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The Cross and Reaganomics

*Conservative Christians Defending
Ronald Reagan*

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Introduction

On election night in November 1980, Americans witnessed the victory of a conservative to the presidency. With the United States experiencing economic stagnation and high inflation, many were hopeful of Ronald Reagan's deeds matching his optimistic rhetoric of America's potential. What followed was a decade of economic transformation, military buildup, and a political awakening of conservatism. At the same time, there was the rising visibility of conservative Christian populism and the robust opposition by critics who feared the application of conservative Christian ideas on issues such as abortion, pornography, prayer in public schools, educational curriculum, and family values.¹ While this is an important story, there was another fascinating debate among Christians missed by much scholarship on the 1980s. During the Reagan years, conservative Christians were among the strongest champions of limited government, free enterprise (particularly small business), and anticommunism. They did not see Reaganomics as undercutting their working-class and middle-class interests.²

For conservative Christians and their ideas on what was best for the United States, a *political* victory came by way of economics which said Reaganomics—the emphasis on free-market principles and smaller government—was a success story. Conservative Christians embraced and tapped into the traditional American values of individual opportunity, personal responsibility, and human freedom—all themes they believed were front and center in Reaganomics. This all made sense theologically given that most conservative Christians focused on spiritual salvation by way of an old-fashioned gospel message that embodied individual responsibility and action. They appeared to be more open than many to risky and unforgiving market competition. Finding stability and certainty in their faith, they adjusted quite

well to the uncertainties of capitalism that in time brought economic progress.³

In one sense, conservative Christians paid their dues of membership to a reformulated Republican Party as they faced critics of Reaganomics who believed it was solely greed and indifference to the poor that motivated support for smaller government. What made conservative Christian defense of free enterprise distinctive was its ethical dimension. As defenders of Reaganomics, many conservative Christians clarified that they too cared about the poor as they understood the problem. There was a clear biblical duty to help people who suffered debilitating injury or other physical and mental health issues. Despite their overall modest income and occupational status, many conservative Christians had an admirable record for charitably giving their time and money to assist those unable temporarily or permanently to take care of their own needs. Contrary to critics, there were conservative churches demonstrating compassion for the economic welfare of American families, shown in their commitment to urban poverty and various humanitarian projects, all done within the framework of a salvation message.

In regards to foreign policy, the defense of free-market capitalism by key conservative Christian leaders offered a sharp contrast to the American Left's defense of socialist activity in poorer countries in the world. In the 1970s and 1980s the political and economic record of communism (revolutionary socialism) throughout the world was a disturbing one.⁴ From the standpoint of conservatives, even the "improved" model of socialist ideas in Third World countries appeared to have left people worse off than those under a more capitalistic structure. In addition, there were serious problems concerning the lack of religious freedom and, even worse, the persecution of Christians, evident in the hostility of socialist politicians to the spreading of the gospel message of individual salvation. There were some such as Christian fundamentalist Jerry Falwell who warned that the Soviets' "only one goal" was "to destroy capitalistic society." And he linked revolutionary socialism with immorality: "Communists know that in order to take over a country they must first see to it that a nation's military strength is weakened and that its morals are corrupted so that its people have no will to resist wrong."⁵ Conservative Christians were the most faithful in funding missionary activities throughout the world and as a result of their long-standing and extensive network of missionary activity they saw much at stake in supporting the democratic capitalist policies of the Reagan government, even when such policies meant American military intervention in nations split over socialist ideas.

The term *Reaganomics* is a broad term not always used in a precise manner. For many, its political label was supply-side economics, notably the cutting of taxes, the capping of government spending, and the reduction of government regulations. However, virtually all of Reagan's economic policies became known as Reaganomics even though they were not always tech-

nically supply-side, which held that the producer (productivity/supply) was preeminent over the consumer (demand). Classical economic principles had multiple sources. For example, conservative Christian supporters of Reaganomics embraced some of the ideas of economists Milton Friedman or Ludwig von Mises, who were not in theory supply-side champions. Supply-side economists themselves did not always agree with each other; many supply-side enthusiasts worried about government spending while others did not.⁶ Although most conservative Christians agreed that high taxes, big government spending, and overregulation were serious issues, their emphasis on any one of these three varied. Some conservatives opposed to big government tolerated tax increases in order to have a balanced budget. Whether they were supply-siders focusing on production or not, supporters of Reagan's economic policies typically fell under the broad Reaganomic banner.

