

A Critical Study of American Christian Fundamentalism focusing on the Moral Majority Movement in terms of the similarity of Korean Christian Fundamentalism

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I. Introduction

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1. The formation of the "Moral Majority"
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본고는 현재 더욱 근본주의 경향이 심화되어가고 있는 한국 교회에 대한 관심을 가지고 시작되었다. 20세기 초에 시작되었던 미국의 기독교 근본주의 운동이 현재 미국의 정치에까지 영향을 미치고 있는 현실을 감안하면, 한국의 근본주의 기독교도 이러한 패턴을 따라가고 있는 것 같다. 이러한 현상을 연구하기 위해서 1970년대 말부터 1990년대 까지 미국 전역에 걸쳐서 일어났던 근본주의 기독교 운동인 “The Moral Majority”를 이 글에서 다루고 있다.

이 운동이 미국 사회의 근원의 문제인 백인 우월주의와 어떻게 맞닿고 있는지, 이 운동이 여성을 바라보는 입장의 문제, 도덕이라는 명분하에 다른 사람들을 억압하는 구조적인 문제, 사회 문화적인 현상을 자신들의 근본주의 시각에서 끌고 가려고 하는 문제들에 대해서 이 논문은 그 현상을 분석하고 있다. 이러한 분석을 바탕으로 이 논문은 한국 교회가 미국의 근본주의 운동이 가지고 있는 한계와 잘못을 그대로 따라가고 있는 현상을 지적하고 있다.

Key words: fundamentalism, the Moral Majority movement,
white-male-centeredness, new-conservatism, Christian superiority.

I. Introduction

Militant evangelism, but no consideration of cultural or political differences of other countries. Pursuing powers, but no condescension for those who are in need. Ignorance of social values, but no communication with others. Male-centeredness, but no openness for women. Exclusiveness of others, but no coalition with the outside of self. And, extreme conservativeness, but no progressiveness for the national identity. These tenets are not an old-dated American Christian fundamental phenomena at the early 1900's. These are the social phenomena of religious fundamentalism in this contemporary society. Especially, Korean Christian fundamentalists are vigorously advocating these religious and even social matters without considering what the truth of Christianity is. For instance, Korean society recently experiences several difficulties related to the Christian fundamentalism: the accident of Afghanistan hostage, the support of unrighteous presidential candidate of conservative party, the new-right movement to advocate right-wing ideology, the designation of "Satan" toward the progressive, and so on. Seriously, most Korean church has lost her vitality for society, but she becomes a sort of fundamental religious organization.

This research is initiated by the question of this Korean Christianity which is very conservative and fundamental. This question makes me not only think what is at stake in Christian fundamentalism in its religious tenets, but also analyze its socio political stances. To answer

this question, there are two different ways to study of fundamentalism: a study of Korean Christian fundamentalism directly or a research of other similar religious phenomenon. Thus, I plan to study of American Christian fundamentalism to criticize Korean Christian fundamentalism because both are very identical. Needless to say, the Korean church is a kind of copycat of American conservative Christianity without clear distinction or understandings between evangelicalism and fundamentalism.

To develop my argument, I will examine an American Christian fundamental movement, the “Moral Majority” initiated by Jerry Falwell. Why I choose the Moral Majority is because it is not only a nation wide fundamentalist Christian right movement, but it also has enough materials to study. Jerry Falwell, the founder of the Moral Majority, tried to publish many materials to propagandize the Moral Majority and his fundamentalist thoughts. My argument is that the Moral Majority has its socio political contents related to white male centeredness, which is related to the American socio political predicament, based on its ethical and cultural values related to its religious rhetorics such as the ‘moral majority,’ ‘conservative Christians,’ and ‘born again Christianity.’

II. Body

The term “fundamentalism” has two meanings in both scholarly and popular discourse in American religion. Sometimes, it refers to all supernaturalist, or “Bible believing” Protestants. On the other hand, it

refers to a particular subset of white Bible believing Protestants who represent themselves as “militantly anti modernist.”¹⁾ From the early 1900s to the present era, this American fundamentalism has been trying to affect American society with its own voice, and to present such conservative rhetorics as “the divinized home,”²⁾ “the ideal Christian as a warrior,”³⁾ and “the flapper against social change about women’s values.”⁴⁾ As long as American fundamentalism is prevailing in various social areas such as family, education, politics, and religion, the study of American fundamentalism is very important to understand American society.

