

**Donald Wildmon, the American Family Association,
and the Theology of Media Activism**

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In December 1976, Donald Wildmon had what he describes as a life-changing experience. Frustrated and before long enraged by things that offended his sensibilities, the Methodist preacher at a church in northern Mississippi launched a religious campaign, willing to work out a strategy as he went along. Rejecting a religion that concentrates on saving souls, he called for church members and especially church leaders to give up their concerns for comfort, respectability, and fund raising, and urged Christians to join him in what he calls a confrontational ministry. That ministry demands frequent--even daily--activism, personal sacrifice, and the willingness to face scorn and ridicule. Wildmon has consistently said he does not know if his ministry can succeed, but he stresses that in his understanding of Christian life, the goal should be holiness, not success.

Wildmon and his organizations have taken on corporate America in a direct way, naming what he sees as the worst offenders, researching and publicizing the interconnectedness of the corporate world, and shaming public companies with publicity most of them fear. Starting in the late 1970s, Donald Wildmon organized the National Federation of Decency, which in 1988 changed its name to the American Family Association. Through these organizations, he has aggressively protested overt sexuality and anti-Christian sentiments in television and other media and challenged the easy

availability of pornographic magazines and movies. Wildmon and his groups have kept up some of most sustained examples of Christian consumer reform in American history.

This paper investigates the theology behind Wildmon's activism. How does he understand religion and its relationship to public action? How does religion change for evangelical Christians who had once been reluctant to address public issues when they become conservative activists? A final question is broader. How have American religious organizations dealt with the fun industries—movies, television, sports, recorded music, and the rest—that have come to dominate so much of everyday American, and where do Wildmon's efforts fit in that story?

Few white evangelical church leaders and church organizations in the South had been involved directly in public affairs until the mid-twentieth century, when the civil rights movement and the issues around it forced so many religious folks to take stands. The leading scholar of that tradition, Samuel S. Hill, Jr. argued in several important works that white southerners' evangelicalism, from the early nineteenth century through most of the twentieth century, concentrated so much on the central theme of converting the unconverted that they viewed most forms of political action and virtually all discussion of systems of legal, economic or racial power as irrelevant to more important issues—or, in fact, the only important issue of people's eternal souls. Hill's description always characterized Baptists more accurately than Methodists, whose Wesleyan background had long encouraged serious, if sporadic, social activism in issues such as opposition to alcohol, some forms of violence, and child labor. Nonetheless, Hill's critique is broadly accurate in pointing out the limited range of much of white southerners' religion, in which activism on any public issue tended—until recently—to be

only occasional and clearly secondary to the larger issue of saving the souls of the unconverted.¹

Like many figures in what came to be known as the Religious Right, Donald Wildmon started addressing public issues in an aggressive way only in the late 1970s. Unlike so many evangelical activists, he has not spent much time addressing the political world, instead concentrating on the issue that drove him into public life in the first place. He likes to tell the story of his life-changing experience (almost a second conversion). His 1990 autobiography, **Don Wildmon: The Man the Networks Love to Hate**, describes how he sat down to watch television with his wife and four children on a December evening in 1976. His description seems awfully defensive, as if he needed to apologize for even watching television. He mentions that they hardly ever turned on the television when school was in session, but it seemed a relaxing way to spend some time during Christmas vacation. His beginning, “when Tim first suggested that we watch TV,” makes the point that the idea came from his oldest son, suggesting that Wildmon himself might not have turned on the television. “I had thought my family might laugh together or that we might all hold our breath in suspense.” He stresses the communal side of the experience; he was watching not for his own enjoyment but for the company of his family. “Ideally, I had hoped to find a program that would teach us something positive about the fascinating and complex world we live in—a program that would mix some kind of mind-stretching nourishment into the entertainment.” The language here sounds too idealistic to be true; he hoped television would be educational and entertaining in ways that all members of his family would enjoy. Wildmon had liked television sometimes, he wrote, citing children’s programs and coverage of space travel

and the Montreal Olympics. But on this night, the first show the family settled in to watch involved married people having affairs. Tim changed the channel to a show with “an outburst of offensive expletives.” The third and last option was a mystery in which one character killed another with a hammer. The three choices, then, were sex, profanity, or violence.² On that December night in 1976, Wildmon decided to do something. “That’s it, I thought. I would take action. I would preach a sermon on television and challenge my church members to be better viewers.”³ This decision to “challenge my church members to be better viewers” helped establish Wildmon as a consumer activist.

The vignette of the violation of a relaxing evening with family in front of the television is especially revealing, because it suggests the vision the founder of the American Family Association had of the ideal family life. “Family” has meant many things in American life, and at least three of those meanings are especially important for people in the twentieth-century South. One is the agricultural family—extended to include numerous close and distant relatives, working and producing, coping with a range of problems. A second is the evangelical definition of church group as family—a body of people who know each other and share the central goal of helping inspire new births into the family-like congregation. Wildmon has shown relatively little interest in either. Instead, he has worked from a third definition, a Victorian image of the family as a small unit of Christian parents teaching Christian children, united in their separation from a more sinful world outside the home.

