

11-2006

The Soul of Politics: The Reverend Jim Wallis's Attempt to Transcend the Religious/Secular Left and the Religious Right

Bohn David Lattin

Stephen Underhill

Marshall University, underhills@marshall.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://mds.marshall.edu/communications_faculty



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lattin, Bohn David, and Steve Underhill. "The Soul of Politics: The Reverend Jim Wallis's Attempt to Transcend the Religious/Secular Left and the Religious Right." *Journal of Communication & Religion*, vol. 29, no. 2, Nov. 2006, pp. 205–223.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Communications at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communications Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact zhangj@marshall.edu, beachgr@marshall.edu.

ARTICLES

The Soul of Politics:
The Reverend Jim Wallis's Attempt
to Transcend the Religious/Secular
Left and the Religious Right

Bohn David Lattin and Steve Underhill

*Preacher and social activist Jim Wallis has written and spoke out against what he identified as the polarizing effects between the Religious/Secular Left and the Religious Right. His first book *The Soul of Politics: A Practical and Prophetic Vision for Change* (1995) reveals Wallis's attempt to create a rhetorical vision that transcends the polarizing political ideologies of the Left and Right. An analysis of Wallis's rhetoric reveals that while his rhetorical goal was laudable the message, built in the form of a jeremiad, lacked consistency and failed to transcend the Frames of Acceptance of both the Left and the Right. Keywords: Jim Wallis, frames of acceptance, jeremiad, metaphor.*

No one can deny that religious voices have shaped and at times shaken the ideological and political norms of the United States. Almost every social movement of the early part of America's story was motivated and inspired by Christian thought (Boase 186). In the late nineteenth century both liberal and evangelical branches of the Protestant church demonstrated concern for social justice. Liberal radical reformers of the Social Gospel movement challenged the established political and social norms of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. The Congregational "Jeremiah" from Grinnell, Iowa, George D. Herron outlined the movement proclaiming that "The existing order. . . cannot be mended; it can only give birth to the new order,

the regenerated civilization" (Boase 185). France Willard, head of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, editor of the Christian socialists periodical *The Dawn*, spoke and wrote for suffrage, anti-war advocates, prison reform, and every social concern that fell within the boundaries of the Social Gospel (Boase 194-195). The rather outrageous public antics of fellow WTCU member, Carrie Nation, earned her the reputation as an "agent of God" and "the chief architect" of passage of prohibition (Coleman 277).

Evangelicals also preached, proclaimed and participated in social justice (Moberg). They participated in the abolition movement, prison and labor reform, and attempted to improve mental health care, and assist the poor and homeless. During the early part of the twentieth century, however, evangelicals became alarmed and troubled by the liberal premillennialist theological belief that humans could assist in ushering Christ's return by arranging for the Kingdom of God here on earth ("Call to Renewal"). This created a move away from social justice movements for many evangelicals to what historian Timothy L. Smith labeled as "the Great Reversal" ("Call to Renewal").

During the middle third of the last century evangelical white fundamentalists, for the most part, neglected social and political causes and concentrated on saving souls. The liberal Left, on the other hand joined efforts in the civil, woman's, and gay rights, student free speech and anti-war movements. With the changing social norms that these movements helped to foster, the Reverend Jerry Falwell, a fundamentalist, founded the counter movement known as the Moral Majority in order to restore what he and his followers perceived to be the moral decline of the United States brought about by the religious and secular Left (Stewart, Smith, Denton 134). This launched the Christian Right movement, which expanded to include James Dobson's family values organization Focus on the Family, Citizen's for Excellence in Education, Traditional Values Coalition, Free Congress Foundation, American Family Association and Concerned Women of America (Stewart et. al 139).

During the last third of the twentieth century a small number of liberal evangelicals lamented for their fundamentalist

brethrens' seeming lack of concern for social issues. Preachers and scholars like Tony Campolo, David Moberg, and Jim Wallis wrote and spoke out against what they identified as the polarizing effects between the religious/secular Left and the religious right ("Call to Renewal"). They called evangelical Christians to strike a balance between evangelism and social concern. In 1995, the Reverend Jim Wallis, activist preacher and writer, founded a social movement titled *Call to Renewal: Christians for a New Political Vision*. At the *Call to Renewal* inaugural gathering nearly 100 religious leaders endorsed an ideological manifesto, *Cry for Renewal*, which declared that the "old political language and solutions of Right and Left, liberal and conservative are almost completely dysfunctional and now helpless to lead us into a different future" (*Call to Renewal* Homepage).