But who were these conservative Christian defenders of Reagan? The designation "Christian Right" is useful, but when referring to Christian supporters of Reaganomics the term can be misleading because there were many conservative Christians who did not necessarily view themselves as part of the Christian Right, often seen as synonymous with fundamentalism.⁷ Their conservatism might focus more on the economy than the divisive social issues fundamentalists worried about. This book favors the term *conservative Christian* (or *Christian conservative*) except on a number of occasions when the term *Christian Right* is appropriate. Conservative Christians who upheld capitalism and smaller government included evangelicals, fundamentalists, conservative Protestants, conservative Catholics, Pentecostals, and other charismatic Christians.⁸ Doctrinally, most African American Protestants had much in common with these conservative groups, but their more liberal responses to major social and political issues "set them apart dramatically from the white evangelicals."⁹

Recent historians define evangelicalism as follows: "a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority," "a stress on the New Birth," "an energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement," and "a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity."¹⁰ Evangelicals are a people of action rather than apathy. An important point is that most evangelicals do not consider themselves fundamentalists. Fundamentalists are evangelicals in that they basically agree with evangelical doctrine. The difference in fundamentalism is that it tends to be more reactionary and separatist. One tongue-in-cheek definition is that "a fundamentalist is an evangelical who is mad about something."¹¹ Interestingly, this reactionary component does not appear to dampen any enthusiasm for sharing the gospel; soul winning and revival are essential for fundamentalists. Scholars point out that those with a strong tradition of revivalism were among the staunchest defenders of individual freedom and free enterprise.¹²

There were conservative Protestants who upheld biblical Christianity, but distanced themselves from the label evangelical or fundamentalist.¹³ The Southern Baptist Convention does not belong to the National Association of Evangelicals and many Southern Baptists resist identification with the term *fundamentalism*. However, there are numerous other Southern Baptists who do not oppose the fundamentalist label. As conservative Southern Baptist leaders focused on biblical inerrancy and took control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s, it was obvious that they were conservative Christians.¹⁴ Conservative Catholics defending Reaganomics were not fundamentalist, but their opposition to the liberation theology of radical Catholics was unmistakable. Pentecostals differ from evangelicals and fundamentalists by their method of worship and preaching of the entire New Testament, notably their greater focus on faith healing, speaking of tongues, and deliverance from demonic forces. Fundamentalists strongly opposed the so-called health-welfare prosperity gospel that became popular in Pentecostal circles in the 1980s. The Rev. Jerry Falwell was all for free enterprise, but he publicly condemned the idea that God wills Christian believers to have robust health and material prosperity.¹⁵ Conservative Christians typically maintained key theological beliefs: the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the deity of Jesus Christ; the infallibility of the Bible; and admission into the family of God through Jesus Christ who died and paid the penalty for the sin of all humans. There was no compromise of Jesus as the only path to truth and the Father.

Many under the umbrella of conservative Christianity opposed any compromising to secular forces. In 1982, Harvard University sociologist Nathan Glazer saw the resurgence of “fundamentalism” in the late 1970s as a defensive response to liberal successes in changing America. With *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and the Supreme Court setting national standards for state laws, abortion became a national issue as a result of liberals abolishing prohibitions against abortion rather than fundamentalists strengthening them. Fundamentalists’ objection to the proposed Equal Rights Amendment was not due to any design to further limit women’s rights. Equal rights for women became an issue as a result of liberals promoting legislation that threatened “all traditional distinctions between men’s and women’s roles.” Pornography became an issue when it was acceptable to display and sell pornographic literature more freely on newsstands and not because fundamentalists were out to ban D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, or Henry Miller. Fundamentalists had no interest in expanding the scope of religious schools; it was the imposition of regulations by government forces that made freedom for religious schools an issue.¹⁶

The theology of fundamentalists and many other conservative Christians had a lessening influence on “mainline” Protestant leaders who were more receptive to modern conceptions of social change. Carried by a modernist

wave that began with nineteenth-century German higher criticism of the Bible and augmented by Darwinism and social Christianity, mainline seminary educators advanced theological scholarship that challenged traditional interpretations. In the 1960s, only 40 percent of Methodist clergy viewed the virgin birth of Christ as “a biological miracle” and barely 11 percent of Episcopal priests interpreted the Bible literally. Liberal Protestant churches typically rejected the biblical literalism of conservative Christianity and the faith healing practices and emotionalism of Pentecostalism.¹⁷

