Evangelical Politics and Status Issues*

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The affinities between the "New Christian Right" and earlier mass-based moral reform movements have prompted scholars to revive the "status politics" model of right-wing protest. This model asserts that moral reform movements attract groups who resent their cultural, political and moral devaluation by the dominant society. The model has rarely been tested empirically and then only with very rough proxies for status discontent. In a survey of churchgoers in a Southern community, a direct measure of dissatisfaction with the social respect accorded traditionalist groups and institutions proved to be a significant factor in promoting support for the Christian Right. The contribution of status measures persisted even with controls for variables associated with rival explanatory frameworks. The findings suggest a future for the status politics model, provided its adherents heed several admonitions about conceptualization and measurement.

In one form or another, the concept of "status politics" remains at the heart of scholarly efforts to account for mass-based moral reform movements. According to the status politics perspective, moral crusades represent attempts by cultural groups to preserve, defend or enhance their social standing by securing "public affirmation of a set of values and beliefs and their support by institutions of the state" (Wallis, 1979: 95). Though challenged by competing theories of social movements, the status politics model has been invoked by observers of the most recent moral reform movement in American politics, the so-called "New Christian Right." Based on information gathered from a sample of churchgoers in one community, this paper offers an empirical assessment of the status politics interpretation of that movement. The study differs from previous research by: 1) its direct measurement of status discontent; 2) the inclusion of predictor variables associated with rival theories of social movements; and 3) the use of behavioral measures to assess mobilization.

STATUS POLITICS AND THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

The concept of status politics derives principally from Max Weber's famous distinction between status groups, defined as "communities based upon the sharing of similar claims to social honor and prestige," and the more familiar social classes characterized by a "similar economic capacity to command scarce resources and life chances" (Brandmeyer

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& Denison, 1969: 5). This dual approach to stratification recognizes that societies are riven not only by economic inequalities but also by competition for the allocation of public respect, a resource every bit as scarce and highly-valued as more tangible rewards. In developing the distinction between status and class conflict, scholars have posited that these alternative modes of stratification are linked to different forms of public action: classes typically pursue material interests through normal political competition — i.e., parties and elections — while status groups tend to enroll in symbolic cultural crusades that are more episodic, decentralized, and uncompromising than conventional partisan activity. Social theorists have further hypothesized that the onset of economic distress facilitates class politics but that status group activity is more likely to emerge during periods of prosperity.

According to this model of collective behavior, moral crusades attract recruits who are dissatisfied with the valuation accorded them by society. The resentment stems from the perception by members of a group that social changes have undermined the prestige commanded by their lifestyle and elevated to supremacy contrasting models with divergent values and codes of behavior. The crusaders undertake to remedy this situation by demanding public endorsement of their “moral universe.” For such groups, it is especially important that the law recognize and embody moral standards devalued by social change. By providing society with proper standards of behavior, traditionalists believe, such laws legitimize their lifestyle, marking “a victory over the challenging enemy and a public display of the viability, acceptability and prestige of the victor’s lifestyle” (Zurcher & Kirkpatrick, 1976: 8). Challenges to deeply-held values are likely to generate preservationist movements that protest against a “changed pattern in the distribution of deference or power” (Hofstadter, 1955: 135). In a variety of formulations, this framework has been extended to an array of mass-based social movements in the United States and Europe (Bell, 1965, 1963; Gusfield, 1963; Zurcher & Kirkpatrick, 1976; Lipset & Raab, 1978; Marshall, 1986; Schweitzer, 1977).

The status politics model has most recently been invoked to explain the “New Christian Right” (NCR). The term denotes an interlocking group of organizations which emerged in the late 1970s in response to widespread dissatisfaction with the perceived erosion of traditional mores and values. Like other preservationist movements, the NCR has attempted to imbue public policy with what it describes as “traditional values.” In practice, it has given priority to resisting gay rights initiatives, the availability of “indecent” material, liberalized abortion law, passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, the spread of “humanism” in the schools, and other perceived threats to public morality. Following what might be described as the “orthodox formulation” of the status politics model, some analysts have portrayed this activity as a vengeful effort by declining cultural groups to restore lost prestige (Gannon, 1981; Lipset & Raab, 1981; Crawford, 1980). Other scholars have insisted that supporters of the Christian Right believe — realistically — that their way of life is under assault and therefore mount rational counterattacks on behalf of the institutions, processes, and values which sustain their lifestyle (Harper & Leicht, 1984; Page & Clelland, 1978; Lorentzen, 1980; Simpson, 1983). The distinctions between these two versions of status politics are not trivial, but, for the purposes of this inquiry, it is more important to concentrate upon the similarities: both approaches identify the major source of support for the Christian Right as social conservatives “who share a style of life and who act out of interest to preserve or defend that style of life against declines in prestige and influence” (Wood & Hughes, 1984: 87).
The capacity of the status politics theory to explain NCR activity must be judged in the context of three rival explanatory frameworks which explicitly deny or deemphasize status considerations:

