

was flagrant and his press-conference divorce was unprecedented. He offended propriety as well as morality. A party that nominated him with full knowledge of the seamier side of his history, and his lack of contrition over it, could not make character-based appeals with a straight face. (It would also owe some profuse apologies to Bill Clinton.)

In recent weeks, journalists have raised questions about whether taxpayer money was used to facilitate Giuliani's affair. His close connection to his former police commissioner Bernie Kerik—who was indicted in November for conspiracy, obstruction of justice, and tax fraud—has also come under scrutiny. (Giuliani vouched for Kerik when Bush briefly nominated him to run the Department of Homeland Security.) His lobbying firm has not released its client list.

It is entirely possible that Democrats have yet more dirt on Giuliani. If so, the fall campaign could be a long one. The issues of Clintonite corruption and do-we-want-Bill-back-in-the-White-House would be off the table. Worse, there is every reason to think that Republican voters would hold Giuliani's lapses against him more than Democrats would hold the Clintons' against her. And a steady drip-drip of allegations would make voters wonder whether they wanted to go through four years of scandal.

Add it all up, and it is hard to see Giuliani cleaning up, as Bush did, among the 22 percent of voters who in 2004 said that "values" had determined their votes. (They gave 80 percent of their votes to Bush.)

If Giuliani is the nominee, the Democrats will almost certainly be a more unified party. Giuliani has a shot at winning the Republican nomination because the Republicans have a larger field and the process is too compact to allow the traditional winnowing of that field. If he wins, he wins with a plurality of Republicans' votes rather than a majority. The Democrats will probably be able to generate a nominee who carries a majority. (You can already see glimmers of this possibility in the polling. Giuliani has not had the support of more than 30 percent of Republicans since May. Clinton has never fallen below 30 percent, and is now above 40.)

There will be more Republicans who will have voted in primaries against a victorious Giuliani than Democrats who voted against their nominee—and more of the Republicans will be inclined to ditch their party's nominee. In the last 25 years, no Republican has won the presidency without winning 91 percent or more of Republicans' votes.

Giuliani might be able to win many of the disaffected Republicans back. But he'll have to spend time doing so instead of reaching out to swing voters, which is the electability rationale of his candidacy.

Giuliani's combativeness could hurt him in a general election, too, in two ways. First, it could make voters nervous about his foreign policy. They may be persuaded that the country has to be willing to go to war on occasion, but they're not gung-ho for war. Second, he could look like a bully up against a female Democratic nominee. The Giuliani campaign understands this second problem, and Giuliani has been trying to keep a lid on it lately. But in the heat of a general-election campaign, the lid might pop open.

Giuliani could win the election. But he would have to overcome a lot of obstacles that his boosters would like to ignore. **NR**

■ THE NATION

Among Evangelicals, A Transformation

They're not 'cracking up,' as some contend, or hope; they are, however, changing

PETER WEHNER

THE modern evangelical movement was born 60 years ago. It was in 1947 that theologian Carl F. H. Henry's landmark book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* was published. Henry rejected what he believed was the rigidity and cultural separatism of fundamentalism; in his words, "Fundamentalism is the modern priest and Levite, by-passing suffering humanity." It is the duty of Christians, Henry argued, to live out "the implications of [the] redemptive message."

From those tentative early steps, the evangelical movement has grown into the most important political force in America. Not surprisingly, it has gathered critics along the way. Liberals and secularists in particular view evangelicals with both disdain and fear. Evangelicals are seen as narrow-minded, anti-intellectual, and eager for a theocratic takeover. Among the fondest hopes of liberalism, then, is that the evangelical movement will experience a "crack-up" that will leave it impotent and disengaged from politics.

Those hopes are bound to be dashed. The evangelical movement is not experiencing a "crack-up." But it *is* undergoing a transformation—one that is far-reaching and will profoundly affect Christianity and American politics.