There is another mirror to understand American society. It is about the American general thoughts of white male centeredness; being American has always meant being White with super power.⁵⁾ Being white means that one can have a position of power. More specifically, Paula Rothenberg posits this more clearly: “White power reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal in American society.”⁶⁾ Even though legal racial apartheid no longer exists in the United States, white supremacy has been embraced by Americans because they have the fantasy that whiteness represents goodness.⁷⁾ For instance, the power of

1) Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) p xv.

2) Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 59–74.

3) Ibid., 75–98.

4) Ibid., 99–117.

5) Paula S. Rothenber ed., *White Privilege* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2002), 56.

6) Ibid., 12.

“white” reveals in the American cultural atmosphere that white is good and strong, but black is evil and weak.⁸⁾

Related to this American value of white male centeredness, American Christian fundamentalism is prevailing in the U.S now not only with political values but also with moral values. In other words, now is the time that Christian fundamentalists in the U.S. seem to dominate this country very strongly because of the Bush administration’s fundamental stance in terms of the conservative Christianity. Therefore, the study about how American fundamentalism affects socio political issues might be another legitimate research in terms of the study of political ethics. Let’s see the contradiction of the Moral Majority, in itself, by examining the foundation of the Moral Majority, its ethical and cultural values.

1. The formation of the “Moral Majority”

To begin with, there are two major contradictions in the formation of the coalition of the Moral Majority: its title, per se; and its leaderships’ ideology for the Christian New Right movement. There is a clear social contradiction in the title ‘majority’ because American society’s majority group is white. ‘Majority’ is usually considered as ‘white’ in the United States. No matter why this group uses this title, ‘majority,’ it contains the social meaning, even if the leaders did not intend it. John S. Hawley argues this point clearly:

7) Ibid., 22.

8) Ibid.

With surprising regularity, fundamentalists talk as though they represent a majority—not a minority—point of view. One sees this in Jerry Falwell’s case, where the majority might be silent, but it was a majority nonetheless. Sometimes this position has a desiderative or moral force: if fundamentalists are not the actual majority, they should be—or were, when times were better. Outsiders sometimes marvel at the fact that this wounded majority harbors what appears to be a “minority complex.” Yet part of what is involved, from the inside, is a commanding sense of one’s own ordinariness.⁹⁾

Also, Hawley states that the majority position is directly connected to Americanness as whiteness:

In many instances the perception of being a beleaguered majority predominates, as in the case of Anglo Saxon American fundamentalists thrown on the defensive by an increasingly plural society but feeling themselves still to represent the majority position—the core of Americanness.¹⁰⁾

Therefore, ‘majority’ implicitly means that the Moral Majority and fundamentalists want to maintain their supremacy with the name of morality.

Furthermore, the Moral Majority jeremiad¹¹⁾ shows in its clear per-

9) John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Fundamentalism and Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1994), 22.

10) Ibid.

11) *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, Chapter Six, pp 153–182. In this chapter, the author

sonnel formations who are participating in the majority group. In June 1979, it was founded by a group of pastors from very large Baptist churches around the country with memberships ranging in the thousands: Jerry Falwell (Thomas Road Baptist Church), James Kennedy (Fort Lauderdale Baptist Church), Charles Stanley (First Baptist Church of Atlanta), Tim Lahaye (Scott Memorial Baptist Church of San Diego), and Greg Dixon (Indianapolis Baptist Temple).¹² They declared that their common concern was to formulate a “nonpartisan political organization to promote morality in public life and to combat legislation that favored the legalization of immorality” (Falwell, 1981:188).¹³ Although the Moral Majority is a political organization in the name of American morality, the more the leaders emphasize their own moral values, the more people are excluded. Susan Friend Harding interprets this correctly:

Most willfully and fully in sync with the content of his speech, they excluded all kinds of “liberals”—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and agnostic. But they also, unwillfully, excluded many others—conservative protestants, Catholics, Jews, white, black, and Hispanic—who may have agreed with some of his political and moral positions, but who were unaffected or positively put off by Falwell’s fundamentalist and evangelical rhetorical forms. . . . They also marked the movement, in spite of its leaders’ protestations, as a white—not a racially integrated—

explains Jerry Falwell’s sermon for Moral Majority as jeremiad because Falwell was mourning as he preached about the Americanized morality.

12) Sharon Linzey Georgianna, *The Moral Majority and Fundamentalism* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 26–2.