1) *Resource mobilization theory* offers a direct challenge to the status politics model because it discounts the role of grievances in stimulating restorationist social movements. Accepting the level of social discontent as constant, this perspective focuses instead on the organizational capacity of the discontented. All other things being equal, the probability of mobilization depends upon the accessibility of target constituencies through pre-existing networks of communication, leadership, information, and organizational resources (McAdam, 1982: 5-35). From this perspective, the success of the NCR is largely a function of the resources available to moral conservatives through their common encapsulation in church-based networks (Himmelstein, 1986; Johnson & Tamney, 1985; Liebman, 1983).

2) The *culture and socialization* approach maintains that morally conservative movements appeal to persons raised in environments where traditional values are honored (Clarke, 1987a, 1987b; Skerry, 1978; Wallis, 1977; Wood & Hughes, 1984). Mobilization is simply a residue of exposure to moral conservatism during the formative years and needs no explanation couched in terms of psychological distress. Advocates of this approach contend that the NCR draws from the wellspring of conservative values propagated in environments which have resisted the intrusion of modern culture.

3) *Corporate populism* treats the NCR "as a front for the acquisition of political power by special economic interests" (Wechsler, 1980: xiv). Enjoying the patronage of affluent sponsors from secular conservative organizations and the business world, the NCR is alleged to attract support by propounding traditional right-wing themes rooted in conservative economics and politics. Moral conservatism therefore serves the interests of secular conservatives through the Republican party (Lienesch, 1982; Ribuffo, 1983; Rogin, 1967; Elliot & McCrone, 1987; Himmelstein, 1983; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1986).

**STATUS DISCONTENT AS AN EXPLANATORY VARIABLE**

Although the status politics framework has frequently been invoked in the study of social movements, empirical research on earlier mass crusades generally found that status variables failed to distinguish supporters of right-wing moral reform campaigns (Wolfinger et al., 1969; McAvoy, 1969: 271-74). When scholars have tested supporters of more recent moral reform movements, including the New Christian Right, the measures of status discontent have performed quite badly. Thus, Wood and Hughes (1984), using five waves of the General Social Survey from 1973 through 1980, failed to find disproportionate

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1 Status politics has been accused of psychological reductionism because of its search for ulterior motives among supporters of moral reform

There is no reason to believe that an increasing disparity between the standards of morality and behavior which one has grown up to believe were true and right and those displayed and legitimated in the surrounding society can not of itself [emphasis in original] provide the grounds for commitment to a movement of moral reform (Wallis, 1977: 197)

This appealing argument to consider moral reform on its own terms does not take into account the differential response to social change by individuals who have experienced common socialization. The various liberalizing trends of the 1960s challenged values which were widely disseminated, yet the changes were accepted enthusiastically by some, while others responded with equanimity, and yet others enlisted in countermovements. It is the legitimate task of social science to investigate the behavioral mechanisms that may account for such variations — particularly within a sample sharing a common Protestant heritage through church attendance.
support for pornography restriction among groups presumably afflicted by status discontent. Status variables also made only a minor contribution to ideological differentiation among delegates attending a regional meeting of the 1980 White Conference on Families (Conover, 1983).