Evangelicalism, contrary to conventional wisdom, is broad, diverse, and difficult to define. It encompasses personalities ranging from Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush, from James Dobson to Jim Wallis. It includes magazines like *World*, *Christianity Today*, and *Sojourners*; and organizations like Campus Crusade for Christ and International Justice Mission. For our purposes, evangelicals can be defined as those who profess to have undergone a "born again" experience and claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus, whom they believe to be the Messiah. Evangelicals believe the Hebrew Bible and New Testament have been given to us by God and therefore have authority over our lives. And they believe, too, that it is a privilege and obligation to witness their faith to others.

Evangelicalism also "encourages spiritual improvisation and individualism," according to D. Michael Lindsay, author of the new book *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*. Evangelicals tend to be informal in their worship, individualistic, and far less inclined than Catholics to rely on church doctrine (as opposed to personal experience). There is, however, nothing within evangelicalism like the richness and texture of Catholic social thought.

Mr. Wehner, a former deputy assistant to President George W. Bush, is now a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Today the evangelical movement constitutes about one-third of the American electorate. More than 70 percent are white or Hispanic; about 28 percent are African-American.

In 1987, white evangelicals identified themselves with the Republican party more than the Democratic party by only five points. By 2004, the gap was 25 points, with 48 percent of white evangelicals identifying themselves as Republicans and only 23 percent as Democrats. That same year, almost 80 percent of America's 26.5 million white evangelicals voted for President Bush (just 14 percent of black Protestants voted for Bush). This accounted for fully one-third of Bush's total votes, making it his, and the GOP's, single most important voting bloc.

A POST-"RELIGIOUS RIGHT" ERA

Politically speaking, then, evangelicals can appear to be very much of one mind. But beneath the surface, currents of change are gathering speed. The most dramatic change we are seeing is generational, according to John C. Green of the Pew Forum. (Much of the data in this essay was gathered by the Pew Research Center.) Among people under 30, he said, the shift has the dimensions of a "sea-change."

This change does *not* involve a major shift away from a commitment to protect unborn children. For example, the younger generation of evangelicals remains strongly pro-life—more pro-life, in fact, than older evangelicals. According to a recent Pew poll, 70 percent of evangelicals age 18–29 favor making it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion compared with 55 percent of evangelicals 30 and above. On the other hand, younger evangelicals view homosexuality as more morally acceptable than do older evangelicals. According to preliminary studies by the Barna Group, 18–29-year-old born-again Christians are some 15 percent more likely to find homosexuality morally acceptable than their religious elders. Just under 80 percent of white evangelicals oppose gay marriage—though the intensity of the opposition has decreased over the years, and the percentage of young evangelicals opposing it is lower than that of older evangelicals.

Overall, more white evangelicals age 18–29 describe their political views as conservative (44 percent) than moderate (34) or liberal (15). Thus, while they are still considerably more conservative than young people as a whole, they are less conservative than evangelicals 30 and older.

Another characteristic of the younger evangelicals is that they are suspicious of big institutions and skeptical of big government. They believe we have an obligation to redress suffering and injustice—but they want to find means other than large, bureaucratic government programs to achieve those ends. Young evangelicals are also increasingly seeking ways to bridge denominational divides. "One of the clearest impressions I have received from [young evangelicals] is a great hesitation to be identified with any religious category," M. Craig Barnes, professor of leadership and ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, recently told me. Barnes, who often speaks at evangelical seminaries and colleges, says that today's young evangelicals "want desperately to cross lines that inevitably develop whenever a line is drawn around a grouping. They perceive the line as inherently wrong and have a distaste for all of them."

While the populist "blue-collar evangelicals"—those who belong to the more fundamentalist and Pentecostal wing of the move-

ment—still identify with the Jerry Falwell–James Dobson model, recent years have brought a break with the tone and approach of the "Religious Right," particularly among upper-middle-class and more highly educated evangelicals. These evangelicals are seeking a "rejection of the hard-edged politics of the Christian Right," according to Green. Most evangelicals still care a great deal about advancing a culture-of-life agenda; abortion remains their most consistently important and galvanizing issue. Yet more and more evangelicals are showing concern for environmental issues like global warming; human-rights issues like religious persecution and genocide; and "social justice" issues like poverty and AIDS. The evangelical movement's longstanding concern about abortion isn't receding; the area of concern is enlarging. "Evangelicalism is in a time of major self-examination," John Yates, rector of The Falls Church (an Episcopal church in Falls Church, Va.), told me. "Certainly there is a sensitivity to be living out the social implications of the gospel that is much broader than even ten years ago."

