was once all about and this included its traditional apolitical stance.

The Rise of the Christian Right in the USA

The prevailing scholarly opinion from the mid-twentieth century held that fundamentalists adhered to a narrow sectarian theology which was at odds with public opinion. Thus it seemed quite likely they would remain a marginal and non-politically orientated religious movement in the contemporary world. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s many studies documented that conservative Protestants were passive in attitudes towards most social concerns and much less inclined towards political activism than their liberal counterparts.²⁸

At first glance it is curious that in the world's most industrialized nation, the USA, the emergence of a conservative religious movement of considerable weight and fortitude should impinge upon the political sphere. The rise of such a movement in the late 1970s, the so-called 'New Christian Right' (NCR), took many commentators by surprise. The political lobbying, the activities of its cause groups, and even the standing of electoral candidates, appeared to be incongruent with other developments in a western democracy. To some extent the appearance of this movement was an indication of the country's religious exceptionalism: its apparently greater religious vibrancy and pluralist traditions. Yet, the surprising aspect *appeared* to be the unity established between hitherto estranged conservative Christians in advancing a distinct political cause.

²⁸ For a review of much of the scholarly literature that appraises fundamentalism and evangelicalism in this way see Wuthnow R. (1973), 'Religious Commitment and Conservatism: In Search of An Elusive Relationship', in C. Glock (ed), *Religion in Sociological Perspective: Essays in the Empirical Study of Religion*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, pp. 117-32.

That the various campaigns of the NCR, over the last three decades or so, have largely failed to be manifest in major legislative enactments and bring a mainstream cultural re-direction does not lessen the significance of the movement as an apparition of some note. Indeed, it has not all been about political campaigning, since a perceived declining national morality has been attacked in a variety of ways with conservative Christian groupings frequently rapidly mobilizing to address particular issues, whether those of abortion, homosexuality or prayers in American schools. In this sense the emergence of the NCR denotes a reaction to the changes in US social and political life over a protracted period of time – transformations which Christian conservative constituencies felt obliged to challenge by a divine calling: to condemn and demand forthright repentance.

There was, however, always more to the story. Conservative Christianity in the USA was not merely reacting to cultural change. Rather, it was forced to enter the political sphere in earnest because secularity had also impinged upon the world of the religious. In this respect, legislation regarding prayers in public schools seemed to epitomize a good deal. From the early 1980s, American schools were no longer obliged to start the day with prayer. This move was perceived as the undermining of national religious traditions. Fundamentalists also perceived threats from the federal government: a possible Federal Communications Commission ban on more licenses for Christian television and radio, alongside prescribed limits on 'air time'.

One of the unpredictable features of the NCR was the number of Pentecostals and charismatics who were prepared to join its ranks. Previously largely apolitical, it seems that a sizeable number felt sufficiently motivated, from the late 1970s onwards, to bond with other Christian conservative activists in a common cause. The co-option of the Pentecostals and charismatics into the ranks of the NCR had potentially far-reaching implications. This was not merely because the movement became a more formidable force with fresh additional cohorts. The apparent new-found unity constituted a sign of the political and cultural impotency of the Christian constituency in that various conservative strands were forced to huddle together for protection in a hostile environment.

When more conservative-minded Christians appeared prepared to move confidently into the political arena, many of the older Pentecostal denominations were among them. To a degree their greater respectability and organization allowed them to become part of the same religious and cultural mainstream that had been alien to them for so long. Moreover, while it appeared that Pentecostal groupings socialized their members in selective (conservative) American values,²⁹ the general

²⁹ Johnson, B. (1961), 'Do Holiness Sects Socialized in Dominant Values?', *Social Forces*, 39: 309-19.

upward mobility of many after the post-war years allowed them to partake of the material blessings of American affluence. Their entrance into the political world was, then, perhaps inevitable. However, politics in the eyes of many Pentecostals was primarily about issues of morality and its evident decline in the USA and, especially in the post-war years, the emergence of the so-called 'permissive' society.

It was not until the late 1970s with the ideological ascendancy of the NCR, and the secular parallel of the Regan administrations, that a Christian conservative backlash was evident. The NCR constituted a social movement dedicated to restoring traditional values in public policy. By the late 1970s, the movement had grown in size and sophistication, so that by the mid-1980s it exercised influence in national politics, especially by mobilizing religious voters on behalf of Republican candidates. The potential strength of America's fundamentalists as political lobbyists and candidates for office thus appeared to be formidable.³⁰ Abortion, adultery, premarital sex, promiscuity, divorce and remarriage, and rebellion against authority, were but a few of the indicators of moral malaise. To deal with these issues without protestation was to render them legitimate.