As the convener and founder of this movement Wallis has written several articles and three books that delineate his religious/political vision. He calls for a movement to transcend the polarizing political ideologies of both the secular and religious Left and right. His first book *The Soul of Politics: A Practical and Prophetic Vision for Change* (1995) reveals the early foundational ideological concepts of the *Call to Renewal* movement ("Call to Renewal"). Therefore *The Soul of Politics* can be used as a representative sample of Wallis's rhetorical vision.

In the opening of *The Soul of Politics*, Wallis urged his Christian readers to "return to radical religious roots" which were based on a "deeper biblical perspective that transcends old notions of either exploitation of the Right or protection of the Left" (42, 47). With an interest in political, social, and religious rhetoric the authors of this paper were intrigued by Wallis's claim of creating a message that transcends the religious Right and Left. We therefore set out to discover the rhetorical strategies that the Reverend Wallis crafted in his attempt to solidify American religious, secular, liberal, and conservative communities into one coherent whole. We will argue that in the opening section and in a few small scattered fragments throughout *The Soul of Politics*, Wallis employed rhetorical strategies that may have appealed to secular and religious liberals and their religious conservative

counterparts. However his message of reconciliation seems to change to a typical liberal polemic against the religious Right in the last two thirds of his book.

In order to support our claims we will: 1) define Burke's concept of frames of acceptance (FOA); 2) describe the FOA of the religious Left and Right; 3) examine Wallis's jeremiad 4) study Wallis's message through a metaphoric analysis and 5) discuss the rhetorical implications drawn from Wallis's rhetoric. We will suggest that a message of transcendence must be broad enough in scope to include and appeal to the different frames of acceptance within a divergent audience. Our examination of Wallis's metaphoric clusters reveals that his message rather than transcend polarized religious/political boundaries falls into a traditional Liberal ideology.

Burke's Frames of Acceptance

Kenneth Burke defined "frames of acceptance" (FOA) as an "organized system of meanings which a thinking man gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it" (3-4). These organized systems of thought are constructed from a framework of feelings, beliefs and attitudes that create a person's perceptions of reality. Humans give these cognitions a code of names that help them define their worldview or ideology. According to Burke these naming systems "shape our relations with others" (3). Accordingly people see certain actions of others, label them as "friendly or unfriendly," "good or evil" and then determine what they perceive to be as the appropriate action. In other words FOA create a binomial world in which every person, place or thing is given a name and a value. Wallis claims to reject the religious/political FOA of both Right and Left, calling for a new paradigm to solve the current crisis in America within the form of a jeremiad.

The Christian Right and Left Frames of Acceptance

A brief history and description of the Christian liberal and conservative FOA are necessary in order to understand Wallis's rhetorical vision of a new FOA that he believed would go "beyond" both wings

of the Protestant church. The conflict between both branches came about during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the 1920s. The liberal modernist FOA centered around a social theology which "called for radical changes in society in contrast to the . . . individualistic perspectives" of the fundamentalist evangelical rightwing (Moberg 14-15). "The social gospel of the liberals was no gospel at all to fundamentalists, who saw in the Bible only a gospel for saving individuals, not one for redeeming the social order" (Moberg 15). Within the purview of social issues like poverty and how to deal with them American Christians could be categorized into two opposing "frames of acceptance."

Christians traditionally labeled as liberals or the Left emphasize immediate social involvement while conservative Christians emphasize evangelism as the Christian solution (Moberg 13). The winning of souls is the chief goal of the Right. From the Right FOA personal conversion will solve a society's problems one soul at a time.

In his book *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern*, Moberg argued that the question of how to deal with social issues today has divided Christians into two camps: the liberal Left and the evangelical right (13). A key element dividing the camps is their mutually exclusive emphases of either compassion or individualism as drawn from the American dream.