The disappointing empirical results may suggest, as some commentators have argued, that the status politics framework is fundamentally misconceived and should be discarded in favor of alternative theoretical perspectives. Yet it is possible that the model has not yet received an adequate test because of confusion surrounding the concept of status dissatisfaction (Polsby, 1963). Authors have measured status discontent without a semblance of consistency, so that what passes for that condition in one study bears only the faintest resemblance to the theoretical formulations in another. Consider the conflicting operational assumptions in two recent studies which attempted to assess the contribution of status discontent to support for New Christian Right policy goals. Conover (1983) used occupation, education, and income as proxies for status discontent, and looked for a negative relationship between those variables and conservatism in order to confirm the status politics model. This is essentially an economic model using class measures as proxies for status dissatisfaction. By contrast, in their study of antipornography sentiment, Wood and Hughes (1984) treated status discontent primarily in terms of inconsistency across status dimensions and/or rapid changes in status situations. They assumed that status inconsistency was rife among rural-to-urban migrants, the "old" middle class, newly-wealthy ethnicities, and persons whose income was substantially higher than normal for their education or occupational standing.

Although both studies professed to examine the same causal agent of "status discontent," it is difficult to fathom how such divergent indicators could tap any common vein. This impression is reinforced by the discovery that Wood and Hughes treated one of Conover's "status" measures — years of education — as an indicator of "socialization experiences" which "might be sources of preservationist right-wing and moral-reform movement support independent of status considerations" (Wood & Hughes, 1984: 88). That is, Wood and Hughes suggest that the contribution of economic deprivation to conservative social values is the result of exposure to such values during childhood rather than the operation of status discontent. The fact that the self-same measure can indicate status discontent in one study, but the rival explanatory concept of "culture and socialization" in another, attests to the extent of conceptual disarray. Previous studies may have failed to identify the influence of status discontent on political behavior because of similar confusion in measurement.

Rather than continue to assume that certain locations in the social structure breed high levels of status discontent, we believe that there is a more promising investigative strategy. On the assumption that status discontent "refers as much to a state of mind as to an objectively definable condition" (Wolfinger et al., 1969: 34), scholars have distinguished subjective or "felt" discontent with status attainment from "objective" structural positions. Stratification research has revealed such glaring gaps between fact and perception that "objective" social location can no longer be accepted as a reliable proxy for status discontent (Blocker & Riedesel, 1978; Starnes & Singleton, 1977). Rather, status discontent should be treated as an attitudinal property exhibited in varying degrees

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2 This approach also assumes linearity where a curvilinear pattern peaking in the center might better identify groups most resentful about low social prestige.
by persons at all levels of the social structure. In measurement terms, this involves assessing how respondents feel about the prestige hierarchy through direct questioning on that topic. The promise of such a subjective approach was demonstrated by one of the status politics studies conducted during the 1960s. With rudimentary measurement methods, Rohter (1969: 222-26) found that the subjective images of social hierarchy, assessed through direct questioning, contributed to support for moral reform movements among some respondents. This same logic is applicable to the preeminent moral reform movement of our day, the New Christian Right.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data

Data were obtained from a self-administered questionnaire completed by members of 23 Protestant churches in the Gainesville, Florida SMSA, during the period from May, 1986 through May, 1987. A local survey was prompted by the lack of information on status perception in national surveys. Because of our interest in the links between religious orientations and political outlooks, we opted to sample churches representing the major theological tendencies of contemporary Protestantism. Such a strategy is appropriate to study a movement in which Protestant churches have been the major node of mobilization.

The mode of questionnaire administration differed from church to church. Almost two-thirds of respondents completed the questionnaire in a youth or adult education class held before, during, or after regularly-scheduled worship services on Sunday or Wednesday. The remainder of respondents completed the survey at a time set aside by the minister during a general congregational assembly or after the conclusion of worship service. Depending upon the age and educational level of respondents, the 13-page questionnaire required from 20 to 45 minutes to complete. Excluding questionnaires completed by underaged respondents and visitors, we obtained usable data from 673 respondents. The number of respondents per church ranged from 5 to 64, but most were within a narrow range around the mean of 28. In terms of denominational groupings, the respondents corresponded reasonably well to recent estimates of church membership in the county. Each major theological tradition within contemporary Protestantism is represented in the sample. However, since respondents were recruited from church attenders, the sample probably overrepresents active church members.

3. Once target churches had been identified, a member of the study team initiated contact with a church official, usually the minister or director of adult religious education. The official was informed of the broad purpose of the survey — to determine how church members felt about religion and social issues — but not of the specific hypotheses entertained by the authors. If requested, a copy of the survey form was also provided to our contact person. We promised anonymity for individual respondents and pledged to keep confidential the names of the church participating in the study. Only one minister turned down our request, but three ministers had their favorable reaction overturned by a lay governing body. The rejections were distributed across theological tendencies and we were able to locate substitute congregations from the same broad tradition.