In the USA the Pentecostals were joined by a number of charismatic elements who became co-workers in the same moral and political campaigns. Given their numbers, the Pentecostals and charismatics were a potentially formidable political force. Abandoning their apolitical stance, they joined the ranks of the fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals, embracing the new moral agenda. In doing so they too were to prove selective of the issue they endorsed, seemingly placing themselves towards the right of the political spectrum. Although this tendency might have been anticipated, there was hitherto little empirical evidence of the political preferences of the neo-Pentecostals, but it was perhaps of no surprise that they should take the path they did.

While over the past few decades, political analysts have explored the fresh profile of evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants in American public life at some length, they have been less cognizant of the parallel activation of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians groups which overlap with the evangelical community but extend into other religious traditions.³¹ By the end of the 1970s, no group in America had a greater opportunity to challenge the existing order. The political preferences and

³⁰ See, for example, Green, J. (1996), 'A Look at the "Invisible Army": Pat Robertson's 1988 Activist Corps', in Green et al, *Religion and the Culture Wars*.

³¹ Some exceptions are the works of Hertzke, A. (1993), *Echoes of Discontent*; Jelen, T. (1991), 'The Political Consequences of Religious Group Attitudes', *Journal of Politics*, 55 (1), pp. 178-90; Poloma, M. (1986), 'Pentecostals and Politics in North and Central America', in Hadden and Shupe, *Prophetic Religion and Politics*; Smidt, C. (1989), "Praise the Lord" Politics: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Characteristics and Political Views of Evangelical and Charismatic Christians', *Sociological Analysis*, 30, pp. 53-72.

ideology of the charismatics soon became clearer. With its vast armies of committed followers, with its overwhelming faith and enthusiasm, able leadership – some which were leading personalities among the ‘televangelists’ – and cohorts of committed followers from the denominations and independent fellowships, the Charismatic movement was in a position to challenge America’s cultural lifestyle.

The Charismatic movement’s political potential was effectively displayed in the Washington for Jesus demonstration, in April, 1980, which attracted half a million Christians to the mall of the capital in one of the largest gatherings in the city’s history. This event showed the political potential of Pentecostals and charismatics. Since the rally was sponsored by the self-confessed charismatic, Pat Robertson, it seemed to indicate a preference of the neo-Pentecostals for Republican Party politics.

In 1980, the NCR was successful up to a point since evidence suggested that conservative Christians switched in the Presidential election from Carter to Reagan. Yet, after the 1980 election, much of the NCR mobilization seemed to disintegrate. While the tactics of its advocates in preaching from the pulpit on issues did not particularly convince church members, neither did the movement impress the electorate in any significant way.³² Despite the accession of a ‘friendly’ administration and conservative Congress, the major groups failed to achieve ‘top priority’ status for abortion, school prayer, tuition tax credit and other vital proposals in Congress.

Disillusioned with the Republican presidency, the movement turned to fresh strategies. It was Pat Robertson who tried hardest to harness the newfound enthusiasm of the NCR and provide the cause with direction. Robertson is a Baptist by origin but could be said to subscribe to the broad Pentecostal-charismatic movement which by the 1980s amounted to an amorphous grouping of largely white churches and congregations – some denominational, others independent. Robertson made a respectable attempt to gain the Republican presidential nomination throughout the 1980s. The motto of his Christian Coalition ran ‘Think like Jesus, lead like Moses, fight like David, run like Lincoln’. Even electoral failure in 1988 did not mark the end of the story. Robertson sought to further mobilize the Spirit-filled from the remnants of his campaigning organization and other second-generation Christian Right groups, and they remained central elements in his Christian Coalition.

A general upward social mobility, in addition to political grievances, seemingly moved a good number of Pentecostals and charismatics towards a greater political involvement. They were a critical element in the Christian Voice organization and other ‘cause’ groups³³ and it was the charismatics, alongside their

³² Lipset, M. and Raab, E. (1981), ‘The Elections and the Evangelicals’, *Commentary*, March, pp. 15-18.

³³ Jorstad, E. (1990), *Holding Fast/Pressing On: Religion in America in the 1980s*, New York: Greenwood.

Pentecostal allies, who formed the core of Robertson's 1988 Presidential bid.³⁴ Hence, Robertson's campaign began to mobilize a hitherto untapped reservoir of support – a constituency comprised of largely middle-class members of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, alongside a narrow slice of evangelical Protestantism.³⁵ This was a cadre that was unrepresentative of evangelicalism as a whole but seemingly not different on the issues that concerned it. One-third of the donors to Robertson's campaign came from non-denominational or independent churches, followed by one-quarter from churches outside of the evangelical tradition, the lion's share of which were charismatics in the mainline Protestant churches. A further one-quarter were Pentecostals, and just under one-fifth represented one variety or other of evangelicals. Overall, more than two-thirds of the donors identified themselves as charismatic or Pentecostal.

