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Jay R. Howard

Butler University, jrhoward@butler.edu

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Vilifying the Enemy: The Christian Right and the Novels of Frank Peretti

Jay R. Howard

The flash of blinding light is followed by the acrid smell of sulfur as another demon is dispatched to "the Abyss" by the host of heaven. In his novels, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*, Frank E. Peretti posits parallel, but intermeshed, worlds. The everyday human world is shadowed by a world where demons and angels are at war for the souls of humankind. Demons use their swords to stall cars and send kitchen knives flying inexplicably out of drawers. Angels knock briefcases from the hands of villains and miraculously rescue heroines from the hands of Satan-worshipping murderers. The success of the angelic forces depends upon the "prayer cover" provided by the "Saints of God" (born-again Christians). Prayer strengthens angels and brings numerical reinforcements. A lack of prayer allows demonic forces the opportunity to expand their influence.

Peretti's novels have proven to be extremely popular within religious circles. The two books have each sold over a million copies. However, sales began slowly before swelling to a landslide. In its first six months after publication, *This Present Darkness* sold a very modest 4,000 copies. But by mid-1988, the novel topped the Christian Booksellers Association (CBA) paperback best-seller list (Rabey). The novel stayed atop the CBA list until finally bumped by the sequel, *Piercing the Darkness*. Peretti's novels are part of a change in the Christian retailing industry which reaches \$3 billion in annual sales. A 1990 review of the best-seller list of the *Bookstore Journal*, the Christian Booksellers Association trade magazine, revealed about half the titles were fiction. Ten years prior not a single novel made the list (Miner).

What makes these novels so popular that film rights have been negotiated? (Miller). The novels have been described as "celebrations of the power of prayer and 'watchcare' that support the Host of Heaven and protect the people of God" (Lobdell 45). We all want to believe that the causes to which we devote ourselves are significant in some ultimate sense. It also doesn't hurt to be told that the forces of good are on your side and looking out for you. In the Christian community, there clearly is a demand for novels that take the Bible as literally true, which depict prayer truly changing things and "guardian angels" watching over the believer.

Peretti's novels provide a clear statement of the worldview of conservative Christians who hold the Bible to be literally true and without error. Not only is the reader presented with doctrinal positions, but the implications of those positions for life in modern society are spelled out as well. In this essay, I analyze Peretti's views of the modern world, its heroes and villains, and argue they are representative of the views of the New Christian Right (Liebman and Wuthnow) in the late 1980s and the 1990s.

The New Christian Right consists of conservative Fundamentalist Protestants and the somewhat more moderate Evangelical Protestants. Both groups insist on the primacy of the authority of the Bible as a guide for individual morality and as a critical standard for society. Additionally, the

New Christian Right has found substantial support among conservative Catholics, Mormons, and to a lesser extent Jews (Albanese). While the memberships of many denominations have been declining since the early 1960s, conservative denominations continued to grow (Kelley 165). To a significant extent this growth was based on the retention of members, particularly children as they became adults, rather than successful recruiting of members of other religions or individuals who were religiously inactive (Johnson 311). Nonetheless, the New Christian Right managed to grow in a period of general decline for most major denominations. Most commentators suggest that the New Christian Right peaked in numbers and political influence in the early 1980s following the election of Ronald Reagan as President. Estimates of membership in the New Christian Right at its peak ranged from 16 percent of the U.S. population to 40 percent (Albanese 386-87). However, the ensuing decline may be reversed as the Christian Right organizes again in reaction to such Clinton Administration policies as gays in the military, lifting of federal restrictions on abortion counseling and funding, and the decline of military spending. The New Christian Right is still a significant subculture and has the potential to return to the headlines in the near future.