4. In a few churches, some respondents took partially completed questionnaires home with them and returned them to church the next week.

5. In two churches, providing less than five percent of the entire sample, subjects were individually recruited by the minister or church staff.
Status Discontent

We conceptualized subjective status orientation as judgments about the degree of social valuation accorded to persons occupying specific roles and possessing certain characteristics. The roles may be defined by occupational, demographic, social, and organizational criteria, and may constitute actual membership or potential reference groups. To tap perceptions about the distribution of social honor, respondents were presented with the following statement: "In today's world, some types of people seem to get more respect than others. For each of the following groups, do you think society gives too much respect, about the right amount of respect, or too little respect?" The question was followed by a list of nine categories: the elderly, churchgoers, professional athletes, home-makers, scientists, hard-working people, ministers, law-abiding people, and "people like you." The nine groups were chosen to represent a range of identities which might generate feelings of status discontent through personal affiliation.

**TABLE 1**

**FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR STATUS DISCONTENT ITEMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>% Too Little</th>
<th>% Enough</th>
<th>% Too Much</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housewives</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(659)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The elderly</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(661)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working people</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(656)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law-abiding people</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(652)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministers</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(657)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchgoers</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(653)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People like you</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(649)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>(656)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>(659)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B Job-Related</th>
<th>% Yes</th>
<th>% No</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do people in the chief wage-earner's line of work get paid enough for their contribution to society?</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>(583)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get enough respect from the rest of society?</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>(590)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get as much respect today as they did when they were growing up?</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>(571)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top panel of Table 1 presents the distribution of responses to these items. In the absence of comparable data from other surveys, it is difficult to characterize the level of status discontent in our sample. Nearly everyone agreed that two groups, the elderly and homemakers, were undervalued by society. Conversely, professional athletes were almost universally believed to enjoy excessive respect from the population. For two groups, scientists and "people like me," the sample thought the level of respect was appropriate. The remaining four groups are conventionally represented as the repository of traditional American values: hard-working people, the law-abiding, members of the clergy, and church-
goers. These groups were deemed to enjoy too little or only enough social respect, but hardly ever too much prestige.

The structure of status attitudes was determined through factor analysis. We found that five of the groups elicited a characteristic reaction. Respondents tended to answer alike about the respect accorded to churchgoers, ministers, hard-working people, law-abiding people, and people like themselves. These groups have frequently been identified as the epitome of Middle America or, to recall a phrase from the recent past, the Silent Majority. They are also groups whose virtues have often been emphasized in the rhetoric of the New Christian Right. Based on this analysis, we constructed an index of "traditional group discontent" measuring the degree to which each respondent perceived an undervaluation of churchgoers, hard-working people, ministers, law-abiding people, and "people like me." Scale scores ranged from 0 through 10 with a mean of 7.2 and a standardized Cronbach's alpha of 0.7.

We also considered the possibility that status discontent might arise from resentment about economic achievement. Following questions about the occupation and work situation of the household's chief wage earner, respondents were asked to assess the adequacy of the chief wage-earner's pay, the respect accorded that occupation by society, and whether social valuation of the job had declined from what it was in the past. Response frequencies are listed in the bottom panel of Table 1. The three items formed a scale with scores ranging from 0 to 3, a mean of 1.3, and an internal reliability coefficient of 0.6. The scale of job-related status discontent was independent of the measure of traditional group discontent. Both scales were ordered so that high scores indicated dissatisfaction with the social status of the target group.

Other Independent Variables

To determine whether status discontent makes an independent contribution to NCR mobilization, it was necessary to represent in the survey the three rival explanations previously described. The resource mobilization interpretation has emphasized the role of church involvement generally and Protestant fundamentalism particularly. Encapsulation in a traditional religious environment exposes the individual to authoritative communication, magnifies the prospect of contact with mobilizing agents, and reinforces social conservatism through intensive interaction with like-minded fellow congregants (Wald, Owen & Hill, 1988). Consistent with this approach, we have included measures of church attendance and commitment to the tenets of evangelicalism. According to the culture and socialization approach, the NCR should draw disproportionate support from groups with limited exposure to the modernizing forces which undercut moral