The ideological matrix of the American Dream is comprised of two interconnected but often adversative parts: the moralistic and the materialistic (Fisher; Johannesen 81). The moralist dimension of the dream envisions that all Americans will be offered equal opportunity and the right to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. The values that fit within this frame of acceptance are "tolerance, charity, compassion, equality of treatment by public institutions and cooperation to help the unfortunate" (Johannesen 81). The Puritan work ethic, self-reliance, and persistence comprise essential components of the materialistic dimension of the American Dream. The former dimension of this bifurcated dream fits the liberal ideology and the latter conservative one. This is especially true when one considers the frames of acceptance of the religious Left and right.

The competing frames of acceptance between the two branches of American Christians, stemming from the modernist-fundamentalist controversies, reflect the competing interests of the American Dream. The core tenets of Liberal Christians fit into the moralistic dimension of the American dream. They believe in a spiritual mandate and responsibility as citizens and children of God to teach peace and tolerance. Universalism, the acceptance of other faith traditions, is widely accepted. The religious right, on the other hand "believe that all social issues are at root merely personal problems . . . and through converting souls to Jesus Christ will resolve all the problems of the world" (Moberg 22). In other words, taking a cue from the materialistic version of the American dream, the religious right believes that every person is responsible for his or her actions and only through a personal relationship with the Creator, Jesus Christ, will his or her regenerated soul benefit society.

Today the difference between FOA of the religious and secular Left are too close to be distinguishable. While the former proclaim adherence to religious tenets and the latter does not, the central concern for both is social justice. The Left is universalistic in nature accepting all faith traditions. Feminists, environmentalists, Gays and Lesbians are welcomed. Their primary god terms are "tolerance," "progress" and service to the less fortunate. They can trace their heritage to the founders of the Social Gospel, Christian socialism and Modernism (Boase). They adhere to the Whig philosophy of history in that humanity is always evolving into a higher state.

For his movement to be successful Wallis needed to do more than just solidify his followers. He was required to do more than preach to the choir. His *Cry to Renewal* movement needed more converts. Those potential new followers would most logically come from the two religious camps he claimed were wrong or misguided. In order to be successful Wallis needed to construct a FOA that both sides could assent to. In order to accomplish this task Wallis seemly relied upon a common religious rhetorical form known as the jeremiad.

Wallis and the Jeremiad

During times of trouble American preachers and politicians have often used the jeremiad to structure their messages. Puritan preachers would vividly describe and define a community's current calamities as "signs" of God's judgment. Followers were blamed for the crisis caused by breaking traditional frames of acceptance set forth by the church. They were offered a promise of hope and return to prosperity if they returned to the former FOA (Johannsen 80). In a similar manner, political leaders like Robert Kennedy and Ronald Reagan used jeremiads blaming cultural problems in United States on Americans for failing to follow the FOA set forth in the American Dream (Murphy, Johannsen). An analysis of Wallis's text reveals that he constructed a jeremiad.

The Nature of America's Crisis according to Wallis

Wallis faced a difficult rhetorical task because, unlike the Puritan preachers who spoke to a homogenous community with a single frame of acceptance, Wallis addressed a divided Christian community. The problem with using jeremiads as Murphy pointed out has to do with the fact like all epideictic forms of rhetoric, jeremiads have to conform to the audience's values or as Burke would say frames of acceptance. In the opening section of his text, using a form of jeremiad Wallis accused and attempted to appeal to both the Left and Right branches of the American Protestant church.

Wallis followed a conventional pattern of a jeremiad by describing what he perceived to be the "signs" of the current crisis in America. In the opening of chapter one, titled "Signs of a Crisis: The Politics of Violence" Wallis wrote of catastrophe in Los Angeles, Boston, and Washington D.C., referring to riots, gang violence in churches, and desperate sounding politicians. From these three descriptive examples Wallis created a "virtual experience" (Campbell 8) in order to help his readers see that the church was ambivalent to the violence in the streets of America and "the political and media elites haven't got a clue about what to do" (Wallis 3).

Wallis defined the violence as a "sign" of "our cultural and political bankruptcy," an "urgent need for redirection," and "the impetus for going deeper than we have before in trying to diagnose and solve our many social calamities" (4). Directing his message to his Christian audience, he concluded that the violence was a sign of "a profoundly moral and spiritual crisis" (4).