Being more progressive in their thinking, liberal Protestant leaders opposed conservative Christians’ “uncritical Americanism” and “celebration of free-market capitalism.”¹⁸ Most mainline leaders favored the right of women to have abortions, and on foreign policy issues they were quite critical of hard-line Cold War views. Since its origin in 1950, the National Council of Churches (NCC) coordinated the public policy of mainline denominations and the World Council of Churches (WCC) played a similar role on the world stage. Most NCC and WCC policies clearly set apart liberal Christian positions from conservative ones. For example, the WCC assembly in Vancouver in 1983 opposed an amendment calling for the immediate withdrawal of all Soviet troops in Afghanistan while at the same time declaring “in very forceful terms” its opposition to Reagan’s policy in Central America.¹⁹

Mainline Protestants generally upheld the status quo political system, but there were vocal Christian leaders who favored some sort of socialism connected to liberation theology. On his return from a visit to Cuba in 1977, Methodist James Armstrong, president of the NCC in the early 1980s, presented a positive report on the effects of Castro’s socialist revolution. Responding to the Iranian seizure of American hostages in 1979, Methodist bishop Dale White proclaimed that we are all “hostages to a vast political economic system of the cruelty structures which are preordaining that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.”²⁰

However, there was a gap in thinking between the mainline laity and most of its leaders. Opinion surveys and voting behavior indicated that there remained a significant nucleus of conservative-leaning members within mainline churches, at least until the 1980s. In 1980, one study found that 75 percent of Methodist laity favored the return of prayer to public school, contrast to only 15 percent of Methodist Bishops and 29 percent of the national staff supporting the return of school prayer. For the presidential elections of 1980 and 1984, mainline Protestants at the grassroots actually were more conservative than the national average. In the end, church leaders and the national bureaucracies promoted a distinct liberal stance and they gained the upper hand over the dissenting voices of traditionalists.²¹ But some argue that such liberalism came at a steep price; the relative membership strength of mainline denominations declined.²² More convinced than ever that mainline clergy leaders had rejected Christian orthodoxy, many

ordinary Americans deserted mainline churches and found a new home in conservative congregations. From 1970 through 1977, the losses were stunning in some denominations: the United Presbyterian Church (-22 percent), the Episcopal Church (-17 percent), and Disciples of Christ (-23 percent). In contrast, all the major conservative denominations grew. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention increased in membership from 11,330,481 to 13,191,294 (14 percent).²³

There were also a small number of Christians who neither fit well in the mainline Protestant or conservative churches. The Christian Left welcomed a more radical approach than most mainline liberals; its more consistent support for socialist-leaning solutions for economic problems at home and its often favorable assessments of socialist governments abroad distanced itself from many mainline Protestants. In fact, Christian Left leaders spoke of the “moral failure of liberalism” due, in part, to its preference for economic solutions tied to the same assumptions embraced by conservatives.²⁴ Confusing also was that there was a minority of Christian Left followers who opposed abortion and homosexual activity (many saw the issues as too complex to take a clear position either way); an editor of a Christian Left magazine even publicly opposed a political action committee organized by some of his friends, including a coeditor, because it took a clear stand against abortion.²⁵ The few cases of Christian Left opposition to homosexual activity were at odds with the secular Left.²⁶

Representative of the Christian Left was the activist Sojourners community, formed in 1972, headquartered in Washington, D.C., and composed of evangelical and non-evangelical radicals with connections to Catholic and Protestant traditions. Sojourners had a paid staff of thirty-seven in 1983; it also functioned as a local church. Although often identified as the “evangelical left,” these activists received considerable criticism from conservative evangelicals questioning whether they were genuine evangelicals. They had evangelical followers (particularly from seminary circles), but many critics believed that a socialist and this-worldly focus was behind the Christian rhetoric of Sojourners leaders rather than evangelism and the importance of a personal relationship with Christ. Although their passion for the poor was unmistakable, their opponents claimed they ignored the reports of terror and violence in revolutionary socialist regimes or made no connection of earlier socialist tragedies to more recent socialist developments.²⁷ On the domestic front, one’s position on abortion was often seen as a litmus test. Christian Left leaders such as Jim Wallis were willing to protest against America’s development of nuclear arms, but not against abortion clinics.²⁸