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6. A friendly critic has suggested that the status politics model runs a risk of tautology by treating what may be a component of conservatism — dissatisfaction with the social valuation of traditional groups — as a causal agent of conservatism. This concern should be alleviated by the finding that dissatisfaction about the status of the elderly and housewives was so universally shared that the two items failed to load on the measure of discontent with the other traditional groups. If such grievances were indeed unique to moral conservatism, constituting part of its core, dissatisfaction with the social standing of housewives and the elderly would not have been so widely disseminated among a politically heterogeneous sample with a plurality of NCR opponents. More generally, we do not accept the implicit assumption that respect for religion, hard work, the clergy, or obedience to the law are solely the province of conservatism. Liberals can and do worry about public morality, the breakdown of law, and the disparity between effort and economic reward (e.g., Damico, 1987). We are thus confident that we have isolated an independent attitude syndrome that may or may not predict NCR support.
traditionalism. The primary candidates for mobilization would appear to be Southerners, the elderly, women, blacks, rural and small town residents, married people with large families, and persons with limited education and modest socioeconomic standing. If the NCR is essentially a stalking horse for economic conservativism, as suggested by the theory of corporate populism, its support should be explained by indicators of right-wing partisanship and ideology. For that reason, we will assess the contribution of party identification, vote choice in the 1984 Presidential election, and self-described political ideology. All have been coded so that high values represent conservatism, producing measures that should relate positively to the NCR index.

Taken together we plan to test a general model of the following form:

\[ \text{NCR support} = f (\text{tgд}, \text{ci}, \text{mod}, \text{pc}) \]

where:

- \( \text{tgд} = \) traditional group discontent (status politics)
- \( \text{ci} = \) church involvement (resource mobilization)
- \( \text{mod} = \) exposure to modernity (culture and socialization)
- \( \text{pc} = \) political conservatism (corporate populism)

Our principal interest is whether status discontent contributes to NCR mobilization even after accounting for variables associated with the other three theoretical explanations. While the antecedents of NCR support are generally arrayed in a causal model to represent stages of influence, the status politics hypothesis can be more rigorously tested if all the predictor variables are included simultaneously as direct influences on mobilization. This strategy is necessary also because of the character of our mobilization measure.

**Dependent Variable**

To indicate level of support for the New Christian Right, we developed a measure which combined three elements: 1) general conservatism on moral issues; 2) subjective evaluations of organizations supporting traditional values in public policy; and 3) report of tangible activity on behalf of such groups. Compared to conventional measures that tap only one of these factors, the combined measure should better enable us to distinguish between persons who accept NCR issues only on principle and those who go beyond principle to endorse organized moral reform efforts, or even to provide tangible support for such efforts. This strategy is true to the meaning of “mobilization.”

The first component, moral conservatism, is a scale based on ten items eliciting support for traditional values on such issues as censorship of books and movies, availability of birth control, the maintenance of traditional gender roles, interracial marriage, abortion, drug use, homosexuality, and cohabitation outside marriage. The ten items, balanced between positive and negative statements of the underlying concept, allowed each respondent to select a response from a 5-point Likert scale with a neutral mid-point. Scores

7. Race, gender, marital status, and region were represented by dummy variables and coded so that the traditionalist group received a value of one. Age and number of children were coded on natural interval scales. Frequency of church attendance, education, and size of place were based on ordinal scales, while we used the Duncan occupational prestige index for status of the chief wage earner in the household. The measure of fundamentalism was based on the three-part scale developed by the Gallup organization in which respondents are assigned the maximum value if they report having attempted evangelism, a personal commitment to Jesus, and a literal view of the Bible.
ranged from 0 to 36 with the mean of 18.6 very near the theoretical mid-point of the scale. The scale has a standardized Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.8.

The second component of the "NCR scale," support for morally-conservative political groups, is gauged by reactions to a list of seven organizations represented as having "been active in encouraging Americans to pick the most 'moral' issues and candidates for public office." For each group, the respondent was asked to select from five choices: very positive or negative, positive or negative, and neutral — the option recommended for an unfamiliar group. Factor analysis revealed a common dimension linking evaluations of Moral Majority, Christian Voice, the American Coalition for Traditional Values, Eagle Forum, and Evangelicals for Social Action. (The use of "Evangelical" in the title of the last-named group may have accounted for the tendency to link it with the other politically conservative organizations.) Evaluations of these five groups formed a scale that ranged from 0 to 20 with the mean and midpoint coinciding at 10 and a reliability coefficient of 0.8.