In an attempt to appeal to both the liberals and conservatives Wallis described the genesis of the "violence" using issues that fit into both Left and Right FOA. For the Left he claimed that the violence was caused by a "cruel and endemic economic injustice, a soul-killing materialism, a life-destroying drug traffic, a persistent and pervasive racism . . ." (4) For the Right he argued that the violence was as caused by "a massive breakdown of family life and structure, and an almost total collapse of moral values" which "have all combined to create a climate of violence throughout this country and a coldness of heart on our streets that make even veteran urban activists shiver" (4). Wallis believed that "the urban chaos" provided "a case study of what happens when the values of social justice and personal responsibility are both abandoned" (8).

Interestingly Wallis blamed both the liberals and conservatives for the current crisis. He wrote that "America today lacks any coherent or compelling social vision" (6).

Wallis concluded that the current "values, assumptions, and structures that have governed us for so long have come to their logical end, and we now find ourselves at a dead end." America is "caught in the middle, stranded between paradigms." (6) Following a typical jeremiad pattern, Wallis continued by stating that the crisis and apparent lack of leadership while menacing also provided Americans with a chance for change.

In second chapter of the *Soul of Politics*, Wallis demonstrated the potential opportunity when describing an encounter he had at a gang member conference. He recalled:

The Crips and Bloods spoke of the personal and spiritual roots of their situation . . . Though they all felt abandoned by the religious community. . . In a

dramatic moment, one young teenager exclaimed, "We've got some habits that only God can cure!" (21-22).

Discussing a traditionally liberal issue (racism and gangs) within a conservative frame (the need for a spiritual discovery) Wallis offered what would appear to be his representative anecdote for appealing to both the Left and the Right. He seemed to affirm this with his remarks concerning the testimony of the gang member. Wallis concluded:

Talk like that can be shocking, even for religious leaders trying to find solutions to social problems. The call for connecting social justice with spiritual renewal today is coming from the streets. A new politics requires an old spirituality—a remarkable connection these young people are making between a personal and political transformation (22).

Wallis appeared, as would be expected in a traditional jeremiad, to call the liberal and conservative Christians back to the time before the modernist/fundamentalist controversy.

According to Bormann during a time of crisis jeremiads functioned to provide community members with understanding, as well as unify and encourage community members to action (130). From an analysis of this first section of Wallis's text it would appear that Wallis defined the crisis, attempted to unify Right and the Left and encourage them to action. He seemed to be on his way to creating a transcendent message.

Metaphoric Clusters in Wallis's Rhetoric

An analysis of Wallis's key metaphoric clusters reveals conservative language masking liberal ideology. This study employed Ivie's (1987) procedure for identifying key metaphoric clusters to analyze Wallis's discourse. To gain familiarity of the author's text and context, the following artifacts were analyzed: *The Soul of Politics*, *Faith Works*, the *Sojourners* web-site, interviews of Wallis, and critiques of his work. *The Soul of Politics* was selected

as a representative text to identify and mark Wallis's employed vehicles because it is a seminal component of *The Call to Renewal* movement. The vehicles (1) "Right," "conservative," "Republican," "restore" (2) "Left," "liberal," "Democrat," "reform" (3) "beyond," "transcend," and "prophetic spirituality," establish three metaphorical clusters contributing to a larger system of metaphorical concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981), explaining American politics as a bi-polar continuum, and Wallis's metaphor of "transcendence" as beyond that continuum. Separate files for each vehicle and its immediate context were compiled containing all occurrences of the vehicle, allowing related terms to be clustered as metaphorical concepts and understood as apart of the larger system.

First, the vehicles "Right," "conservative," "Republican," and "restore" are used somewhat interchangeably as a metaphoric cluster to discuss the politically Right's FOA. Wallis states "these *conservatives* of the hard *Right* regularly echo the mean-spirited diatribe of Pat Buchanan's us-and them rhetoric at the *Republican Convention*" (11); "*conservative* calls for individual initiative, unrestricted business enterprise, and trickle down economics have utterly failed to bridge the economic gap between the rich and the poor. The *Right* has failed to generate the moral imperative to challenge the unjust status quo" (77). "*Conservatives* talk endlessly about personal morality and responsibility" (21); "*Conservative* evangelicals have been the *Republican Party* at prayer" (37). (All emphases added). The vehicle "restore" is an epideictic agent, acting in concert with the other three vehicles, reinforcing the FOA thematic meaning.