In the worldview of the New Christian Right there is an implicit assumption that the world is growing worse and that humans by themselves cannot rectify the situation (Albanese 373). Conservative Christians, both Fundamentalists and Evangelicals, share the goal of restoring America to an idealized past. Because the Bible is the supreme authority and believed to be literally true, angels and demons are held to be actual beings. Christians have an obligation and an opportunity via prayer to join in the struggle against evil. In Peretti's works, the "Sovereign Hand of God" is moved in response to prayers of the "saints"-the faithful "remnant." who refuse to be led astray by a society growing ever more irreligious. Education, government, the media, the ecological movement, and big business are, knowingly or unknowingly, swayed by demonic forces in the novels. It is Peretti's depiction of villains that is most revealing of the worldview of the New Christian Right. By defining who should be opposed, Peretti indirectly establishes who Christians are and their interpretation of the world in which they live.

Heinz (133) argues that the New Christian Right is engaged in a struggle to establish a "counter-mythology" to challenge the "secular humanism" they see dominating modern society. Secular humanism is equated with godlessness, moral relativism, and permissiveness. The constitutional separation of Church and State has been misinterpreted by an activist judicial system, forcing Christian influences out of government and education and leading to a society dominated by a godless religion—secular humanism.

Fundamentalist Christians have responded with a moral crusade for control of symbols and the means of symbol production in society—particularly the family, public education, and the media. In a moral crusade, victims and corrupters are distinguished by presenting an oversimplified picture of social reality in which the enemy is unmistakably identified (Clarke 135). In the view of the New Christian Right, who is this enemy? What are their tactics? How should one go about opposing them? Peretti's novels offer his not-so-subtle answers.

The New Age Movement

The tie that binds the villains in Peretti's novels is the New Age Movement. The New Age Movement is a loosely organized collection of individuals and groups that share the belief that human beings are all expressions of one another and the universe-universalism (Albanese 361). New Age rituals seek to promote mental journeying into nonmaterial worlds. Albanese argues there are two groups of New Age participants. First, there are thinkers with environmental, transformational, and holistic-health agendas. Second, there are those more visible, media wise, individuals who practice channeling and work with crystals. As with the New Christian Right, it is difficult to estimate the number of New Age adherents. Estimates range from 28,000 to possibly hundreds of thousands (Albanese 368). Whatever their numbers, the New Age Movement and other "New Religions" have had no discernable political impact in the United States (Johnson 307).

In Peretti's works, the New Age Movement is far from powerless. We find educators, government officials, environmentalists and big businessmen deeply involved in demonic activity under the guise of a New Age type enlightenment. Peretti's New Age Movement actively seeks to remove all Christian influence from society while expanding its own sphere of domination.

The Educational System

The foremost battleground for the New Christian Right is the public educational system. The stakes are high. To lose this confrontation is to lose the ability to impact children through educational socialization. In the eyes of conservative Christians, to force all religious influences out of public schooling is to establish an anti-religious worldview-secular humanism. According to Peretti, the enemy views this battle as part of the ongoing effort to remove the influence of Christians on future generations, a necessary step in the battle to control and mold every segment of society.

In Peretti's novels, the local elementary school "reeked" of demons and ten-year-old children are possessed by demons disguised as "Inner Guides." Students at the high school who used to do drugs, now "trip out" on demons. "Something happens" to every kid that goes off to Whitmore (the local community college) as they become entangled with instructors who practice occult and New Age rituals. America's finest university, Bentmore (a reference to Harvard?), is at the center of a national, even global, effort to promote a New Age/Satanic curriculum for public schools. Pervasive dangers to Christians and their children haunt public education. A "sanitized" version of Yoga is taught in physical education classes. Witches co-author pre-school curriculums. Christian schools, the only safe alternative, come under attack as an attempt is made to forcibly introduce government regulation.