The UK Counterpart

UK charismatics over the same period have engaged in their own political and moral campaigns and largely for the same reasons. Although experiencing far less of a public profile than their American cousins they have, at times, enjoyed a measure of success in fulfilling their aims. They may have appeared to be less vociferous, more complacent and accommodating to social change. This was never quite the case. Although they frequently did not wish to be equated with the political machinations of the American fundamentalists, the UK Pentecostals and charismatics had their own agenda. Their prophetic warnings may have been more muted and have gone for the most part unheeded, but they were there nonetheless.

In many respects the UK Pentecostals and charismatics have proved to be of a different ilk to their kin in the USA. Theological and cultural preferences aside, they have often been acutely aware of the charge that their political and moral agenda is restricted to certain issues identifiable with right-wing and conservative politics generally. Their response to this challenge has occasionally been to balance their political views by widen the issues. Not infrequently, as explored below, certain groupings have been prepared to take recourse to social activism and embrace some of the concerns of the liberal evangelicals, albeit selectively. There has also been another motivation of the Pentecostals in this wider remit – to win souls among the socially marginalized and impoverish, and thus usher in the long awaited revival.

³⁴ Smidt & Penning, *ibid.*

³⁵ Hunter, J. (1983), *American Evangelism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

The post-World War II world and the advent of the 'permissive' society changed a great deal for the broad Pentecostal movement. The UK had become an increasingly secular nation and conservative Christians lost their power base in the UK Parliament. They formed no sizeable cadre in the major political parties. There were, however, voices in the wilderness in the post-colonial years which saw the nation losing its own version a manifold destiny.

The late 1960s saw the rise of the Festival of Light (NFOL) as a movement of some significance. It was the movement that gave primary expression to Christian moral outrage. The NFOL was ecumenical in nature. Its supporters, concerned with what they perceived as the moral decline of the nation, ranged from charismatic Christians to traditional Roman Catholics who held rallies of sizeable numbers and candle-lit vigils. Their conventions and street marches protested against the moral degeneration of UK society: sexual permissiveness, the break-down of the family, the extension of gay rights and the increasingly explicit material shown on television.

Several of these conservative groups began to mobilize themselves in earnest in the 1970s. They comprised a movement that soundly condemned, among other things, the decline of family life and the growth of what it called 'militant homosexuality' as a perversion of God-given sexuality.³⁶ The movement for moral regeneration of the UK however did not contribute to the cultural polarization of society as in the USA. There was not a section of the UK population sufficiently large as to constitute a major reactionary response and generate a cultural war as in the USA. The UK was far too secular a nation, while cultural change had not generated a significant religious grouping that responded to such transformations. Nonetheless, the UK Christian Right did express a fairly rigid moral code of family values which tended to simplifying complex issues such as abortion and divorce.

Conservative evangelicals, a dwindling constituency and disgruntled with the ecumenical breadth of the moral campaigning movement as it grew, remained outside of its remit and largely apolitical. Even those tempted to engage in moral campaigns frequently distanced themselves from Roman Catholic activists. Although the early charismatics played their part, political activism took second stage to the main cause of bringing renewal to the denominational churches. The resurgence of moral and political campaigning from the 1960s nonetheless brought together unlikely Christian associations. This suggested the profound cultural weakness of religious constituencies rather than their growth as was the case in the USA.

As in the USA, UK Pentecostals and charismatics were initially inclined to be luke-warm in their attitude towards moral campaigns. Yet, from the mid-1960s and

³⁶ Caufield, M. (1975), *Mary Whitehouse*, London: Mowbray.

throughout the 1970s, the community of those evangelicals who were politically driven, alongside Roman Catholics and Pentecostals, grew and were swelled by the ranks of the charismatics in the mainline denominations and 'house church' movement. They were increasingly at the forefront of moral campaigns in the UK, with the Evangelical Alliance uniting many of these constituencies.

Thompson asserts that the Charismatic revival and its political input in the UK cannot be over-exaggerated since the emphasis upon the role of the Spirit and the spiritual gifts enabled a common purpose and sense of unity across numerous church traditions.³⁷ This new-found unity was seen in the extensive platform-sharing during the yearly Christian festivals, the dramatic increase in both para-church organizations and the growing neo-Pentecostal culture during the 1980s which, in turn, was perceived by believers as confirmatory evidence that the Holy Spirit was at work in their cause.³⁸

The charismatic revival brought change to the Festival of Light movement which then broadened its support base. The rise of the Community Standards Association (CSA) also reflected increased political awareness among Pentecostals and charismatics. The CSA concerned itself with a wide range of issues from anti-sex shop campaigns, to the picketing of occult stores that reflected the charismatic approach to spiritual warfare. But it was not all about conservative politics. The CSA also stressed concern for the urban elderly, crime victims, offender policies, domestic violence, cruelty to animals and environmental ethics. Thus, as the UK's equivalent to America's Moral Majority became more active, it sought to widen its campaigning and thus its appeal.