Values necessitating restoration include "good work, good parenting, and good sexual values (6)...citizens' trust in their political leaders (11)...the shattered [spiritual] covenant (45)...the covenant we've lost with our neighbors on this planet and with creation itself (51)...humanity (109)...integrity of family, marriage, and parenting [in a manner] that ensures the dignity and equality of women (119)...and biblical integrity (165)." Notably, this value structure primarily reflects the conservative FOA, making Wallis's vision hospitable to the Right.

Second, the vehicles "Left," "liberal," "Democrat," and "reform" create a metaphoric cluster describing the politically Left's FOA. Wallis writes, "*liberals* could now be free from the constant accusation of being sympathetic to communism; they no longer have to carry the baggage of failed *Leftist* regimes" (31); "*liberal* religious leaders have easily been confused with the *Left* wing of the *Democratic Party*" (37); and, "*liberalism's* best impulse is to care about the disenfranchised and insist that a society is responsible for its people" (22). (all emphases added) Thus, Wallis's construction of the liberal FOA relies on the above vehicles.

Wallis uses the vehicle "reform" deliberately to advocate change. He champions reforming "our language for the sake of racial and gender justice" (40), American patriarchy (137), Christianity from a message of "salvation by faith alone" to "the gospel is good news to the poor" (175), and land distribution (184). Thus, he seemingly reserves the vehicle "reform" for liberal and religiously Left causes

Finally, the vehicles "beyond," "transcend," and "prophetic spirituality," create a metaphoric cluster describing Wallis's vision of enveloping both the Right and the Left FOA. The author explains that "[*prophetic spirituality*] *transcends* the categories of liberal and conservative" (47); "this *prophetic spirituality* movement speaks the language of both social justice and personal responsibility" (47); "building a new sense of solidarity will require our going *beyond* the ideological frameworks of the Left and the Right" (77). (all emphases added) The final cluster is therefore "beyond" the scopes of the liberal and conservative FOA.

The three metaphoric clusters create a metaphoric concept with spatial properties, deriving meaning from juxtaposition. Wallis utilizes the traditional liberal/conservative FOA to first introduce the Left/Right political continuum, then explains prophetic spirituality as transcending both FOA, encompassing them in a larger political spectrum beyond the continuum.

Rhetorical Strategy

When examining Wallis's use of the vehicles "Right," "Left," "conservative," "liberal," "Republican," "Democrat," "beyond,"

“transcend,” and “prophetic spirituality” a four-part strategy emerges, designed to create Christian solidarity for religiously Left concerns. First, he directly targets the religious Right and ambiguously clumps the Left together. Second, Wallis explains Cold War liberal ideology as being “reactionary,” “captive,” and “controlled” by conservative ideology. Third, he articulates his political vision of post-Cold War conservatism and liberalism. Finally, he explains political transcendence through “prophetic spirituality,” which emphasizes spirituality over political ideology. This process attempts to create Christian solidarity with the evangelical Right via redefining his political vision as religious vision rooted in spirituality. However, transcendence is not accomplished because Wallis simply invites the Right to become Left—an impossible request for religious conservatives who perceive truth in their ideology.

Though Wallis claims to transcend the religious Right and secular Left in *The Soul of Politics*, he specifically speaks to the religious Right. Wallis directly addresses the “religious/evangelical Right” thirteen times, while only addressing the “secular Left” twice, indicating an imbalance of attention. Further, the term “religious Right” is delivered with a tone of suspicion and tyranny—“Given the prominence of the *religious Right* in contemporary American politics, any reference to the Bible prompts many to mistrust and suspicion” (36), “the *religious Right* has drawn even firmer boundaries” (40), and “the *religious Right* has controlled the public debate on politics and morality” (42). (all emphases added)

However, the term “secular Left” is delivered with a tone of salvation—

Z’s writer suggests that progressive Christian movements could be “the salvation of the *secular Left*.” Only a religiously based radicalism can succeed in winning a major sector of American sympathy. . . The American people will not sacrifice their lives for a secular utopia that does not fulfill their emotional and spiritual needs. Although the American Left

seems to have little awareness of its own religious vision, the American people do know what they want, what Jesus wanted, a universal community of peace, love, and justice sustained by the experience of a loving God (38).