Throughout the 1980s, the *Sojourners* magazine mostly covered American foreign relations and the antinuclear and peace movements with the occasional focus on domestic issues. It sought to formulate a “theology of liberation for North American Christians” which drew on radical Protestant

and Catholic thought and made connections with the church of the poor in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.²⁹ In the back pages of each magazine, “The Sojourners Book Service” listed recommended books for sale, including books on justice, liberation, war, and peace, and works by non-evangelical radical authors such as Noam Chomsky, Daniel Berrigan, and E. F. Schumacher. A *Sojourners* review of Noam Chomsky’s *Turning the Tide: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace* (1985) praised the book’s analysis of American deceit and terror played out in Central America. Simply put, “To those of us already on the outskirts of society for our prophetic book, Chomsky is a welcome companion and his book as invaluable as a dictionary.”³⁰ Conservatives critical of Chomsky questioned why some thought his expertise in linguistic philosophy gave him special knowledge to become an authority on foreign policy.³¹

Formed in 1965, Jubilee was another Christian Left organization which promoted “radical economic sharing, just relationships, and an end to the wide disparity between the powerful and the powerless.”³² The organization gave grants to various justice education and lobbying groups in order to improve the lot of the poor and oppressed. It also operated Jubilee Crafts, the importing of Third-World crafts and products such as Latin American coffee. In 1983, the staff of Jubilee consisted of eleven full-time and five part-time workers with salaries based on household need rather than staff position. Its *theOtherSide* (renamed *The Other Side* in 1985) was a magazine ideologically similar to *Sojourners*. It promoted books such as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*; Jose Miranda, *Communism in the Bible*; Arthur McGovern, *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective*; and Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*. One resource article on urban missions listed Saul D. Alinsky’s *Reveille for Radicals*.³³

In its early years *The Other Side* was an evangelical magazine, but one of the founders claimed this was not the case in the 1980s since the magazine connected more with Catholics and mainline liberal Protestants.³⁴ Left Christian leaders downplayed soul winning, and editor John F. Alexander lamented, “we radical Christians are inclined to downplay evangelism. That troubles me, because it seems to me we’re losing a central part of the story—what Jesus was up to and what Paul was up to.”³⁵ For some, the definition of an atheist was someone who did not love (rather than someone who did not believe in God). The interview of Feofilo Cabestrero, a Jesuit priest prominent in the Nicaraguan revolution, in *theOtherSide* captured such thinking: “I have comrades who say that they ‘don’t believe’ [in Christ], but they’ve been living a life of love, a life of commitment. They’ve given the gift of self and of sacrifice for twenty years now in the cause of the poor. Certainly this will be acknowledged on the Last Day as genuine faith.”³⁶

The Christian Left viewed electoral politics in the United States with suspicion. As Danny Collum of *Sojourners* explained, “the two parties that

monopolize the system are controlled by the same corporate forces and subscribe to a similar ideology of empire and profit, voting in their elections only strengthens the illusion of choice.”³⁷ Journalists of *theOtherSide* spoke the same language. Editor John F. Alexander, who admitted to readers that he had not voted for a winning presidential candidate since 1964 (Democrat Lyndon Johnson), had no enthusiasm for either Jimmy Carter or Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election. Stating his desire for a “new political vision,” he wrote that candidates John Anderson (independent), Barry Commoner (Citizen’s Party), and Dave McReynolds (Socialist Party of the United States) seemed “to me moving in more-or-less the right direction.” Alexander, however, pretty much gave up on the democratic politics of modern America. Blending cynicism and humor, he wrote: “And if it should happen that come January Donald Duck is sworn in as the next president of the United States, I plan to wear my only suit to the inauguration.”³⁸ James Gorman of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee told *theOtherSide* that the presidential options were depressing and the democratic process was “rotten to the core.”³⁹

The abundant liberal and Christian Left literature attacking the alliance between conservative Christians and other political conservatives presented legitimate questions. In the eyes of liberal and radical Christian commentators, political conservatism represented selfish materialism and a heartless approach to the issue of poverty. There was the suggestion that no informed evangelical could support the “evil system known as conservatism.” In response, conservatives claimed that Christians on the left lacked a rigorous knowledge of basics economics and broadmindedness for conservative Christian economic ideas beneficial for all.⁴⁰ When liberal and other leftist pundits argued that Reaganomics was little more than a justification for tax cuts for the rich, conservative Christians represented a good defense for Reaganomics not always or necessarily by design but by the simple fact that there were very few rich among them and certainly little evidence of a primary focus on economic self-interest at the expense of others.