What was new about the so-called UK 'New Fundamentalism' of the 1980s was its ability to transcend the continuing disputes regarding political activism in some churches, convincing both Pentecostals and 'born-again' charismatics to mobilize. Christian Voice, which enrolled 150,000 laypersons and 37,000 ministers from Pentecostal churches (such as the Assemblies of God) and charismatic groups, sought to unite existing single-issue moral crusades against the normalization of homosexuality and pornography in order to make more effective their opposition to the immorality spread by the demonic forces of secular humanism.

Despite such activism, the reality was that UK conservative Christians were unable to mobilize in sizeable numbers. Unlike the USA, there were no significant

³⁷ Thompson, W. (1992), 'Britain's Moral Majority', in B. Wilson (ed), *Religious Contemporary Issues: The All Souls Seminars in the Sociology of Religion*, London: Bellew Publishers.

³⁸ Thompson, W. (1987), 'Porn Wars: Moral Crusades, Pornography, and Social Policy', unpublished Ph.D thesis, Essex University, England.

charismatic (in a Weberian sense) leaders of any note. Neither did the conservatives gain significant public support. The UK population tended to equate Christian moral campaigning with extremism. The educated public displayed a dislike for what was perceived as the shrill fundamentalists and fanatically Christian lobbying evident in the USA which seemed a world apart from the decorum and moderation of UK culture. In addition, the UK's unitary political system meant centralized power in the governing party at Westminster. The lack of a federal structure weakened the impact of Christian campaigning at a local level and thus failed to provide the regional electoral vagaries that provided a measure of success in the USA.

The UK's Pentecostals of various hues constituted an integral element of the moral campaigns but their impact was muted. There was no meaningful or sizeable counterpart for the direct intrusion into political campaigning as in the USA. Political lobbying of members of the UK Parliament was commonplace. However, there was no Christian sponsored candidate that seriously hoped to win a Parliamentary seat. While the UK Parliament has regularly seen a handful of conservative Christians among its members at any given time, Pentecostals and charismatics among them, they were not voted to office by the electorate according to any stringent religious criteria. Yet, sometimes with the equally strange alliances that constituted the Christian Right in the USA, their influence has regularly been hidden from public view.

The cause of the UK conservative constituency seemed to be a thankless and unrewarding one compared to the efforts of the Christian Right of the USA. This fact is not to underestimate some of the victories of the moral campaigns in UK especially in the 1970s and 1980s. This included the legislative closure of many 'sex shops' and only restricted licenses granted to others by Parliament. Such campaigns also highlighted the greater unity of conservative Christians, including Pentecostal and charismatics, whereas in the USA their disunity seemingly contributed to failure.

Pentecostal Political Activism Appraised

The first significant evidence pointing to the overestimation of the power of the Christian Rightist involvement in the USA during the 1980s elections was presented in an article by Lipset and Raab published in *Commentary* in March, 1981.³⁹ Having examined a mass of polling and election data, Lipset and Raab concluded that 'What all these findings seem to indicate is that the effort to mobilize a religious constituency for political purposes in America had no measurable effect on the 1980 elections'. The failures were repeated in 1984 and 1988.

³⁹ Lipset, M. and Raab, E. (1981), *ibid.*

Internally, despite attempts at a coalition, the NCR was deeply divided on religious grounds, and this included long-standing tensions between fundamentalists on the one hand and Pentecostals and charismatics on the other.⁴⁰ Pat Robertson also proved to be a divisive force in the NCR and the Republican Party. While his support was welcomed by many Republican leaders, Robertson's movement was also perceived as something of a liability.

The Lipset and Raab survey also included gauging attitudes towards key figures in the Christian Right: Pat Robertson and the late Jerry Falwell. Respondents were asked whether they saw themselves as evangelicals, fundamentalists, charismatics or Pentecostals. The findings suggested an overlap between political objective support for these figures and for the Republican Party. However, fundamentalists were more likely to choose Falwell and the charismatics Robertson. Indeed, the fundamentalists antipathy towards Robertson's Pentecostalism was detrimental to his presidential claims.⁴¹

Jelen concludes that despite similar agendas, religious fragmentation appeared to have an independent effect on support for specific NCR political figures (Robertson's greater support among charismatics, and fundamentalists for Falwell) even if they held similar attitudes towards subjects such as abortion, foreign policy, racial segregation, social issues, genders roles, gay rights and the death penalty.⁴² This suggested that such leaders themselves, in a political culture where prestigious personalities were important, provided cognitive structures through which the political world was understood and simplified.