New Christian Right activism, the final component, is based on a follow-up question to the group evaluation items. Respondents were asked if they or a family member had "given financial support or any of your time and effort" to help any of the seven political groups. Because only about one-fifth of respondents reported such activity on behalf of even one of the five conservative groups, this item was reduced to a dichotomy.

The respondent's basic orientation to the New Christian Right was determined by dichotomizing the moral conservatism and conservative group scales at the midpoint and then cross-tabulating respondents by their scores on both measures. The 192 respondents who ranked in the bottom half of both scales, and who had done nothing tangible to support any of the five groups, were classified as NCR opponents. Their polar opposites, 72 respondents who ranked in the top half of both scales and who reported some form of tangible group support, were labelled NCR supporters. The remaining respondents were apportioned between 163 "ambivalents" and 167 "sympathizers." The former included persons who were in the off-diagonal cells of the contingency table — either high on moral conservatism and low on the group scale or low on moral conservatism and high on the group scale. Sympathizers were defined as persons who were in the top half of both the moral conservatism and support for conservative groups distributions, but, unlike supporters, had done nothing concrete to advance the fortunes of New Christian Right organizations.

ANALYSIS

With an ordinal-level dependent variable distributed non-normally, discriminant analysis is the most appropriate technique for multivariate analysis. Using a set of independent variables prescribed by the researcher, the discriminant algorithm attempts to derive linear equations that maximize the differences among respondents on the dependent variable. Since we know in advance which respondents belong to the four groups under investigation — NCR opponents, ambivalents, sympathizers, and supporters — we are not utilizing the discriminant procedure primarily to classify the subjects on the dependent variable. Rather, we are interested in which combination of independent variables best distinguishes members of the four groups. Accordingly, the analysis employed fifteen independent variables associated with one or another of the theoretical

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8. Respondents who selectively omitted ranking a group were assigned the neutral midpoint on the scale.
perspectives predicting support for the NCR — status discontent, resource mobilization, culture and socialization, and corporate populism. The variables were entered in a block.

Table 2 summarizes the findings of the discriminant analysis. Because of missing information on some of the variables — always a problem with self-administered questionnaires — about one-third of the cases had to be dropped. We performed some auxiliary analysis to assure ourselves that the pattern of missing cases did not unduly bias the nature of the sample. The distribution of respondents among the four categories of the dependent variable did not differ significantly as a consequence of missing data — an indication that missing values were distributed equally among the groups rather than being concentrated within any particular category. Moreover, dropping the independent variable responsible for the largest number of missing cases produced results virtually indistinguishable from those reported for the reduced sample in Table 2. With no evidence to suggest that missing values on some variables biased the sample, we followed the standard practice of omitting cases lacking values for any of the variables in the equation.

As it must in a four-group case, the analysis produced three uncorrelated discriminant functions. The functions differed markedly in predictive power and interpretation. The first, which accounted for more than 90% of the explained variance and attained a very high degree of statistical significance, distinguishes cleanly among the members of all four groups. The magnitude of the canonical correlation coefficient, 0.73, indicates a strong function. The other two functions, both of which failed to attain accepted levels of statistical significance, nonetheless provide some useful insights about differences between sets of groups. Taken together, the three functions produced correct classifications for 55% of the respondents, a decided advantage over the 25% expected by pure chance or the 32% that would be classified correctly by assigning all respondents to the modal group.

Group Centroids. As indicated by the group centroids, the first function arrayed the groups straightforwardly along a continuum from NCR opponents to NCR supporters. The structure coefficients can thus be read as indicating the correlation between each independent variable and support for the New Christian Right. For the most part, the observed patterns of NCR support are compatible with the predictions of each of the major theoretical frameworks.