Conservative Christian support for capitalism did not stop their criticism of the ungodly behavior of greedy corporate leaders, criminal Wall Street insiders, or crony capitalism. Corrupt and unethical practices against workers warranted condemnation, as did the behavior of corporate elites not true to free-market principles. There was no enthusiasm for monopolies and the actions of big businesses eager to avoid competition. Evangelical author Herbert Schlossberg suggested that the government often played a role in big business monopolies, something unacceptable.⁴¹

Conservative Christians understood that there were dishonest capitalists cheating workers and corporate bureaucrats seeking government advantages over competitors, but they did not believe that such exploitation and tactics were endemic to the system; there was nothing inherent in capitalism which

made exploitation and corruption necessary or unavoidable. Class-war type rhetoric against the rich often seemed imprudent, especially since small businesses employing fifty or fewer workers accounted for approximately 80 percent of job growth in the United States.⁴² Acknowledging there were examples of capitalism deserving of criticism, conservative Christian leaders nonetheless saw much good in the free enterprise system and they articulated the aspects of capitalism which motivated people to work hard and pursue their dreams.

No one disagreed that God cared for the poor, but conservative Christian leaders rarely found proof of liberal social policies working as intended. They pointed out that various liberal programs meant to assist the poor did far more harm than good. For them, bigger government meant a drain on a society's productive capacities, consequently punishing many of the very people politicians sought to help. For example, too much state intervention appeared to cause higher unemployment.⁴³ In 1987, Mike Cromartie of the Washington think tank the Ethics and Public Policy Center made the point that the *real* debate necessary between liberals and conservatives was over the best means to meet the needs of the destitute.⁴⁴

Conservative Christian support of capitalism did not mean turning a blind eye to the problem of greedy acquisition of consumer products in American society; their understanding and awareness of sin did not allow the level of shallow self-therapeutic consumerism embraced by shoppers seeking happiness and meaning in life through frequent or indiscriminate purchases. Within conservative Christian circles there was significant rejection of the thinking of those whose number one priority was gaining money to finance their expensive tastes and hunger for prestige. But defending capitalism was not always straightforward. Complicating matters were the scandals of Wall Street and examples of a hedonistic leisure culture. A common criticism of the 1980s was that it represented a decade of greed. However, conclusive evidence is lacking for one side or the other. There were high-profile cases of avarice of the rich and famous which attracted much media attention, but statistics also show that Americans donated more to nonprofit organizations in the 1980s than ever before. Donations for the years 1970 to 1992 increased 556 percent, outstripping the increase in gross domestic product of 503 percent.⁴⁵

For the late 1980s, survey data indicate that evangelical and conservative churches received higher levels of financial contributions than was the case for mainline denominations. As a point of comparison, the reported church giving in the United States was markedly higher than in Canada, a nation seen by some as a model for compassion (particularly for its generous welfare state that offers universal health care).⁴⁶ Jerry Falwell's church was one of many conservative churches offering programs for those in need. To be sure, there were inequalities and evidence of heartless consumption-oriented

individualism. But relative to conditions elsewhere, life was good in the United States. As one study on the 1980s states, “few Americans worried about the basics of food, shelter, or clothing.”⁴⁷

Like any group of people, there were only a small number of conservative Christians who had the time, interest, and expertise to champion capitalism in public space. Actually, the benefits of the free market appeared too obvious to press the issue. As historian D. G. Hart notes, evangelical commitment to small government and free enterprise was a “given” and, consequently, did not command as much attention as issues concerning public morality.⁴⁸ One significant constraint for Christian Right organizations to speak forcefully for Reaganomics was the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 prohibiting any tax exempt religious organization from campaigning on behalf of a public office candidate and devoting a substantial part of its efforts toward influencing legislation. The hearts and emotions of Christian Right leaders soared when Reagan spoke their language, but they had to be somewhat politically circumspect.⁴⁹ And that far more conservative Christians addressed moral-social issues rather than specific economic subjects is not proof of weak support for free enterprise. Excluding the criticism of corrupt individuals in the business world, it is almost impossible to find a conservative Christian critical of capitalism as an economic *system*.