This imbalance between the "religious Right" and "the secular Left" reflects the direction of Wallis's attention, and his intention to connect with a specific audience between the polemic extremes of the religious Right and secular Left.

Next, Wallis describes the American partisan climate during the Cold War as stacked against liberalism. Metaphoric vehicles relating to constraint are used to establish the political Left's position: "the Clinton administration is still *vulnerable to the attacks* of conservatives" (11), "[Clinton] is still *controlled* by traditional Democratic approaches" (11), "liberalism became *captive* to large distant institutions" (22), "[liberal religion] has become both *reactive* to conservative religion and *captive* to the shifting winds of the secular culture" (40), "the religious Right has *controlled* the public debate" (42), "... family values is often a cover for a return to the patriarchal structures of the past. Male *control* seems to be the underlying issue" (119). (all emphases added) These terms, "vulnerable to the attacks," "control/led," "captive," and "reactive," suggest that liberal politics during the Cold War were the result of conservative political dominance. This explanation serves to dismiss liberal political dilemmas over the last fifty years, as it blames conservative politics for positioning liberalism into a defensive role.

After dismissing liberal accountability during its time of "constraint," Wallis articulates his political vision of post-Cold War politics. He argues that "it's time for principled conservatives to prove they are not just providing intellectual and *political cover* for wealth, power, and Right-wing self-interest, but that they genuinely care about their own best and most basic convictions" (31). He also argues that "liberals could now be *free* from the constant accusation of being sympathetic to communism... It's time for liberals to show they are less committed to

particular models and ideologies than to the poor themselves...” (31). Interestingly, his political vision of new conservatism and liberalism both reflect traditionally liberal ideals, and calls for conservatives and liberals to step away from their political ideologies and commit to their “best and basic convictions.”

Once Wallis invites conservatives and liberals to remove themselves from their political ideology for the sake of furthering their convictions, he introduces the concept of prophetic spirituality—“the alternative to the current manifestations of conservative and liberal religion” (42). Wallis frames prophetic spirituality as a neutral ground removed from Left and Right that both liberals and conservatives can trust to unite all peoples with religious interests. Wallis explains

prophetic spirituality has found expression in virtually every renewal and reform movement in history that has sought to return to radical religious roots (42).... On the environment, this deeper biblical perspective transcends old notions of either exploitation or protection (47).... It draws evangelicals with a compassionate heart and a social conscience. It brings together mainline Protestants who desire spiritual revival and justice. It invites Catholics who seek a spirituality for social change. It includes African-American, Latino, Asian, and Native American faith communities who are working to shape a more pluralistic and just society. It has the capacity to bring Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other religious communities together in a dialogue and cooperation based on the respect and contribution of each one's particularities rather than on a bland religious reductionism (48).... The politics we most need right now is the “politics of community.” In that birthing process, a prophetic spiritual network—across the lines of race, class, gender, and region— can act as the midwife of new possibilities (49).

Wallis further explains that prophetic spirituality will "include community land trusts, micro-enterprise projects, worker cooperatives, community finance institutions, consumer cooperatives, and democratically run community development corporations" (252).

In short, prophetic spirituality is inclusive of everyone who is religiously principled, and is interested in helping minorities, the poor, women, and the environment. Though these are traditionally liberal issues, he redefines them as religious issues to avoid excluding evangelicals who would otherwise reject liberal interests. Thus, prophetic spirituality resolves the constraint caused by Cold War conservative politics with new liberal initiatives.