Neither was the charismatic contingent politically united. The fact that they were so widespread was significant: they were a distinct minority among evangelicals, mainline, black Protestants and Catholics. Only within the evangelical and black Protestant camps did Pentecostal and charismatics constitute a substantial percentage. In addition, Guth found that members of the Pentecostal/charismatic movements were no more cohesive in their issue preferences than are other believers.⁴³ Other factors, Guth found, mitigated against the political unity of the NCR. Pentecostals and other evangelicals have historically exhibited strong anti-Catholic sentiments, for theological, liturgical and possibly cultural reasons. Similar barriers existed in trying to forge any political alliance between white and black Pentecostals.

⁴⁰ Wilcox, C. (1992), *God's Warriors: The Christian Right in Twentieth Century America*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

⁴¹ Wilcox (1992), *ibid.*

⁴² Jelen, T. (1991), *The Political Mobilization of Religious Beliefs*, New York: Praeger.

⁴³ Guth, J. (1996), 'The Politics of the Christian Right', in J. Green, J. Guth, C. Smidt and L. Kellstedt (eds), *Religion and the Culture Wars: Dispatches from the Front*, New York and London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Traditions clearly shape the political behavior of the Pentecostal/charismatics in the USA. Overall, among evangelical Protestants, the Pentecostal/charismatics are much more Republican than traditional Evangelicals. Nearly twice as many Pentecostal/charismatics label themselves as Republican (55 percent) than Democrats (28 percent). Likewise, more Pentecostal/charismatics reported voting for Bush in the three-way race in 1992 than their traditional evangelical counterparts (59:50 percent respectively).

Despite something of a lull wrought by such divisions, the NCR has not disappeared. The 2004 Presidential elections indicated that the movement's vote was still significant. The UK newspaper, *The Guardian*, carried the article heading that 'John Kerry was undone by the emergence of the churchgoing "values voter"'.⁴⁴ George Bush jr. had won a second term of office. The final exit polls defined the situation clearly. When asked which issue mattered most, the commonest repeated response was not terrorism, or the war in Iraq, it was not the economy; it was moral values. The new block that emerged was the 'values voter'. Over one-fifth of everyone who voted was a self-described evangelical. Bush won their vote by a crushing margin, and these voters turned out for him in greater numbers than ever before.

Evidence suggests that Bush was elected because his campaign manager Carl Rove implemented a strategy of working through the conservative churches in particular. This turned out an army of enthusiastic evangelicals, many of whom had even avoided politics until that time and who, by improved organizational strategies, tipped the election in Bush's favor. In dozens of interviews since the election, grass-roots activists in Ohio, Michigan and Florida credited Rove with setting a clear goal that became a mantra among conservatives: to win, Bush had to draw 4 million more evangelicals to the polls than he did in 2000. But they also mobilized evangelical Protestants and conservative Roman Catholics in a movement that took off under its own power. According to surveys of voters leaving the polls, Bush won 79 percent of the 26.5 million evangelical votes and 52 percent of the 31 million Catholic votes. Turnout soared in conservative areas such as Ohio's Warren County, where Bush picked up 18,000 more votes than in 2000.

The rallying cry for many social conservatives was the same as in the 1980s and 1990s: opposition to same-sex marriage, concern about the liberal tendencies of the Supreme Court, abortion, school prayer and pornography motivated these 'values voters'. This interpretation of the election was disputed, but there is no doubt that white evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for Bush. Richard Land, a prominent leader among Southern Baptists, the largest and most organized contingent of Evangelicals

⁴⁴ James, P. (2004), *Guardian*, 5th November.

in his post-election commentary saw the underlying story as a 'culture war' continuing across America. Among the more evangelically-minded, there were those who believed that by allowing Bush to be re-elected, God had given the nation another chance. For months leading up to the election, many Christians nationwide prayed and fasted, in an effort led by Intercessors for America, to assist in Bush's re-election. There were clues to the preferences of the Pentecostals. Over the summer of that year, the Rev. Bruce Moore, pastor of Warren County's Clearcreek Christian Assembly (AOG), gave two sermons explaining a Christian's responsibility to vote. Then he passed out voter registration cards. His four-hundred congregants circulated them among like-minded friends, registering hundreds more voters to the Bush cause.⁴⁵

Radical Aspects of Charismatic Politics

While political mobilization has been increasingly evident for some three decades among Pentecostals and charismatics in the USA and UK, it has not, however, proved to be a wholesale part of a right-wing movement. Indeed, the picture is far more complicated than the above analysis might suggest. The charismatics, along with a number of Pentecostal groupings, have been evident in liberal political campaigning albeit over fairly selective issues.