Another major hurdle for conservative Christians was apparent media bias. The results of one survey in the early 1980s of 240 of the nation’s most influential print and television journalists revealed much. Eighty-six percent seldom or never attended a church or a synagogue service, a large majority held a pro-choice and pro-homosexual position, and 54 percent did not regard adultery as wrong. S. Robert Lichter of George Washington University and Stanley Rothman of Smith College, who conducted the study, concluded that “members of the media, the elite, emerge as strong supporters of sexual freedom or permissiveness, and as natural opponents of groups such as the Moral Majority, who seek to enlist the state in restricting sexual freedom.”⁵⁰

If various studies and polling data are accurate, liberals in the Reagan era held a major advantage in that they dominated the world of television, print, and academia. Many influential liberals saw few constructive aspects of grass-root conservatism. On the left, Alan Wolfe of the *Nation* wrote in late 1982: “The psychological instability of many conservative political leaders is actually the source, for a time, of their appeal. People vote conservative out of anger and frustration; voting for unstable personalities seems to satisfy a need to let off steam.”⁵¹ In other words, conservative ideas and beliefs did not have much merit. Basing their views on incomplete and often prejudiced media reports, liberals and others on the left who did comment on conservative Christians during the Reagan era usually did so disparagingly.⁵² In fact, much of the abuse directed to conservative Christians and Reagan came from the same people.

Actually, opponents of conservative Christianity need not have worried about a full-blown conservative revolution. Three Reagan appointments to the Supreme Court did not change *Roe v. Wade*, and conservative Christian hopes for constitutional amendments to ban abortion and restore school prayers sputtered in the face of liberal forces. Society in the 1980s became more secular, postmodern, and therapeutic (sins were passé, syndromes were in). Historian Robert M. Collins explains that the new American brand of individualism was less about “*independence within a system of traditional normative expectations and guidelines*” and more about “*freedom from all restraints and impediments to self-fulfillment*.”⁵³ Conservative Christians never gained the degree of power many liberals feared.

Whatever the true shape of society, the perceived rise of secular humanism was disconcerting for Christian Right leaders. Fundamentalist Tim LaHaye, who later coauthored the successful *Left Behind* novels, wrote: “Between 1976 and 1980 I watched a professing Christian become president of the United States and then surround himself with a host of humanistic cabinet ministers. . . . These people nearly destroyed our nation.”⁵⁴ The Rev. Pat Robertson, a well-known Pentecostal leader, likewise called for action in 1980: “We used to think that if we stayed home and prayed it would be enough. Well, we are fed up. We think it is time to put God back in government.”⁵⁵ The growth of a powerful secular government and the loss of biblical moorings, conservatives warned, spelled the loss of freedom.⁵⁶ Timely was the arrival of Ronald Reagan on the national scene.

At least Reaganomics provided reassurance for conservative Christians worried about the intrusion of big government and liberal approaches to economic problems. The results of Reaganomics breaking America out of double-digit inflation and unemployment rates, of creating a climate of hope for the majority of Americans, appeared to demonstrate the correctness of conservative Christian thinking on economic matters. Yes, there were the embarrassing episodes of high-profile church leaders who violated the trust of their followers by embracing greed; the Jim Bakker fiasco in the late 1980s hurt countless Christians. But conservative Christians pressed on. They, as some knew historically, understood all about pluralism in America and competition of religion in the free market.⁵⁷ Very much like capitalist entrepreneurship, to survive and grow, church groups had to compete aggressively in a pluralistic culture. The best model was small business innovation as opposed to the collusion of big government and large corporations. In this process, conservative Christian denominations drew on the growing financial resources that Reagan’s policies stimulated and expanded their church operations to reach others with a message of sin and salvation.

Most of the mainstream media viewed conservative Christianity through the prism of explosive social issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and pornography, and often missed was the steadfast support of conservative

Christians for Reagan's economic and foreign policies. Conservative Christians threw their support behind Reaganomics and found it encouraging that their conservative president left the White House with impressive public approval ratings between 63 to 68 percent. Since World War II, no outgoing president had a higher popularity rating than Reagan.⁵⁸ Conservative Christians' place in American culture was apparent. Their identification with liberty and free enterprise—themes fervently embraced by Reagan—was for the most part good politics, notwithstanding what the critics said.⁵⁹

NOTES

1. Many claim that a conservative revolution unfolded with the ascendancy of Reagan. Recent examples of a long list of books taking this position are Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974–1980* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010) and Dean Baker, *The United States Since 1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Scholarship that sees conservative Christians as having considerable political strength and success include: Sara Diamond, *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), and Matthew C. Moen, *The Christian Right and Congress* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989). Other scholars suggest there was no outstanding conservative revolution. For example, a recent study on the 1980s, states: "For all the talk about repudiating the New Deal, dismantling the Great Society, and undoing the 1960s' social and cultural revolutions, many innovations [in the 1980s] became routinized and institutionalized." See Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 18.