In the New Age curriculum, reading, English and arithmetic are pushed aside because they cannot "be applied in an affective, clinical sense" to facilitate global change (Peretti, *Piercing* 180). The "National Coalition on Education" (a reference to the National Education Association?) joins in the effort to promote education to facilitate change, to prepare the next generation for global community. In order for global community to become a reality, Peretti's villains suggest nationalism, religion and notions of absolute morality have to be cast aside. As illustrated in the apocalyptic novels of Hal Lindsey and others. Fundamentalist Christians have long feared a one-world government as part of the Antichrist's scheme to dominate the world. Via the educational

curriculum promoted by the New Age Movement, Peretti weaves this conservative Christian apocalyptic view into his novels.

Peretti also highlights conservative Christian fears of parents losing the ability to control the influences upon their children in modern society. The new curriculum is introduced under the labels of "holistic education" and "alternative education," by gaining control of school boards—ousting resisters and implanting sympathizers, blinding parents to what was happening to their children, and keeping parents uninvolved—leaving educational decisions in the hands of "experts." Peretti presents an educational system wherein Christian parents trying to monitor and limit the secularizing effects of public schooling face overwhelming obstacles.

If, as Peretti suggests, the educational system is corrupted, who are the promoters of its evil agenda? In *This Present Darkness*, the principal antagonist is Juleen Langstrat, Professor of Psychology, a graduate of UCLA with a strong interest in Eastern philosophy and occultism. At Whitmore College, Langstrat offers courses with clear New Age themes, such as: *The Psychology of Self*; *In the Beginning Was the Goddess*; *How to Enjoy the Present by Experiencing Past and Future Lives*; *Pathways to Your Inner light*; and, *Introduction to God and Goddess Consciousness*. Anyone who follows Langstrat's teachings eventually encounters "inner teachers, spirit guides, ascended masters..." which are, in Peretti's novels, demons seeking to control the minds and bodies of humans.

In Peretti's fictional world, psychologists, and academics in general, are viewed with suspicion. First, Langstrat and colleagues gradually oust the former faculty with the aide of a corrupted board of trustees, and teach students "sixty-four dollar words which impress people with your academic prowess but can't get you a paying job" (*Present* 37). Peretti shares conservative Christian sentiments that the educational system has strayed too far from the basics of education into impressive-sounding programs that lack substance and value in the labor market. In *Piercing the Darkness*, academics continue to be suspect as the testimony of a child psychologist with a bias against religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is used as an expert witness in legal proceedings to claim the Christian School headmaster is engaging in "outrageous religious behavior against a child" (attempting to exorcise a demon from a ten-year-old child), physical abuse by spanking, and "excessive religious instruction harmful to a child" (*Piercing* 71). Attorneys urge the psychologist to "enhance" his opinion for the sake of a more persuasive courtroom effect. Meanwhile, the defendants are denied the opportunity to have their own child psychologist meet with the alleged victim.

In Peretti's novels, and in the worldview of the New Christian Right, the public educational system is a battle ground for the confrontation of good and evil. Be it by intent or by being deceived, educators and academics are clearly on the side of evil. In the worldview of Peretti and the New Christian Right, to win the battle is to have the power to shape future generations. To lose is to surrender society to Satanic/New Age influences.

Government

In the mass media, Fundamentalist Christians are typically depicted as being supporters of the status quo, even quasi-fascist A recent article in the *New York Times Book Review* (Lifton and

Strozier) went so far as to suggest that the parenting advice given by conservative Christian psychologist and syndicated radio host Dr. James Dobson comes close to sadism, while arguing the Christian Right is promoting a "totalitarian theocracy" at a point in history when flexibility and openness to new ideas are "clearly required." Peretti's *This Present Darkness* was cited as evidence of this trend. However, a closer reading reveals that Peretti generally paints governmental authorities as either a part of the New Age conspiracy to take over the world and remove all religious influences from society or as too weak to challenge the conspiracy. Eventually, at the end of each novel the FBI does come to the rescue, but only after Christians have done all the sleuthing necessary to indict the villains. However, the story is suppressed in the media and few arrests are made. Marshall Hogan, one of the heroes who appears in both novels, explains: "There are cases and there are cases... such a big can of worms; there's so much of it going on in so many places, and you can't arrest everybody" (*Piercing* 430). Ironically, Peretti's overall message is closer to Marx's maxim, "Question authority," than to Machiavellian fascism despite the stereotype. Peretti is not endorsing big government, but views big government with suspicion, as does the political right in general.

