Christian Nationalism

The Contemporary Version in the Past 50 Years – and Its Precursors

Paul Nuechterlein / Unity Racine / September 19, 2024

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Part 1 – The Precursors

The American Nazi Movement ca. 1930-60

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Rachel Maddow's *Ultra* Podcast and *Prequel* Book

- Main Characters of the American Nazi Movement (some of them actual paid operatives of Hitler):
  - Philip Johnson
  - Lawrence Dennis
  - William Dudley Pelley
  - George Sylvester Viereck
  - Francis Parker Yockey

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Rachel Maddow's *Ultra* Podcast and *Prequel* Book

- Significant American Anti-Semites who sympathized with Hitler and Nazism:
  - Father Charles Coughlin
  - Preacher Gerald L. K. Smith
  - Henry Ford
  - Robert McCormick (Chicago *Tribune*)
  - Senator Bill Langer
  - Senator Joseph McCarthy

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Rachel Maddow's *Ultra* Podcast and *Prequel* Book

- Most surprising precursor (Ultra 2, Ep. 7, "Mobilized"): Robert McCormick's group For America plotted to get Joseph McCarthy elected in the 1956 Presidential Election by presenting fake sets of Electors to mess up the count on January 6 – sound familiar? – it never came to fruition as McCarthy's health and popularity plummeted, with him dying of his alcoholism in January 1957

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Interlude

"The Family" – Fanatical anti-Communism in the Christian Right Movement

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The Family, by Jeff Sharlet

- Sharlet's book: *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (2009)
- Netflix turned it into a four-part docu-series in 2019
- Tells the story of Abram Vereide, and his successor Doug Coe, starting the National Day of Prayer with Reagan, and exerting influence through prayer groups with many seated legislators
- Vereide's politics are extremely anti-union and anti-Communist – hung Hitler's portrait in his office in the 1930's

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Part 2 – Contemporary Christian Nationalism

How Paul Weyrich orchestrated the rise of the current anti-democratic movement

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Paul Weyrich's Role: a Recent Revelation

- Weyrich co-founded four major conservative organizations:
  - 1971: the Heritage Foundation (funded by Joseph Coors)
  - 1976: Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC; aka Free Congress Foundation)
  - 1979: Moral Majority (with Jerry Falwell)
  - 1981: Council for National Policy (funded by folks like the Koch brothers)
- In 2001, Weyrich wrote with Eric Heubeck *The Integration of Theory and Practice*, the Free Congress Foundation's strategic plan – basically, a manifesto – predecessor to the Heritage Foundation's **Project 2025** – people are finally paying attention to Weyrich's role!

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Paul Weyrich's Role: a Recent Revelation

- Since people are just beginning to see Weyrich's hand in everything behind what we're now experiencing, the bibliography is just starting to grow – here's the early sources:
  - "The Real Origins of the Religious Right: They'll tell you it was abortion. Sorry, the historical record's clear: It was segregation." *Politico Magazine*, by Randall Balmer, May 27, 2014 (https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133/)
  - 2024 Documentary *Bad Faith* (Prime and AppleTV+) – must see!
  - *The Radical Mind: The Origins of Right-Wing Catholic and Protestant Coalition Building*, by Chelsea Ebin (U. Press of Kansas, August 2024)

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Who Is Paul Weyrich?

- Surprise! Born and raised in Racine! (1942-2008)
- Graduated St. Catherine's High School and UW-Parkside (Journalism?)
- Left Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II to join the Melkite Greek Catholic Church – ordained as a deacon
- First job: reporter for the *Milwaukee Sentinel*
- Moved to Washington D.C. / Fairfax, VA (late 60's?) where he lived most of his life

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Paul Weyrich's Basic Views

- His 2009 book *The Next Conservatism*: "should be fighting to return to family structures of the 1950s"
- He called "Political Correctness" "Cultural Marxism"
- Closely associated with the theocratic position called "Dominionism"
- Stridently anti-gay

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Paul Weyrich's Basic Views

- Quote: "I don't want everybody to vote. Elections are not won by a majority of people. They never have been from the beginning of our country, and they are not now. As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down."

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Paul Weyrich's Basic Views

- Quote on Culture Wars: "The question is not whether we should fight, but how. . . . In essence, I said that we need to change our strategy. Instead of relying on politics to retake the culturally and morally decadent institutions of contemporary America, I said that we should separate from those institutions and build our own."

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The True Story of the Origins of Religious Right

- A coalition of conservative Catholics and Evangelicals *not* over abortion but over racial segregation with abortion as red herring
- In 1971, delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, passed a resolution encouraging "Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother." The convention, hardly a redoubt of liberal values, reaffirmed that position in 1974, one year after *Roe*, and again in 1976.

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The True Story of the Origins of Religious Right

- When the *Roe* decision was handed down, W. A. Criswell, the Southern Baptist Convention's former president and pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas – also one of the most famous fundamentalists of the 20th century – was pleased: "I have always felt that it was only after a child was born and had a life separate from its mother that it became an individual person," he said, "and it has always, therefore, seemed to me that what is best for the mother and for the future should be allowed."
- Billy Graham was also a strong supporter of *Roe*.

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The True Story of the Origins of Religious Right

- Weyrich was certainly against Roe from the start, but he formed the alliance of the Moral Majority with Jerry Falwell in 1979 over the promise of fighting the Supreme Court rulings on non-funding of segregated schools like Liberty University and Bob Jones University, with abortion as the cover issue
- Weyrich orchestrated the bringing together of the Moral Majority with the Reagan campaign to build the basic partnership of the Religious Right with the Republican Party to this present day

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Further Bibliography

- Local News
  - "John Nichols calls Project 2025 a threat to American democracy," by Heather Asiyanbi, September 9th, 2024, *Racine County Eye*, https://racinecountyeye.com/2024/09/09/project-2025-john-nichols-sept-8/
- Theological Responses to Christian Nationalism
  - *Jim Wallis, The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy* (St. Martins, 2024)
  - William Barber II, numerous books and his constant public presence in his ministry of the Poor People's Campaign (Google him)

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