Status Politics Model. Consistent with the status politics research tradition, we hypothesized that respondent discontent with the social valuation accorded traditional cultural groups would correlate positively with support for the NCR. The role of status factors was measured by scales assessing dissatisfaction with the social valuation of five traditional groups. The structure coefficient for that variable confirms the status politics hypothesis since dissatisfaction with the perceived social ranking of traditional groups correlated at +0.39 with the first discriminant function. The standardized canonical discriminant function coefficient (not shown), which is adjusted for collinearity among predictors, confirmed the unique contribution of the traditional group discontent variable to NCR orientation. While not the strongest predictor among the set of independent variables, status discontent ranked with party, region and church attendance as an influence upon respondent disposition toward contemporary moral reform movements. Cultural discontent — the perception that traditional social groups are not adequately

9. In the complete data set, 32% were opponents of the NCR, 27% ambivalent, 28% sympathetic and 12% supportive. After removing respondents with missing values on any independent variable, the distribution was only slightly different: 36% opposed, 27% ambivalent, 26% sympathetic, and 13% supportive.
prized — does apparently motivate support for contemporary moral reform movements.

We also explored the possibility that status dissatisfaction with the occupational group of the household's chief wage earner might similarly translate into sympathy for moral reform movements. This was represented by a scale measuring dissatisfaction with the pay, current social respect, and status decline of the chief wage earner's job. In practice, status discontent based on occupation did not correlate strongly with the primary function and ranked among the weakest contributors to scores on that function. It seems that cultural forces rather than economic grievances are the most potent bases of collective identity.

Other Frameworks. It is clear from the other predictors in the first function that status politics was not the only factor predisposing individuals to promote the NCR. The resource mobilization hypothesis was sustained by the strong positive contribution of the two religious variables to NCR support. Like other empirical studies of the NCR mass base,
our investigation confirmed the strong attraction of the movement to active churchgoers and persons who accepted the tenets of evangelical Protestantism. This pattern indicates a high probability of mobilization among persons accessible to issue-entrepreneurs through church-based networks. Of the nine variables representing the culture and socialization hypothesis, four made substantial contributions to NCR support in the predicted direction. The movement was especially strong among persons of limited education, low occupational prestige, advanced age, and Southern upbringing. Such traits have been accepted as proxies for socialization in cultural environments stressing traditional values. Finally, the results were also compatible with the theory of corporate populism: Support for the NCR was magnified by a conservative ideology, support for Ronald Reagan in 1984, and identification with the Republican Party. The strongest advocates of the Christian Right share the right-wing ideology and partisan affinity of secular conservatives.

Second and Third Functions. Notwithstanding their marginal statistical significance, the other two functions provide some insight into the conditions that promote the mobilization of the New Christian Right. The second function discriminated between the group we called “ambivalents” and the other three groups taken together. Compared to the other groups under investigation, ambivalents were much more likely to be black, female, and to express dissatisfaction with the social respect accorded to the household’s chief wage earner. The principal line of demarcation in the third function ran between NCR supporters and activists. That is, the function helps us account for people who sympathized with NCR goals and groups but did nothing to aid them, and those who backed up their sympathy with some form of tangible assistance. The single greatest difference between sympathizers and activists was that the latter were substantially more likely to be young and married. We suspect that the salience of the profamily theme may be greatest for such people and they may be relatively freer to contribute the time and energy entailed by political activism.

While all three functions provided some information germane to the principal hypothesis, the first speaks most directly to the role of status discontent in promoting support for the New Christian Right. People who felt that society accorded too little respect to groups representing traditional values — churchgoers, ministers, people who worked hard and obeyed the law, people like themselves — were indeed more positively disposed to support the agenda, organizations and activities of the New Christian Right. The level of satisfaction with the respect accorded the job of the chief wage earner made no contribution to support for the movement. As predicted, the moral reform disposition was also encouraged by availability for mobilization in churches, a history of immersion in traditionalist environments, and generalized political conservatism. Inclusion of these factors did not eliminate the role of status discontent.

DISCUSSION

Before offering some conclusions and speculations based on the analysis presented above, we must introduce a note of caution about generalizing the findings too broadly. The conclusions rest on a single sample obtained through a non-random selection process. While we would defend the research strategy as a reasonable approach given our theoretical interests, the results of the analysis may be strongly conditioned by certain operational decisions. Moreover, we have followed the typical survey habit of assuming that
respondents accurately reported both their attitudes and behavior. In light of these problems, the results are suggestive rather than definitive.