2. The claim that Republican strategies and politicians used cultural-war issues to manipulate evangelicals to vote for economic policies that went against their interests continues to have life in the twenty-first century as seen in Paul Boyer's brief discussion of Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (2004). See Paul Boyer, "The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 49–51.

3. Economics Alan Greenspan makes the following point: "The problem is that the dynamic that defines capitalism, that of unforgiving market competition, clashes with the human desire for stability and certainty." See Alan Greenspan, *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 268.

4. Coined in 1840, communism for some became "to mean Leninist theory and practice." For Richard Pipes, "No clear distinction can be drawn between 'socialism' and 'communism.'" See Richard Pipes, *Communism: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), ix–x. Also see János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 10. As for word choice, Kornai explains his preference for socialist system rather than communism: "The adherents of the Communist party in power never referred to their own system as communist. So it would be awkward to attach this name to it 'from outside'" (10n4).

5. Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 11, 95.

6. For some differences between supply-side economists in the early 1980s, see E. C. Pasour Jr., "Supply-Side Economics: A Return to Basic Principles?" *Modern Age* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 64–65.

7. Various scholars in the 1980s used the term fundamentalists interchangeably with the Christian Right because fundamentalists were the most prevalent and powerful supporters of the Christian Right. For example, see Moen, *The Christian Right and Congress*, 4.

8. There is the argument that a significant number of born-again Protestants were “indifferent to political conservatism.” See D. G. Hart, *From Billy Graham to Sarah Palin: Evangelicals and the Betrayal of American Conservatism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 177.

9. Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), 31–32, 75.

10. See Mark Noll et al., eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond 1700–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.

11. Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 360–61. For an excellent discussion on defining fundamentalism, see Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4–11. Also, Robert D. Woodberry and Christian S. Smith, “Fundamentalism et al.: Conservative Protestants in America,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 25–27, and David Harrington Watt, “The Private Hopes of American Fundamentalists and Evangelical, 1925–1975,” *Religion and American Culture* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 155–75. George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4. Religious historian Martin E. Marty claims that fundamentalists looked “like barbarians to the rest of America.” See Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 411.

12. For example, see Craig M. Gay, *With Liberty and Justice for Whom? The Recent Evangelical Debate over Capitalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991).

13. One historian rejects the classification “evangelical” arguing that the term is too elastic and imprecise. See D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004).

14. For example, see Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), and Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

15. Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 1995), 271–72. “Falwell Says Media Ministers Need More Accountability,” *Christianity Today*, July 10, 1987, 42.

16. Nathan Glazer, “Toward a New Concordat?” *This World*, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 111–12, 115.

17. Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education 1870–1970* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007). E. Brooks Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 266. Robert Booth Fowler et al., *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices*, 4th ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2010), 36.

18. John C. Bennett, “Assessing the Concerns of the Religious Right,” *Christian Century*, October 14, 1981, 1019.

19. “Critical Imbalance,” *Sojourners* 12, no. 9 (September 1983): 6. The evangelical left magazine stated that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was likely equal to “the slaughter the United States is funding and overseeing in Central America.”

20. A. James Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985), 265.

21. Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life*, 269–74.

22. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 247.

23. Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 322. Moen, *The Christian Right and Congress*, 22. Dinesh D’Souza, *Falwell before the Millenium: A Critical Biography* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1983), 91–92.

24. Jim Wallis, “The Rise of Christian Conscience,” *Sojourners* 14, no. 1 (January 1985): 16.

25. Mark Olson, "JustLife: A Cause for Sadness," *The Other Side* 22, no. 8 (October 1986): 34, 36. For a few years earlier, *The Other Side* was presented as *theOtherSide*.

26. "Listening Together," *Sojourners* 15, no. 11 (December 1986): 37.

27. One such book from the 1980s dealing with the nature of revolutionary socialism is Robert Conquest's *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Referring to an earlier period, Richard Pipes writes: "Moscow won useful allies among liberals and 'fellow travelers,' mostly intellectuals who, without joining the party, promoted its objectives." See Pipes, *Communism*, 98.