The contemporary evangelical movement is increasingly identifying with voices like Tim Keller, the senior pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, who is known for his persuasive, culturally informed, and literary sermons (he's been called "Manhattan's leading evangelist" in the *New York Times*), and Rick Warren, the senior pastor of Saddleback Church and author of the bestselling book *The Purpose Driven Life*. Warren and those like him tend to be low-key in their approach to politics, non-partisan, and willing to let people find their own way politically instead of instructing them how to vote.

THE ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES

As one would expect, this transformation has important political implications. For one thing, despite his current low approval ratings, President Bush remains fairly popular among evangelicals and the Republican party remains the natural home for most of them. Forty percent of young white evangelicals identify themselves as Republicans, compared with just 19 percent who identify themselves as Democrats. To the extent that support for Republicans has tailed off since 2001—it's dropped 15 points since then—those people have increasingly identified themselves as independent, not as Democrats. (The disdain shown by Democrats and secularists for evangelicals over the years has been noticed by evangelicals.)

What is happening, then, is that evangelical voters remain solidly conservative and still lean Republican, but less reliably so. The feeling one gets is that many evangelicals are increasingly uncomfortable with a close association with political institutions. As a pastor of a church in California put it to me, "In my mind, to be co-opted by any political party is a problem. Whenever the gospel is overtly identified with a political party, we are in trouble."

Most evangelicals still believe politics is one way to improve the human condition, but they care more about the ideas and ideals that they believe ought to animate politics. "The Kingdom of God transcends politics," Scott Dudley, senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Bellevue, Wash., told me. "The Kingdom includes politics, but ultimately is bigger than politics and goes deeper and beyond where politics can go."

The perennial snare for Christians is to invest hopes in politics that cannot be met—which leads to disenchantment and eventual-ly to bitterness.

What role, then, should we expect evangelical voters to play in

the 2008 presidential elections? Much depends on who the nominees are. According to the latest data, the Iraq War is the single most important issue for evangelical voters, and all the top-tier Republican candidates are resisting the call to withdraw prematurely from Iraq. They have also adopted a strong stance on the war against jihadism, which many evangelicals view as a mortal threat akin to the one we faced during the Cold War.

Beyond that, however, the candidates begin to separate. The candidate who will face the greatest apprehension among evangelicals is Rudy Giuliani—whose stances on abortion and gay rights have engendered evangelical skepticism, as has his personal life. Meanwhile, evangelicals don't yet fully trust Mitt Romney because of his recent conversion on a number of social issues. His December 6 religion speech—arguing that denominationalism should not be a factor in presidential politics, while at the same time insisting that religious values should be—was extremely well received by evangelical leaders. Almost every evangelical I know agrees that Romney's Mormonism should not influence people's votes, yet there is a suspicion (backed by polling data) that it might.

The candidate with the most appeal to evangelicals is former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee. His surge in Iowa and beyond is evidence of this. Huckabee's appeal to evangelicals is not surprising; in many ways, he embodies the changes we are seeing. Huckabee is a forceful, long-time defender of unborn life and the traditional institution of marriage. He speaks about his Christian faith not in a detached manner, but as central to who he is. Yet his tone is consciously different from that of past evangelical leaders—and conspicuously different from some of his own past statements. (It was recently disclosed that in 1992 Huckabee wrote that homosexuality was an “aberrant, unnatural, and sinful lifestyle”—and called for AIDS patients to be isolated.)