13) Ibid.

movement. Finally—and here Falwell’s content and his rhetorical forms agreed again—they marked the movement as male centered.¹⁴⁾

All in all, the Moral Majority, like other American Christian fundamentalist groups such as the Religious Roundtable and the Christian Voice, has lasted and issued a strong call for fundamentalists to take a stand in American political life. They were joined by the American Coalition for Traditional Values (Tim LaHaye), Conservative Caucus (Howard Phillips), National Christian Action Coalition (Robert Billings), and other New Right groups. They constantly insisted that they were the “salt of the earth” and the conscience of the nation. If America fell from greatness, it would partly be due to their silence.¹⁵⁾ They, however, favor their political power in the name of the American majority. Finally, the Moral Majority was treated as one of the right wing conservative political groups, in which many people, especially most minority ethnic groups, were excluded from their political concern.

2. “Conservative Christians” and their Moral Values

There are several ethical values in the Moral Majority such as individuality, family, and social justice. Fundamentalists usually argue that their ethical values are directly related to American moral values against liberalism and progressiveness. Ironically, however, fundamen-

14) *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 166

15) *The Moral Majority and Fundamentalism*, 3

talist's moral values, including the Moral Majority, have some contradictions because they have been trying to manipulate these moral values for their social and political power. Especially, the contradictions are reveled in their moralities of family and individuality in terms of white male centeredness, even though the Moral Majority tried to express its own perspectives of social justice.

The Moral Majority and Jerry Falwell broke their separatist taboos, about which American fundamentalists are usually against engaging in politics.¹⁶⁾ Rather, Falwell delivered many politically charged sermons during the 1980s while he led the Moral Majority. He has a clear conviction that “conservative Christians” should fight worldly battles and seek worldly power and influence in the name of “Christian values.”¹⁷⁾ Therefore, he tried to preach about social justice with this perspective. He said, “In this century, God counseled and nourished Protestants on both sides of the struggle over civil rights and racial inequality.”¹⁸⁾ He made equal both the Civil Rights Movement and the Moral Majority. Falwell said, “I was criticizing pastors who were taking time out of their pulpit to be involved in the Civil Rights Movement or any other political venture. But, now I find myself doing the same thing and for the same reasons they did (quoted in Petersen and Board, 1980:18–19).”¹⁹⁾ Sharon L. Georgianna, however, severely criticizes his thought:

16) *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 9.

17) *Ibid.*, 10.

18) *Ibid.*, 11.

19) *The Moral Majority and Fundamentalism*, 363.

Actually, however, Falwell was not doing “the same thing” nor “for the same reasons” as those involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Whites involved the Civil Rights Movement tended to belong to the more liberal element of Protestantism—not fundamentalism. But Falwell was shaken up. The government was increasingly becoming a threat to Christian private schools; humanism has always been a threat to fundamentalism, and the abortion ruling bothered Falwell as it did other conservative Christians.²⁰⁾

And Georgianna criticizes more resolutely:

In terms of scale and the kinds of activism, several magnitudes of difference separated the Civil Rights movement and the New Christian Right as political movements. The Civil Right movement relied on high risk and high cost direct actions and city and statewide campaigns, while most New Christian Right activism was routine, low cost, no risk electioneering and lobbying. And, no one, not even New Christian Right leaders, claimed that the New Christian Right had produced a great national orator such as was Martin Luther King, Jr.²¹⁾

Namely, Jerry Falwell was not Martin Luther King, Jr., but he was the major cobbler and distributor of the hybrid religious and political rhetorics that enabled white conservative Protestants to see themselves as a singular political and moral force.²²⁾

There is another important ethical value in the Moral Majority—“pro traditional family.”²³⁾ Family values seem to have no clear con-

20) Ibid., 37.

21) Ibid., 23–24.

22) Ibid.

nection with socio political issues related to American white male centeredness; however, family values are clearly related to this because they are strongly supporting American hierarchical social order. American family values of fundamentalists give man, a father, the social power, and give woman a “separated sphere,” i.e., “the divinized home,” in which woman supports man and the social structure.²⁴⁾ Moreover, the Moral Majority empowered conservative Christians to keep values, like God’s commandment, because the commandment says that the concepts of father or husband are equivalent to God, “Our Father.”²⁵⁾ Unfortunately, to their minds, the proper order of things in America had been grievously disrupted: the proper roles of men and women were awry. They found themselves excluded from the polity they had established, especially, the roles of the family.²⁶⁾ This criticism against liberal family values, however, had a clear contradiction related to racial issues because the roles of the family in the Moral Majority were not supporting family member’s equality. Therefore, there is extreme exclusion in it according to the interpretation of David Snowball:

This meant that they tended to polarize issues into black versus white, Christian versus satanic, and millennial versus apocalyptic, but they also

23) Jerry Falwell, ed., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, New York: Doubleday & Company 1981), 189.

24) Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism 59 74.

25) David Snowball, *Continuity and Change in the Rhetoric of the Moral Majority* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 15.

26)Ibid., 41.

*tended to depict their opponents as representing the extremes of their various affiliations. As a result, all feminists became lesbians or, better yet, radical feminist lesbians, all socialists became communists, all humanists became atheists, and so on.*²⁷⁾

Finally, family values not only work to naturalize the United States hierarchies of gender, age, and sexuality; naturalized hierarchies of gender and age are also interwoven with corresponding racial hierarchies.²⁸⁾ In the United States, family values contain several racial issues: separated space of territory, blood purity, national identity, economic social class, gender ideology, and so on.²⁹⁾ Therefore, Patricia H. Collins criticizes clearly about naturalized hierarchies of the traditional family:

*Naturalized hierarchies of the traditional family ideal influence understandings of constructions of first and second class citizenship. For example, using a logic birth order elevates the importance of time of arrival in the country for citizenship entitlements. Claims that early migrating, White Anglo Saxon Protestants are entitled to more benefits than more recent arrivals resemble beliefs that “last hired, first fired” rules fairly discriminate among workers.*³⁰⁾

Furthermore, family values relate to American national identity in

27) Ibid.

28) Uma Narayan & Sandra Harding, co ed., *Decentering the Center* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 159.

29) Ibid., 156-176.

30) Ibid., 160.

terms of racial issues:

In a situation of naturalized hierarchy, conceptualizing U.S. national identity as composed of racial groups that collectively comprise a U.S. national family fosters differential patterns of enforcement of the rights and obligations of citizenship. Members of some racial families receive full benefits of membership while others encounter inferior treatment.³¹⁾

Overall, family values are not a simple moral propaganda of fundamentalism and the Moral Majority, but family values work to clarify who can join in ‘the’ majority.

3. “Born again Christianity” and Its Cultural Values

Cultural values, such as education, media, and professions, were another crucial agenda of the Moral Majority because the Moral Majority always emphasized that its main purpose was cultural reformation.³²⁾ Actually, Falwell used many cultural means for his ministry as well as the Moral Majority: media projects, direct mail, audio and video tapes, books, magazines, newsletters, pamphlets, college programs and courses, concert tours, rallies, Bible studies, conferences, prayer groups, and many kinds of activities. And this change made a clear difference with old fashioned, separatist fundamentalism.³³⁾ Gradually, he enlarged his cultural realms to include education and professions. He

31) Ibid., 166.

32) *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, 10, 16.

33) Ibid., 10.

founded Liberty University and tried to educate secular professions like doctors, lawyers, journalists, producers, public school teachers, and professors.³⁴⁾ The cultural values of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority, however, have clear limitations because the cultural values existed in order to make Christians, who fit in American fundamentalism, the “born again Christianity.”³⁵⁾ Susan F. Harding states this clearly:

*Jerry Falwell led his people during the 1980s toward a more open engagement with American society, culture, and politics, and he helped make that worldly engagement part of the definition of a true Bible believing Christian.*³⁶⁾

And this Christianity implies Christian superiority. Harding says again:

*Not only should fundamental Christians become doctor, nurses, lawyers, jurists, legislators, journalists, producers, directors, news anchors, public school teachers, professors, and so on, they should also excel in their professions and use them as platforms to be the salt of the earth, and to take a stand in the field that you're in the way that only you can.*³⁷⁾

Needless to say, Jerry Falwell's cultural notion was not different with

34) Ibid., 147.

35) Ibid., 28.

36) Ibid.

37) Ibid., 14.

white American middle class' thought, that they should always lead this society and other minority groups should follow them or live under their cultural categories.

The issue of public education is also related to this cultural value of the Moral Majority. It advocated for building Christian private schools in order to protect their second generation from modernist liberal thoughts such as gender roles, family values, sexuality, and new scientific humanism. In interview in Penthouse magazine, the co founder of the Moral Majority, Greg Dixon, asserted that the public school system basically "is atheistic, politically it is socialistic and philosophically it is relativistic."³⁸ Sharon L. Georgianna interprets Dixon's thought properly in terms of racism:

The idea that schools were once heavily Protestant, but now are more humanistic, if not atheistic, pervades the ideology of the Moral Majority. It is often claimed that the real motivation for founding religious schools (fundamentalist in particular) is to discriminate racially against minorities.³⁹

Thus, the 'reformer' rhetoric shows the limitation of the cultural values of the Moral Majority, because its cultural reformation was not for the social change, but for their own belief system, "born again Christianity."