In both *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*, local government officials are key villains. Police officers engage in wiretapping, blackmail, tamper with evidence, interfere with the delivery of U.S. mail, and participate in satanic ritual murders. The one "good cop" in Peretti's novels, loses his job after becoming too suspicious of his boss's misdeeds. Rather than being an ally in the struggle against evil, the police are a major part of the problem. Their hunger for power as individuals makes them easily corrupted by the enemies Peretti depicts.

Another local governmental agency viewed with suspicion is the Child Welfare System. Right wing political rhetoric has often included "keep government out of the family" themes. The fear that one's religious convictions could cause governmental agencies to remove children from the family is a nightmare for Fundamentalist Christians. Peretti mixes this fear well with his own demonic nightmare.

In *Piercing the Darkness*, the Child Protection Department (CPD) removes the two children of widower Tom Harris, the Christian School headmaster, from their home after receiving an anonymous complaint on the CPD child abuse hotline. Harris is not allowed to confront his accusers and is given only hours' notice of an appointment to visit his children following their removal. The CPD case worker defines relatively common fundamentalist practices, such as not allowing children to watch TV and spanking, as "abuse." In accounting for Harris's difficulty in getting his children returned, his legal counsel points out, "The laws are just vague enough to allow a lot of leeway from case to case" (*Piercing* 173). The fundamentalist Christian clearly fears losing control over the family and finding him or herself subject to the whims of an irreligious bureaucracy.

The fundamentalist view of the child welfare system finds support in Seth Farber, a New York psychologist and family therapist, who describes the child welfare system in the United States as "police state" (Neal). While Farber describes himself as coming from a "1960s New Left" perspective, he has found a greater degree of support among the political right. In Farber's view, the child welfare system has absolute power and no oversight. It has become more concerned with

its own preservation than with the preservation of families and children. Psychological testing used by the child welfare system detects "disturbances" in everyone. If this is the case, why do we continually hear of abused children returned to their abusive parents? Farber suggests that the way abusers get their children returned is to take a totally submissive stance toward the authorities, admitting guilt, following orders, and keeping their mouths shut. Parents who feel they are wrongly charged, such as parents whose spanking of children is defined by the authorities as abuse, face near impossible obstacles in having their children returned. Farber's arguments support nagging fears among the New Christian Right that governmental intrusion into the family may make Peretti's scenario commonplace.

The American judicial system is another arena of struggle for control of government in the view of conservative Christians. Peretti paints the legal position that the Constitution is a "living document" open to reinterpretations as the fundamental danger. This view allows for an "activist" judiciary, who are not accountable to the public because of lifetime appointments. Peretti's depictions reinforce conservative Christians' view of the judiciary as strongly dominated by humanistic influences.

This view is illustrated by Peretti throughout his novels. The attorney for the Christian School involved in the lawsuit wonders aloud, whether "[he's] just a rotten lawyer or if God chooses to stay out of courtrooms ... " (*Piercing* 424). The judge in the case has her "heart and mind" given over to the "powers and minions of darkness" during a satanic ritual resulting in an unfavorable pretrial ruling against the Christian School (*Piercing* 291).

Peretti's American Citizens Freedom Association (ACFA), a thinly veiled reference to the American Civil Liberties Union, brings the lawsuit. Peretti catches conservative Christian sentiments when he describes the ACFA (ACLU) as "that infamous association-one could say conspiracy-of professional, idealistic, legal technicians, whitewashed, virtuous and all-for-freedom on the exterior, but viciously liberal and anti-Christian in its motives and agenda" (71). The ACFA attempts to use the judicial system to set legal precedents which will give the government the power to control religion and religious schools. ACFA attorneys argue that spanking and exorcism should be removed from the "umbrella of religious freedom." The Constitution would be just so much "toilet paper" when the ACFA used child abuse as a ruse to distract attention from the real issue of the separation of Church and State, according to the attorney for the Christians (100). Peretti dismisses any possibility of "pure" motives on the part of the ACFA when a prominent ACFA lawyer admits a complete lack of concern for the safety, rights and welfare of children, as evidenced by the ACFA's defense of the "interests of child pornographers and molesters" (*Piercing* 374).