The potential for a more radical style political mobilization was perhaps exemplified in the USA by the presidential electoral campaigns of Jessie Jackson in 1984 and 1988. The timing of these campaigns was significant since the 1980s marked a watershed for African American politics throughout the Reagan years. Furthermore, Jackson's political mobilization via the black churches, Pentecostal or otherwise, did not carry the religious and status divisiveness found in predominantly white congregations since the politics embraced largely, but not exclusively, reflected the cultural legacy of a low status group in the USA.

Organizing black parishes as precincts and continuing his support of African Americans, Jackson established common ground with liberal activists and Arab Americans. This ensured that the political issues which he embraced were in stark contrast to the conservative Right: economic redistribution, feminism, gay rights, environmental concerns, nuclear disarmament, Majority World issues and the Palestinian cause. By 1988 Jackson's commanding leadership in the black community gave him an overwhelming 92 percent of the black vote. Electoral failings, however, did not mark the end of Jackson's campaigning. The Rainbow Coalition, mostly

⁴⁵ Cooperman, A. and Edsall, T. (2004), *Washington Post Staff Writers*, 8th November, p. a01.

through Jackson's personal intervention, organized marches on state capitals in Michigan and California in protest to cutbacks in welfare programs in 1992.

While the predominantly white charismatics, especially those subscribing to the Third Wave movement, are not of a wholesale right-wing persuasion in the USA, they seemingly fail to be strong on political issues at all. At a congregational level, Miller's survey of the large Calvary Chapel, Hope Chapel and Vineyard churches found that pastors and congregations were far from politically homogeneous.⁴⁶ Although pastors indicated a strong interest in politics and national affairs, only approximately a third stated that they tried to persuade people how to vote. Instead, many saw their primary responsibility as focusing on spiritual matters rather than attempting to change political structures. The ministers did speak out on moral issues, but this included topics such as racism.

That acknowledged, on civil liberty issues pastors were consistently more reactionary than their congregations. For example, 90 percent of the pastors, but only about 70 percent of their members, agreed that someone who is against the churches and religion should still be allowed to make a public speech. Well over 80 percent of the pastors thought that someone who is hostile to religion should not be allowed to teach in a college or university, but slightly under 60 percent of their congregations shared this view. Nonetheless, on all sex-related issues, according to Miller's survey, these church ministers and members were generally conservative. Half of the Vineyard pastors and about 70 percent of the Calvary pastors were strongly opposed to public schools teaching sex education in grade four through to eight. In this regard, they were somewhat more conservative than their congregations. While pastors demonstrated a nearly unanimous position against abortion and homosexuality, 99 percent declared it is 'always wrong' to have extra-marital sexual relations.

Miller found that while church leaders represented conservative political values, they differed considerably in their public demonstration of those values. The pastor of Hope Chapel and the Vineyard churches surveyed shied away from active demonstrations at abortion clinics, Operation Rescue, and other highly controversial political activities. In most Sunday sermons political references were minimized – at least in comparison to the tone of many liberal churches.

In UK, a more liberal agenda has proved to be even more to the fore. It was the Evangelical Alliance, increasingly dominated by Pentecostals and charismatics, which transformed them from a largely defensive constituency that viewed social and political reform dimly and hitherto referred to it pejoratively as the 'social gospel';

⁴⁶ Miller, D. (1997), *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 118-21.

into a grouping with a mission which went beyond winning souls to partake of social activism as a worthwhile act in itself. The EA thus sought a balance in contrast to the one-sided agenda of USA fundamentalists from which it attempted to distance itself.

The search for respectability by the EA meant a wider remit. True, issues related to the family, gay sexuality, abortion and pornography were to the fore. But so were those of unemployment, the Majority World and the environment. These issues increasingly moved towards the heart of the charismatic political agenda. Tear Fund, a global charitable agency, started by the EA, experienced a massive increase of donations in the 1980s and was to become the sixth largest relief and developmental group in the UK. The one-day charismatic street festival, March for Jesus in 1987, included a series of local charismatic marches which coalesced into a large 'Anti-Materialism' protest gathered around the City of London, the city's financial and banking centre, with 15,000 participating.

The charismatic constituency in the UK, largely through the EA and its churches, has supplemented their rather individualized and selective involvement in the specialized campaigning groups with social activism. The major churches frequently organize their own initiatives. To the fore are the social campaigns undertaken by the New Churches, including many of a Third Wave disposition. Their annual March for Jesus, if not exactly left-wing, embraces within its remit community concerns, feminist issues and inter-church co-operation on behalf of the poor.