After all, cultural values of the Moral Majority and the fundamen-

38) *The Moral Majority and Fundamentalism*, 3.

39) Ibid.

talist leaders are based on majority supremacy as they thought that they should lead American society with their moral purity. Especially, their ethical norms, related to their Christianity, often recapitulated white male centered normative morality. On the other hands, cultural values made people outsider and insider according to their cultural difference.⁴⁰⁾ More specifically, therefore, the final formation of cultural values of the Moral Majority was to be neo conservative because the purpose was to separate themselves from secular liberalism although the Moral Majority emphasized cultural reformation contrary to old conservatism. This neo conservatism relates to socio political issues, too. George Lipsitz asserts the situation as such:

The neoracism of contemporary conservatism plays a vital role in building a countersubversive consensus because it disguises the social disintegration brought about by neoconservatism itself as the fault of "inferior" social groups, and because it builds a sense of righteous indignation among its constituents that enables them to believe that the selfish and self interested politics they pursue are actually part of a moral crusade.⁴¹⁾

Therefore, the cultural values of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority do not exist for cultural reformation but for conservation for its fundamental values in terms of white privilege on behalf of 'the majority.'

40) *Decentering the Center*, 41-42.

41) *White Privilege*, 7.

III. Conclusion

In sum, even though the Moral Majority is a religious organizational movement for morality, it is connected with sociopolitical issues as long as it is based on the American value of white male centeredness. Namely, the Moral Majority is related to white privilege because the Moral Majority works for American white 'majority', not only with social ethical values, but also with cultural values. Firstly, the Moral 'Majority,' the title, per se, contains an important racial implication because white middle class is usually called 'the majority' of American society. The Moral Majority, moreover, included American white churches as its leader groups and excluded other minority groups for its political goals. Secondly, ethical values of the Moral Majority limited itself within whiteness or white privilege in terms of its social ethics and family values. Although the Moral Majority expressed that it works for social justice, its notion of justice is for the American white majority, not any minority ethnic groups. Traditional family values are the Moral Majority's basic propaganda; however, the traditional family value is for the almighty creator of male centered ideology and naturalized hierarchy, which is a backbone of American racism. Lastly, cultural values, such as education, profession, and media, are effectively used in the Moral Majority's social stance. Conservative Christians think that they should have good jobs not only for white middle class supremacy, but they ought to establish public schools also

for protecting their white purity against liberalism. Therefore, the study about American Christian fundamentalism shows us its prejudicial stance in terms of society and politics.

Likewise, I studied of the Moral Majority in order to rearrange and reorganize the fine lines between evangelism and fundamentalism or between conservativeness and progressiveness related to the Korean Christian fundamentalism. Most of all, I hope that the Korean church give up the endeavor to obtain any kind of coercive power to sustain or show up her religious authority because coercion is not the crux of Christianity. Rather, coercion simply makes people aggressive and oppressive over others with the power as I showed the example of American Christian fundamentalism. Furthermore, the Christian church in Korea as well as in the U.S., if they are still favor on the justice of God, should open her mouth for the world against any kind of oppression related to the socio-political issues of Christian fundamentalism, because silence cannot change the world but it tends inevitably to easily fall in the temptation of coercive power. All in all, this research is very meaningful in that it argued the very important points about what is at stake in the American Christian fundamentalism in order to read Korean Christian fundamentalism.

To conclude this research paper, I would like to suggest the Korean church to repent her structural sins and recover her vitality for society. Truly, the Korean church have committed several serious sins which are based on Korean Christian fundamentalism in front of nations: the support of unrighteous government, the accident of Afghanistan hos-

tage, the hatred of the progressive, the exclusion of the participation of women, the ignorance of those who are in need, the eagerness of power, the corruption of the Church administration and so on. The more Christian fundamentalists are longing to having power, the deeper the chasm between fundamental Christians and the world is. Perhaps, the Korean church, finally, become a useless religious organization which lose prophetic vitality but become a kind of puppet of unrighteous power. I hope that this research paper can help them open their eyes and ears to see and hear what they have done, and I suggest that they don't commit the similar mistakes like the American Christian Fundamentalists. Church does not exist for getting any kinds of power, but for doing prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry for the world!

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