The Christian Right's indignation over Supreme Court rulings against prayer in public schools and in favor of the right to abortion is also illustrated by Peretti as judicial corruption goes all the way to the Supreme Court. At the end of *Piercing the Darkness*, the reader discovers a recently appointed (fictitious) Supreme Court justice is a member of a satanic organization who received the post as a result of "powerful forces" blackmailing the Attorney General (*Piercing* 429).

Government is a contested field in the eyes of the Christian Right Christians must join the fray to avoid being overcome by humanistic forces which dominate modern society and to return America to an idealized past where Christian views predominated. Clearly in Peretti's works, government is at best a neutral party to the battle between the New Age conspirators and conservative Christians for society. At worst, government has been corrupted and made a tool for the enemy's use.

The Media

In the eyes of Fundamentalist Christians the media are both an area of contention and an ally of the enemy. Groups such as Donald Wildmon's American Family Association have organized to monitor vulgarity, sex, violence and "anti-Christian bigotry" on television and to boycott sponsors of television programs featuring the same. Movies, television, MTV and rock music have long been the scourge of televangelists like Jerry Falwell and Jimmy Swaggart.

In Peretti's novels, the conservative Christian belief that the media is all too willing to portray Christians as corrupt extremists is highlighted when a television reporter ends his story by asking, "How much religious freedom is too much, especially where young children are concerned...?" (*Piercing* 78). Newspaper editorials concerning the trial appear which "couldn't have been better written by the ACFA." Unflattering pictures of the "alleged child abuser" appear in the local paper. The ACFA takes advantage of this bias by fighting its battle at two levels: in the courts and in the public arena. By manipulating public opinion through the media the ACFA attempts to create a climate conducive to favorable legislation and eventually favorable court rulings.

Peretti offers another illustration of Fundamentalist Christian suspicion of the mass media, by including the "director of mystical science fiction films whose name is a household word and whose film characters were now plastic toys in every kids room" at the New Age "Semi-annual Global Consciousness Conference" in *Piercing the Darkness* (378). Conservative Christian suspicion of "The Force" of the Star Wars trilogy with its New Age overtones is the obvious reference. Things as seemingly innocent as adventure movies and children's toys become tools of the New Age Movement. In the eyes of the New Christian Right, the news and entertainment media are, at best, a battleground for influence. At worst, they are allies of the enemy in the attempt to remove Christian influences from society.

Ecological Movement

Because of the New Age Movement's concerns for ecology, just about anyone with ecological concerns in Peretti's novels is depicted as demonically duped into the conspiracy against Christians. The New Age conspirator Pastor Young of the large, liberal Ashton United Christian Church is "into saving the whales" and "condemns cruelty to animals" while endorsing religious tolerance. Eastern mystical philosophy that promotes a "kinship with the earth" is used to lure unsuspecting college students into Professor Langstrat's network. A rock singer, who is reminiscent of John Lennon or Sting, leads "worshippers" at the Global Consciousness Conference in one of his well-known ballads of global peace and perfection before his lecture on "Ecology: The Merging of Earth and Spirit." Peretti notes the designers, in keeping with their devotion to

"Mother Earth," created the conference center so that the natural environment was not supplanted, but allowed the campus to merge with it.