“Real faith,” Huckabee, the former Baptist pastor, now says, “should make us humble and mindful, not [of] the faults of others, but of our own. It should not make us more judgmental but rather less judgmental, as we see others living a life with the same frailty we acknowledge within ourselves.”

Today Huckabee's tone is more redemptive than judgmental. He tells people of how as a pastor he provided a listening ear to 14-year-old girls who were pregnant and 17-year-old boys who believed they were gay and had yet to speak to their parents about it. Huckabee talks about the need to be a good steward of the earth. He says he will not close his eyes to poverty and hunger. He has expressed opposition to waterboarding. And, at a time when the GOP base is furious about illegal immigration, Huckabee has had sympathetic words for illegal immigrants. His stands have alienated many conservatives. They fault him for his record on trade, immigration, and taxes; they also worry about his posture on Iran, and about his role in the release of convicted rapist Wayne DuMond, who killed a woman after being let out of prison.

Yet Huckabee, an excellent debater and speaker, is clearly generating excitement among evangelicals. When Pat Robertson endorsed Rudy Giuliani, Huckabee told the *Washington Post's* Michael Gerson: “There is a disconnect between past generational leaders in Christian conservatism and their own followers.” Huckabee is tapping into that discontent. Whether he can sustain his momentum is an open question, given the fundraising disadvantages he faces and the withering spotlight that turns to every top-tier presidential candidate. But Huckabee's rise underscores

the broader changes we are witnessing within evangelicalism.

Among the Democrats, Hillary Clinton generates far and away the deepest antipathy among evangelicals. Barack Obama is considerably more appealing to them: Though he is conventionally liberal on most issues—and that remains the acid test for most evangelical voters—Obama is fluent when speaking about the Bible. In terms of the evangelical vote, the best match-up for Republicans would pit Huckabee against Clinton, while the worst would pit Giuliani against Obama.

The GOP, if it hopes to retain the strong support of evangelicals over the long run, will have to remain steadfast on some matters and make adjustments on others. Most important, Republicans will need to remain staunch on the war against militant Islam and the culture-of-life issues, abortion above all. If there were a retreat on those fronts, evangelical support would dissipate, and maybe even collapse.

Even so, Republicans need to move beyond the “culture war” model that worked well in the past. The rhetoric of candidates needs to be principled but civil, inviting rather than aggressive, and radiate grace instead of invoking apocalyptic warnings. Also, it is no longer enough simply to voice support for a human-life amendment that has no realistic chance of passing. While it will still be important for Republican candidates to “check the boxes”—pro-life, pro-marriage, pro-tax cuts for families—it will no longer be sufficient.

LIBERATING RELIGION FROM POLITICS

Finally, what about the effect of this evangelical transformation on Christianity itself? It is mostly good. A faith whose chief symbols are a crown of thorns and a cross cannot put its main hope in worldly power.

Christianity has a core mission far different from that of politics, and it should never be beholden to any political party or ideology. That doesn't mean that at particular moments faithful Christians won't find their worldview more affirmed in one political party than another, but that is quite different from becoming essentially a reliable operational wing of a political party. In recent years, many Christians felt that the latter was happening—and were made uncomfortable by it. We are therefore seeing a predictable, and probably healthy, reaction.

The danger is that this corrective could lead to overcompensation—that evangelical Christians might decide to retreat from politics, as they did in the early part of the 20th century. I rather doubt that will happen. But the best way to ensure it doesn't is for evangelicals to develop a public theology that is balanced, historically informed, durable, and grounded in Scripture. This would help smooth out the wide swings we have seen, from political disengagement to full immersion.

Rémi Brague, a distinguished professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne, puts it well in his new book *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea*: “The political and the religious are two independent sources of authority; they have crossed one another's paths more than once, but they never have merged in spite of attempts to fit them together, sometimes to the advantage of one, sometimes to that of the other. Although there has been cooperation between the two, there has never been confusion about which is which.”

Cooperating on important moral enterprises while steadfastly opposing anything that smacks of a merger—that is a pretty good place for the evangelical movement to be, both for its own sake and for the sake of our politics.

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