The initiatives of the largest New Churches have included that of the churches of The Pioneers which have involved themselves in caring for AIDs victims, while New Frontiers' emphasis on social action includes the plight of the homeless, refugees, debt casualties, drug and alcoholic addiction in ex-Communist countries and, in Mexico, the rehabilitation of street children. Similarly, the Ichthus Fellowship developed its *Revive! 2005 Vision* initiative, with its roots as early as 1974, entailing community projects such as employment programs and self-help groups for the unemployed and single mothers, while lobbying the government for increased funding for the socially marginalized.

Christian Right Politics in the Twenty-First Century

Pentecostalism in the past constituted a movement that was typically apolitical, and this historical pattern still obtains today in the USA and the UK. The political and religious cultures moreover, as this paper has attempted to show, have shaped the environment in which such political activism that they are involved in.

Over-all Pentecostals in the USA participate less in politics than those who are not Pentecostal, particularly for turnout in presidential and congressional elections.

This participation gap, however, declines with more difficult acts of participation. Only a somewhat smaller percentage of Pentecostals, and charismatics for that matter, report having contacted a public official or signed a petition than those outside of their ranks. No difference is evident in working for a political candidate, attending a political meeting, or contributing money to a campaign.⁴⁷

More broadly, the telling question is undoubtedly, has the Christian Right in the USA won the 'war' or even significant battles? To be sure, there are different ways by which its influence can be gauged. In respect of its broader social impact, conservative Protestants have, according to Hunter, succeeded in widely publicizing and presenting their agenda.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, he asserts that the expansion of conservative Protestantism does not disprove the fact that there is a general decline of Christianity in the USA, but merely that the process is complicated by discernible cycles of secularity and religious revival. Similarly, the American writer Michael D'Antonio declared in his round-up of the NCR in *Fall from Grace: The Failed Crusade of the Christian Right* that its campaigning of the 1980s could be seen as America's longing look backwards at religious absolutism. There has only been a pause in the secularizing process that has been underway since the turn of the twentieth century. Yet the failure of the movement demonstrated that the 'born-again construct of a Christian America is no longer possible'.⁴⁹

Alarm about the rise of the NCR has generated a predictable counter-mobilization of individuals and groups who stand in opposition to the movement's beliefs. There has also been a tendency to underestimate the influence of liberal Christianity in the USA. Adam's account of the reaction of conservatives to the issue of gay marriages includes the observation that it constitutes a moral panic which obscures the relatively small size of the conservatives on the one hand and, on the other, that liberal Christians (and not only Quakers and Unitarians) have been relatively well-organized and successful. For instance, they have proved to be influential on the Supreme Court in seeking equality for gays and lesbians.⁵⁰

In the UK the story is very different and has proved to be so over a period of Parliamentary elections. In many ways, the aim of conservative Christians to bring a religious revival, to reverse the permissive and increasingly materialistic and individualistic society that has evolved from the 1960s, seems particularly unrealistic. Most right-wing politicians have little interest in the religious lobby. The attempts by

⁴⁷ Guth, *ibid.*, pp. 235-36.

⁴⁸ Hunter, *Evangelicalism*.

⁴⁹ D'Antonio, M. (1989), *Fall from Grace: The Failed Crusade of the Christian Right*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers.

⁵⁰ Adams, D. (2002), 'The Defense of the Marriage Act and American Exceptionism: The "Gay Marriage" Panic in the United States', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2 (2), pp. 259-76.

the NCR to influence the outcome of general elections over some three decades, by appealing to religious moralism, have proved ineffectual.

This failure in the UK is not only because conservative Christians are operating within an increasingly secular culture and because there are fewer of them. Rather, in attempting to mobilize support for their goals, religious organizations are less effective than secular organizations as a result of the tendency of the former to follow vague, universal, and ill-defined moral goals. Such goals are, in many respects, often abstract, unattainable, and unwinnable. The religious motivation may sometimes be hidden by the claim to be advancing the public good and respectability. However, when this lack of transparency has come to light, a negative reaction by politicians and the public has often occurred. Moreover, in forging public opinion, as much as reflecting it, the UK state is a powerful determinant especially when it has to fall in line with the recommendations of international agencies such as the European Community regarding issues such as gender and gay rights, while public opinion largely sees the Church as out of 'sync' with the culture and ethos of the modern world. As long as the NCR defines issues *only* in absolutist principles, it will be perceived as an extremist element in society and will not significantly increase its following.