At the Omega Center for Educational Studies, one of the demonic strongholds, health enthusiasts drink green, herbal concoctions and eat vegetarian lunches while wearing clothes of beautiful, woven natural fibers. The front organization for a group of satanists sells herbs and mystical, holistic literature down at the Mercantile. In Peretti's novels, any type of ecological sensitivity makes one suspect in his worldview, such concerns are inappropriate, or at least misdirected, among Christians.

Big Business

In each of Peretti's two books, the activities of the demonically inspired conspiracy are funded by donations from multinational corporations with directors who thirst for power and are willing to "walk on disposable people" to get it. In *This Present Darkness*, the finances come from Omni International, a company with links to Arab oil, the Common Market, the World Bank, and international terrorism. Omni's director, Alexander Kaseph, who channels Strongman the chief demon, is "a perfect cross between the ultimate guru and Adolph Hitler" (206). Omni buys up virtually the entire town of Ashton. Nonconspirators are terrorized by thugs and demons into selling their properties. Members of the conspiracy must deed everything over to Omni Corporation as a requirement for membership. In the effort to meld into a New Age "universal mind" all individuality must be done away with, including private property. Thus Peretti combines the twin fears of big business beyond any government's control and communist attempts to eliminate private property.

In *Piercing the Darkness*, the primary underwriter of the New Age organizations is Emile Goring, a major stockholder and director in over 40 global corporations dealing in oil, gas, transportation, exports and mining. Goring is present at the attempted satanic ritual murder of the heroine. Enemies are members of an occult secret society known as The Royal Order of the Nation. The Nation has no ordinary, blue-collar members. All are bankers, businessmen, educators, attorneys and statesmen. Leaders of "The Nation" profess that all are equal, but privately acknowledge a la *Animal Farm* (Orwell) that "some are more equal than others, and far more fit to rule (*Piercing* 377)."

In sum, common to each of these battlegrounds of education, government, the media and big business Peretti illustrates fears on the part of the New Christian Right of losing control: losing control over the educational socialization of one's children; losing control over one's family; losing control of an activist judicial system that has its own anti-Christian agenda and is no longer accountable to the people. Losing control of the media to liberals with anti-Christian biases. And losing control of government and society due to the influence that the financial resources of big business can buy. Peretti links the conspirators attempting to take over society by their New Age doctrines. These doctrines squelch individuality in favor of "universal consciousness" while channeling demons for guidance.

The "Good Guys"

As Peretti has clearly identified the enemies of the New Christian Right, who does he see as being the "good guys"? Who will fight this demonic conspiracy against the souls of humanity? First and foremost, praying saints provide a defense against the onslaught and a means of offensive action via angelic warriors. The ever vigilant "prayer warrior" Edith Duster, a former missionary to China and wise old matron of the church, is one role model for conservative Christians to emulate. Others include rugged individualists who insist on standing up for what's right while risking their jobs and their lives: Ben Cole, the police officer who loses his job and serves as a private detective for the Christians; Marshall Hogan, the small-town newspaper editor who doggedly pursues the "moles" linking the various aspects of the New Age/demonic conspiracy while risking his life, livelihood and family; and Hank Busche, the fundamentalist pastor of the small church who prays and gathers the remnant of praying saints to rally the forces of good and save the town.

To a lesser degree, non-Christian authorities who have avoided being corrupted by the demonic conspiracy make a contribution. A New York newspaperman who provides information to the Christians, the FBI which finally comes to the aide of the Christians, and the Attorney General who forces the resignation of a Supreme Court Justice each unwittingly assist the Host of Heaven in their battle against demons and their human surrogates.

While a degree of political involvement is necessary, in Peretti's view, and in the worldview of the New Christian Right, the way to battle evil is individually through personal salvation and prayerful intercession on behalf of the forces of good. Political maneuvering without prayer is useless in the battle against evil. Society will be preserved and returned to an idealized earlier era only through personal morality and the intercession of divine forces. Interestingly, Dean Kelley's key explanation for the growth of conservative denominations is that the clergy have not neglected the "spiritual" aspects of religion (prayer, worship, etc.), while pursuing, to a greater or lesser degree, societal reform (civil rights, peace, justice, etc.). The latter agenda is acceptable, but the former is primary among the New Christian Right.