This is explicit in Wallis's use of the "beyond" metaphor. He explains that prophetic spirituality goes "*beyond* the old categories of liberal and conservative" (20), has religious partnerships "with other faith traditions *beyond* the religious mainstream" (43), and "takes us *beyond* the bottom line of profit or the stagnation of bureaucracy" (47). Consistent with Wallis's perspective of dominating conservative politics over the last fifty years, he writes "with the *Cold War* over, [prophetic spirituality] provides fresh discussions about the need for new economic ideas, values, and options going *beyond* those of either corporate capitalism or state socialism" (193). He emphasizes that prophetic spirituality "means the ability to invent the future, guided by core values, and *unrestrained* by present ideological assumptions and structural status quos. In particular, [prophetic spirituality] means that we go beyond the *frozen systems* (e.g. Cold War constraint) of thought, politics, and social organization that have *governed us for so long*" (248). Finally, freedom, Justice, liberation, peace, and reconciliation are "*beyond* predictability and *control*, especially by those who *rule* [e.g. conservatives]. Those we thought to be *all-powerful* are undone by them. The *lock* of historical inevitability and determinism is broken open, and a new world of possibilities is again revealed" (264). (all emphases added)

Wallis attempts to create Christian solidarity through equivocating his impressions of conservatism, redefining liberal

political interests as religious political interests, and framing this maneuver as a political transcendence called "prophetic spirituality." *The Soul of Politics* struggles to engage the religious Right in liberal social causes via proselytizing Wallis's biblical interpretation of religious duties (i.e. helping the poor) as a new political direction, thus explaining his occasional inclusion of the Jewish and Muslim communities.

However, prophetic spirituality fails to accomplish solidarity as it is hostile to conservatism and excludes conservative concerns. Even those concerns recognized by Wallis as possibly legitimate, including "public virtues" (11), "personal morality" (11), "personal and family values" (22), "the effectiveness of huge welfare states (40), and "individual initiative" (77) are neglected by prophetic spirituality. Therefore, to accept Wallis's invitation, conservatives must abandon their political identity/interests, while accepting liberal identity/interests.

In sum, Wallis's prophetic spirituality is an attempt to create religious solidarity through emphasizing religious-political interests. However, transcendence does not occur because Wallis is hostile towards conservatism and fails to address concerns of the religious Right.

Implications

Wallis's target audience's symbolic world was constructed within a Tragic frame (Burke). Reconciliation between groups with different world views, different heroes, and different villains is a difficult task for any rhetor. As our analysis reveals Wallis does, in the first quarter of his book, make an attempt to create a message that might have spoken to both the Left and the Right. Had Wallis continued to integrate elements from both the liberal and conservative frames of acceptance developing a plea for reconciliation he might have received a better hearing. His book, however never became a best seller. Book reviewers on the Left and Right offered lukewarm praise to outright scorn. *Commonweal* book reviewer Stephen J. Pope half heartedly commended Wallis stating that Wallis "effectively recounts the human suffering" that many Americans face "to underscore our profound failure as a society" but "Wallis operates at a very

high level of generality" making his solutions "to be simplistically moralistic . . ." (18). In the secular Leftist periodical, *The Nation*, John Brown Childs wrote that he could not understand why Wallis accused liberals of being morally vacuous (541). Ronald H. Nash, an evangelical writer, accused Wallis of straddling "the fence" on "abortion and homosexuality" (75).

The authors of this paper realize the difficulty Wallis faced attempting to create a transcendent message. But Wallis, if his intent was to create a new transcendent message, failed to avail himself of all the available means to persuade his readers, especially the conservatives. Wallis could have cited Biblical texts that not only call Christians to develop a personal relationship with God, but also implore the faithful to fight for social justice. No stronger arguments exist for the conservative Christian than the Bible which they consider to be God's revelation to humanity. Wallis could have mentioned how often Jesus argues for social justice. Wallis could have drawn from the book of James who defines true religion as helping the "widow and the orphan." The Apostle Paul, champion of the Christian evangelicals, wrote that the disciples of Christ were created to "do good works". Surprisingly Wallis does not avail himself of this deep resource of invention. Wallis could have constructed a message calling all Christians to follow Christ developing a vertical relationship with God while serving others. That message could possibly transcend both the Right and the Left frames of acceptance. Heroes of the Right speaking out for the cause of the Left. In the end, the Reverend Wallis should be commended for his attempt to create a message that attempted to transcend both the Left and the Right. Transcending such extremely different frames of acceptance might be at task too difficult for anyone.