28. "Faces of Faith," *The Other Side* 23, no. 2 (March 1987): 17.

29. Jim Wallis, "Ten Years," *Sojourners* 10, no. 9 (September 1981): 5.

30. Thomas Rendon, "The Still, Small Voice of Reason," *Sojourners* 16, no. 2 (February 1987): 43-45.

31. For example, see Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals: From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre and Chomsky* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2007), 337-41.

32. "A Giver's Guide," *theOtherSide* 19, no. 3 (March 1983): 13.

33. Clinton Stockwell, "Resources for Urban Mission," *The Other Side* 24, no. 4 (May 1988): 36.

34. "Faces of Faith," *The Other Side* 21, no. 7 (October 1985): 12.

35. "Faces of Faith," *The Other Side* 21, no. 7 (October 1985): 13. John F. Alexander also wrote: "If we leave that out, we're leaving out enormous hunks." In the next month's issue, Alfred Krass admitted that many within the Christian Left "are offended by evangelicals and fundamentalists who go around asking people if they're saved." See Alfred Krass, "Good News or Are We Laying on a Guilt Trip," *The Other Side* 21, no. 8 (November 1985): 62.

36. Feofilo Cabestrero, "Nicaragua: A Priest in the Revolution," *theOtherSide* 19, no. 10 (October 1983): 16.

37. Danny Collum, "What's at Stake . . . and What Isn't," *Sojourners* 13, no. 8 (September 1984): 14.

38. John F. Alexander, "Welcome to the Election Circus," *theOtherSide* 16, no. 9 (September 1980): 12-13. Four years later, Alexander wrote: "And then every once in a blue moon, a George McGovern appears who has more of the mind of Christ than he may suspect." See John F. Alexander, "On Stopping Bullies," *theOtherSide* 20, no. 10 (October 1984): 5.

39. James Gorman, "Our God Rides Lame Horses," *theOtherSide* 16, no. 9 (September 1980): 26-27.

40. Ronald H. Nash, *Evangelicals in America: Who They Are, What They Believe* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1987), 107-8.

41. Gay, *With Liberty and Justice for Whom?*, 70.

42. "Christianity Today Talks to Michael Novak," *Christianity Today*, 10 July 1987, 55.

43. Ronald H. Nash, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Milford, Mich.: Mott Media, 1983), 6-7, 64, 106, 113, 117.

44. Beth Spring, "With the Religious Right in Disarray, Two Groups Consider New Opportunities," *Christianity Today*, 10 July 1987, 46.

45. Robin Klay and John Lunn, with Michael S. Hamilton, "American Evangelicalism and the National Economy, 1870-1997," in *More Money, More Ministry: Money and Evangelicals in Recent North American History*, ed. Larry Eskridge and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 31.

46. Dean R. Hoge and Mark A. Noll, "Levels of Contributions and Attitudes toward Money among Evangelicals and Non-evangelicals in Canada and the U.S.," in *More Money, More Ministry: Money and Evangelicals in Recent North American History*, ed. Larry Eskridge and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 352, 364.

47. Troy, *Morning in America*, 218.

48. D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 170.

49. On the importance of Christianity to Reagan, see Paul Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004).

50. "Media Elites Studied," *Christian Century*, March 17, 1982, 296. Also see, Paul H. Weaver, "The Networks vs. the Recovery," in *Is Capitalism Christian? Toward a Christian*

Perspective on Economics, ed. Franky Schaeffer (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1985), 385–97.

51. Alan Wolfe, “The Retreat of the Right,” *Nation*, 23 October 1982.

52. Christian Smith, *What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 195.

53. Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture during the Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University, 2007), 5, 152, 155.

54. Quoted in David Edwin Harrel Jr., *Pat Robertson: A Personal, Religious and Political Portrait* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 183–84.

55. Quoted in Moen, *The Christian Right and Congress*, 9.

56. M. Stanton Evans, “Unlearning the Liberal History Lesson: Some Thoughts Concerning Conservatism and Freedom,” *Imprimis* 9, no. 3 (March 1980): 6.

57. On religion thriving in a free market and the success of vibrant Christian denominations in American history, see Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).

58. John Ehrman, *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 1.

59. On Reagan and human freedom, see Peter Schweizer, *Reagan’s War: The Epic Story of His Forty-Year Struggle and Final Triumph over Communism* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003).