After examining the correlates of support for the issue positions and organizations comprising the New Christian Right, we have concluded that there is much to be said for the status politics interpretation provided that:

(1) The conceptualization of "status" returns to Weber's original notion of claims to social honor and prestige rather than economic attainment. In our analysis, the perception of status was equated with judgments about the degree of respect accorded by society to certain cultural groups. The emphasis was on perceived social valuation instead of economic rewards. Thus defined in a Weberian manner, status discontent proved to be a significant predictor of orientation to the Christian Right. When status takes an economic cast — i.e., resentment about the material rewards-to-investment ratio of the chief wage earner — the concept loses its theoretical precision and, apparently, its capacity to explain political behavior. Although low levels of objective economic standing may contribute to a positive NCR orientation, that can more readily be explained through a socialization model than by the status discontent thesis.

(2) The extent of "discontent" is gauged by direct questions rather than inferred from objective social location. For investigators who undertake secondary analysis with the status politics model, there is usually no practical alternative but to assume a strong linkage between objective and subjective status evaluations. Contrary to this assumption, recent research on subjective status perception suggests that many persons neither perceive their status attainment correctly nor, if there is a discrepancy between status rankings on different measures, are particularly bothered by it. That may explain why attempts to measure status discontent based on objective social location have not yielded impressive relationships with sociopolitical outlooks. However, when discontent is measured by asking if people are satisfied with the social respect given to them or to groups they support, our results suggest both greater accuracy in assessing status discontent and a greater probability of success in predicting political behavior. By the same token, it does not seem to matter much whether the aggrieved individual's social esteem is rising, falling or holding steady; status discontent is engendered by the perceived gap between the social respect awarded and that which is thought to be deserved. A gap may be perceived in equal measure whether it represents a decline from some past benchmark or the failure of social respect to catch up with real gains in social position.

(3) We relax the assumption that status resentment focuses solely on the social respect earned by the individual. The ambit of status discontent appears to be corporate and referential. By corporate, we mean that individuals did not resent just their personal social prestige but also that of diverse cultural groups and categories. We reached this conclusion, first, by noting the weakness of the occupational discontent measure which was clearly related to the personal circumstances of respondents. Second, respondents linked their own level of social respect with that of groups such as churchgoers, hard-working people, ministers, and law-abiding people. This suggests to us that people think of themselves not as social isolates but as persons whose social standing is also tied to the fate of social collectivities. We thus see no need to restrict status discontent to membership groups; few of our respondents were ministers, but that did not stop them from linking their status to that of the ministry. The reference group model appears to operate in subjective status judgments.
(4) Advocates of status discontent treat that factor as only one of the forces promoting support for moral reform movements. Our multivariate analysis suggests that status politics explanations of the New Christian Right can coexist peacefully with hypotheses based on theories of resource mobilization, culture and socialization, and corporate populism. This recalls the approach of The New American Right (Bell, 1955), the volume which first applied status politics theory to a moral reform movement. The contributors found that support for Joseph McCarthy's anticomunist crusade of the 1950s was rooted in international tensions, economic dislocation, and partisan competition — not just in status dislocation. To suggest that contemporary moral reform movements can be explained solely by resentment over social devaluation ignores both the proximate causes of discontent and the additional mechanisms necessary to channel it toward political action. The resentment may grow out of deeply-held social values inculcated in traditionalist environments, may be articulated and channelled by entrepreneurial elites with ties to evangelical churches, and may become part of a more generalized conservative syndrome. That combination of factors showed up in our analysis in the manifold paths of influence leading to NCR support. Whatever the role of status discontent, it does not provide a complete explanation for the strength of moral reform movements.

These provisos speak primarily to advocates of the status politics tradition. We think its critics, too, may learn something useful from our findings. The utility of the status politics tradition has been questioned by advocates of three rival hypotheses. The resource mobilization approach to social movements has usefully directed our attention to the key role played by organizational resources. Because of culture and socialization theory, we have recognized the genesis of moral reform movements in traditionalist environments. Analysts who stress the patronage of the NCR by secular elites have identified another factor that can all too easily be overlooked. In spite of these insights, supporters of the New Christian Right appear to be responding to what they perceive as fundamental changes in the social order. They hold grievances about the erosion of social norms, grievances which must first exist before they can be mobilized, and which appear to have grown in salience as the result of changing public policy. By its capacity to explain the presence and heightened sensitivity of such grievances, the concept of status politics still has a place in theories of moral reform movements.

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