Bohn David Lattin (PhD. University of Oregon) teaches courses in Rhetorical Theory and Criticism and Public Address at the University of Portland.

Stephen Underhill (M.A. Communication Studies, University of Portland) is a graduate student pursuing his doctoral degree from the University of Maryland's Communication Department.

Endnotes

¹ Heinemann claims that "Although Deism and English liberalism no doubt played an important role in the Revolution, they did not play an exclusive role... Rather than excluding Puritanism and Calvinism, these new liberal doctrines blended with them. That the Revolution followed a season of Calvinistic individualism was not just chance. The doctrines of election and the personal spiritual relationship with God constitute a most powerful rationale for individualistic and revolutionary behavior" (50-51.)

Works Cited

- Black, Edwin. "The Second Persona." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 111-119.
- Boase, Paul H. "The Social Gospel." *America in Controversy: History of American Public Address*. Ed. Dewitte Holland. Dubuque: Brown 1973. 185-203.
- Borman, Ernest G. "Fetching Good Out of Evil: A Rhetorical Use of Calamity." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 63 (1977): 130-139.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*. Vols. 1 and 2. New York: The New Republic 1937.
- Call to Renewal Homepage. Online. World Wide Web. (c) 1996. <http://www.ari.net/calltorenewal/ctr0001.html>
- "Call to Renewal: Christians for a New Political Vision" 17 July 2001 *The Religious Movements Homepage Project: @The University of Virginia*. Ed. Douglas E. Cowan 3 September 2004 <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/home.htm>.
- Campbell, Karlyn K., and Susan S. Huxman. *The Rhetorical Act: Thinking, Speaking, and Writing Critically* 3 ed. Belmont, CA., 2003
- Childs John B. "The Religious Left" *The Nation* 7 November 1994: 536-542.
- Coleman, Ronald G. "Suffrage and Prohibition: Integrated Issues." *America in Controversy: History of American Public Address*. Ed. Dewitte Holland. Dubuque: Brown 1973. 261-279.
- Daughton, Suzanne M. "Metaphorical Transcendence: Images of the Holy War in Franklin Roosevelt's First Inaugural." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 428-446.
- Fisher, Walter R. "Reaffirmation and Subversion of the American Dream." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 161-173.
- Heineman, Robert L. "God, Man, and the Great Awakening." *America in Controversy: History of American Public Address*. Ed. Dewitte Holland. Dubuque: Brown 1973. 35-51

- Heisey D. Ray. "Slavery: America's Irrepressible Conflict." *America in Controversy: History of American Public Address*. Ed. Dewitte Holland. Dubuque: Brown 1973. 103-121.
- Ivie, Robert L. "Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War 'Idealists'." *Communication Monographs* 54 (1987): 166-182.
- Johannesen, Richard L. "Ronald Reagan's Economic Jeremiad." *Central States Speech Journal* 37 (1986): 79-89.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Moberg, David. *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1972.
- Nash Ronald H. *Why the Left is Not Right. The Religious Left: Who They Are and What They Believe*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Osborn, Michael. "Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53 (1967): 115-126.
- Pope, Stephen J. "Among the Poor: The Soul of Politics" *Commonweal* 16 December 1994:18.
- Reed, John W. "Church and State in Massachusetts, 1620-1160." *America in Controversy: History of American Public Address*. Ed. Dewitte Holland. Dubuque: Brown 1973. 19-34.
- Sager, Allan H. "Modernists and Fundamentalists Debate Restraints on Freedom, 1910-1930." *America in Controversy: History of American Public Address*. Ed. Dewitte Holland. Dubuque: Brown 1973: 281-308.
- Stewart, Charles J., Craig A. Smith, Robert E. Denton Jr. *Persuasion and Social Movements*. 4th ed. Long Grove, IL: Waveland P., 2001
- Wallis, Jim. *The Soul of Politics: Beyond the "Religious Right" and the "Secular Left"*. New York: New Press, 1995.

Copyright of *Journal of Communication & Religion* is the property of Religious Speech Communication Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.