It is also intriguing to note the favorite targets of Fundamentalists that Peretti leaves largely unindicted in his novels. Heavy metal rock music receives only passing mention. Planned Parenthood, sex education and abortion are not addressed at all. Lifton and Strozier argue that Peretti targets assertive, professional women because psychologist Juleen Langstrat is the principal antagonist in *This Present Darkness*. However, each book also features strong heroines who are instrumental in the triumph of the forces of good. Peretti does present pastors' wives in very traditional gender roles, supporting their husbands through thick or thin, and making the coffee when the all-male Church Elders gather.

Conclusion

Just how seriously should we take Frank Peretti's depiction of reality for the New Christian Right? Does the author intend these works to be viewed as pure fiction or does he want to make a statement about modern society? Peretti suggests, the novels "are fictional treatments of spiritual truths" (Maudlin 59). The books are works of fiction written, in part, to encourage Christians to pray and to remind them of the "undefeatable redemptive power of the cross" according to Peretti (59).

However, they are also meant as social commentary. Peretti sees society as being threatened by a New Age/Satanic conspiracy. Therefore, Christians must be called to arms, or better yet to prayer. Peretti comments: "Right now, it's half and half—half fictional device, half reality. I think in a few years it will be more reality than fiction ... we're heading for some real confrontation" (58). Peretti takes his fictional world seriously and it seems the New Christian Right does as well. Some pastors have bought copies of the *This Present Darkness* for their entire congregation (Rabey), apparently in an attempt to make them more aware of the impact of prayer and of the human-demonic conspiracy against Christians.

While Peretti's works clearly affirm a theological belief in the importance of prayer, they also affirm a particular worldview. In this worldview education, government, the mass media, the ecological movement, and big business are each corrupted by a New Age/Satanic conspiracy for the control of society and the souls of humans. The New Christian Right responds first, and most importantly in their perspective, with prayer for divine intercession on the side of good. But then the question arises, to what degree should Christians withdraw from the dominant culture and to what degree should they engage the enemy in battle. Should Christians send their children to private Christian schools, watch only Christian television, and refuse to participate in a corrupt governmental system? Or should they take on the powers that dominate education, the media and government in a direct confrontation? Peretti's novels indicate the latter is becoming, or at least should become, the choice of the New Christian Right. In the worldview of the New Christian Right, as depicted by Frank Peretti, a threat clearly exists. Therefore, despite declining media attention since the mid-1980s, the New Christian Right is not likely to go away quietly. A renewed political and social activism is likely to arise in response to the Clinton Administration's efforts to make abortion more accessible, to allow gays in the military and to reduce defense spending while increasing spending on social services.

Another difficulty that arises with this worldview is an inability to dialogue with the opposition. If one is convinced opponents are, intentionally or unintentionally, a part of a demonic conspiracy, discussion and compromise are impossible. The confrontation becomes a win-lose situation. Instead of open dialogue over the merits and shortcomings of various positions within academia, government and society in general, a siege mentality may develop as demons lurk behind all opposing viewpoints. Such a worldview makes it exceedingly difficult for conservative Christians to make a positive contribution to society. Instead, there is a battle to see who will impose what upon whom.

While it is easy to dismiss the New Christian Right as bordering on fascism, caution is necessary. In historical perspective even the most militant of the New Christian Right are considerably more liberal on certain issues than their predecessors (Johnson). Few are overtly racist, anti-Semitic, or anti-Catholic. While they campaign against abortion, they do not advocate national prohibition or the repeal of divorce laws. For the New Christian Right, to return to the idealized past does not mean a return to the same racist, morally authoritarian society. It does express a desire to see Christian views regarding personal morality elevated to an honored position. For better or worse, we are likely to be hearing more from the New Christian Right.

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