What is particularly noteworthy is that the appeal of moral activists to the secular world provides a marker as to how marginalized the conservative Christians have become in the UK. It is now obliged to court wider secular agencies and engage with the broader discourse on civil liberties. The lobbyist groups have increasingly endorsed the logical framework of their opponents in order to resist them. They can no longer choose their own ground and have begun to play down the moralist argument and advance their cause by adopting the rhetoric of civil rights and utilitarian arguments. In essence, they have discernibly reduced their essentially 'religious' moral element in order to defend their position and to partake of the secular language long embraced by their liberal opponents.

In the case of the USA and the UK there is more to consider regarding the involvement of the Pentecostals and charismatics irrespective of levels of secularity and religious culture. The participation of these constituencies in moral and political campaigning has not been wholesale. This is why Poloma insists that the view which sees the fundamentalist bent of Pentecostals and charismatics as inevitably resulting in them being a major component of the politico-religious mosaic is largely an erroneous one.⁵¹ Public issues, including economic problems, social welfare legislation and internal affairs, are still generally regarded by charismatics as outside the concern of religion.

⁵¹ Poloma, M. (1986), *ibid*, p. 332.

Those few Pentecostals and charismatics who are at the forefront of political action often represent antithetical positions that threaten to divide the broad movement. In fact, Poloma argues that should Pentecostal and charismatic leaders become fully politically active there is evidence that such involvement would tend to fragment the movement. When charismatic leaders have been perceived to step out of the realm of private moral concerns and into the public sphere, controversy has tended to erupt. Poloma is willing to concede that Pentecostalism, as a broad movement, is inclined towards legitimating a democratic-capitalist world system. However, its supernaturalism satisfies a basic human need rather than endorsing or shaping the politico-social order.⁵² Moreover, its millenarian tendency may have weakened but not considerably. The Pentecostals, then, tend to remain concerned with the impending arrival of God's kingdom rather than the pitfalls of political machinations.

Abstract

Stephen Hunt

PENTECOSTAL POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THE USA AND THE UK: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In historical terms, the Pentecostal movement, for almost a century, was known for its political quietism. Identified by ecstatic and esoteric experiences, Pentecostalism was in essence world-rejecting by nature. The movement's millenarian disposition meant that it had no or few political inclinations. The return of Christ seemed imminent, ushering in the Kingdom of God that would replace all human authorities. With new waves of Pentecostalism spreading across the world, the movement appeared to become increasingly politicised in certain global contexts.

This paper takes a comparative analysis of the political undertakings of Pentecostalism in two western contexts, namely, the USA and the UK that provide examples of a seemingly highly religious society and a 'mid-range' secular society of Europe respectively. The paper overviews the activities of Pentecostals in both nations and identifies the key factors behind the politicalization of the movement and explores the principal variables by which to understand different levels of success achieved

⁵² Poloma, *ibid*, p. 374.

by the movement. This emphasis is supplemented by recognition of the contrasting political cultures in which the activities of the Pentecostals have operated.

Key words: Evangelicalism, New Right Politics, Pentecostalism, Political Culture, United Kingdom, USA.

Резиме

Стивен Хант

ПОЛИТИЧКИ АКТИВИЗАМ ПЕНТЕКОСТАЛИЗМА У САД И ВЕЛИКОЈ БРИТАНИЈИ: КОМПАРАТИВНА АНАЛИЗА

Са историјског становишта, скоро цео један век пентекосталистички покрет је био познат по свом политичком квајетизму, односно „политичком ћутању“. Препознатљив по екстатичким и езотеричким искуствима, пентекостализам је, у суштини, сам по себи представљао одбацивање света. Миленаријанско утемељење овог покрета значило је да он нема, или барем да скоро уопште нема никаква политичка опредељења. Повратак Христа изгледа као да непосредно предстоји и биће отелотворен у Божјем царству које ће заменити све људске власти. Али, са новим таласом пентекостализма који се шири по целом свету, овај покрет постаје, у одређеном глобалном контексту, све више и више политизован.

Овај чланак представља компаративну анализу политичког деловања пентекостализма у два западна друштва, тј. у САД и Великој Британији. Реч је о примерима, како се то чини, једног веома религиозног друштва и једног „просечног“ европског секуларног друштва. У чланку је изнет преглед активности пентекосталиста у обе поменуте земље, уз идентификовање кључних фактора који стоје иза политизације покрета и одређивање основних варијабли битних за схватање различитих нивоа успеха које је овај покрет остварио. Изнети ставови су допуњени указивањем на противречности политичких култура у којима пентекосталисти изводе своје активности.

Кључне речи: Евангеликализам, политика нове деснице, Пентекостализам, политичка култура, Велика Британија, Сједињене Америчке Државе.