Wildmon’s upbringing offers clues about his decision to become a Christian consumer activist. Born in 1938, Donald Wildmon grew up in Ripley in northeastern Mississippi, where his father worked for the Mississippi Health Department and his

mother taught in public schools. His parents taught Sunday school in the Methodist church where Don had his conversion experience at age nine. His parents were solidly non-agricultural small-town folks, which is what Wildmon himself became. He went to Mississippi State University for a while, then to Millsaps College, the Methodist college in Jackson that is certainly Mississippi's best liberal arts institution. As a teenager in 1957, he received a license to preach, which he said had been his goal since early childhood,⁴ and went to divinity school at Emory, the best spot for a bright young southern Methodist to get a degree. He returned to northern Mississippi as a minister, first in Tupelo in the late 1960s, then closer to Memphis in Southaven, before moving back to Tupelo in the late 1970s.

The Tupelo years may suggest something about Wildmon's distinctiveness within the tradition of Southern evangelism. He came from non-farming people, and spent much of his adult life in Tupelo as it was becoming distinctive within the Deep South. Tupelo emerged at mid-century as a fairly prosperous small city where wages were fairly high and old historical burdens were not particularly troubling. At first a center for garment factories that paid typically low wages to young white women (such as Elvis Presley's mother Gladys), Tupelo began to change in the post-war years by developing a furniture industry that paid decent wages.⁵ As the son of salaried people, and as an adult in a rare part of Mississippi that paid reasonable wages, Wildmon did not have the farm native's inherited fear of consumer culture. Wildmon had long been especially interested and active in the media. He wrote newspaper sports stories and columns for his high school newspaper, for Millsaps College's **Purple and White**, and for the **Tupelo Journal**.⁶ In the late 1960s, he founded his own publishing house, Five Star Publishers,

to print Christian material, and he wrote religious columns for newspapers. In the 1970s, the church he pastored was Tupelo's first to offer a telephone devotional, where anyone could call to hear a recorded message. He was part of the media culture, and then he turned on it.

Practical Help for Daily Living

Prior to his life-changing moment in 1976, Wildmon had shown little interest in activism. In the early 1970s, he wrote several short books of Christian advice and encouragement that allow considerable insight into his theology and ethics before he became a leading conservative Christian media activist. The books all look alike, sound alike, and follow the same pattern. Originating as short pieces for newspapers, their chapters consist of two to three page lessons that try to teach positive lessons. The intriguing thing is that he showed little of the anger and political focus--and none of the interest in corporate America--that later dominated his religious thought and activism.

In his advice books in the early 1970s, Wildmon did not present himself as a systematic thinker or theologian. "For the average fellow theology can sometimes get to be a very confusing and difficult subject to understand.... Even after seven years of higher education dealing specifically with that subject, I often find myself over my head in the subject." He rejects the idea that anyone "has claim on all the truth" and worried especially that theological differences often caused too much division. Ultimately, Wildmon decided, he could always return to "some basic fundamentals of which I am certain," and he is "thankful that the basic necessities are so simple even a little child can

understand.”⁷ It is important that Wildmon does not list out those fundamentals; as on many topics, the things that are right do not need to be spelled out.

His advice books offer accessible encouragement from a Christian perspective. Perhaps the theme of those books is clearest in the title of a 1972 volume, **Practical Help for Daily Living**. It begins with an essay on kindness, followed by “Some Words to Live By,” an essay urging humor, friendly appreciation, encouragement, and forgiveness. As how-to books for Christian living, Wildmon’s volumes frequently offered examples of the ways history’s great men upheld particular virtues. In his 1970 volume **Nuggets of Gold**, Wildmon detailed the individual virtues of heroes, often saving their names as surprise conclusions. There once was a man who struggled toward his dream with great determination.... His name was Walt Disney. Another man showed courage that inspired people to overcome great obstacles.... His name was George Washington. Albert Schweitzer was an example of compassion, Abraham Lincoln understood and acted on what was truly important, William Seward exemplified self-discipline. Alfred Nobel showed a willingness to change, and William Waldorf Astor exemplified persistence and hard work. Antonio Stradivari discovered his true talents and put them to good use.⁸ Other examples quoted Thomas Jefferson, Edgar A. Guest, Mahatma Ghandi, popular polls and popular magazines, and numerous ministers of great or little renown. When Wildmon’s books mentioned Jesus, they typically referred to him as “the Nazarene carpenter” or “the Galilean,” stressing the everyday character of Jesus’ humanity. In Wildmon’s books, Jesus provides good examples, especially the example of being willing to make sacrifices.

The emphasis on real-life examples from history gives many of Wildmon's essays from the early 1970s a somewhat bland Christianity and American patriotism that stressed individual achievement. Live a good life, with good examples, determination, kindness, patience and some humility, and God will likely bless you with a happiness. Many of the essays stress that doing good yields rewards. Kindness, for example, has two rewards. It "wins the heart of the recipient" and it "makes life enjoyable." People who seek the Kingdom of God have found the way "of matching happiness and holiness."⁹ He consistently reassured readers that good times follow bad, that problems and depression do not last, that things are not as bad as they often seem. "When frustrations come, cool down and think things over. A period where you can just be alone for a few minutes and talk it over with God helps. Remember, also, that not everything is wrong. Most things are still right. Remember that God is still the same God, still present and wanting to help."¹⁰ In a book of short addresses to graduates, he offered the blandest of all calls to resilience: "When life hands you a lemon, the thing to do is to make lemonade."¹¹

From reading Wildmon's Christian advice books from the late 1960s and early 1970s, one would not likely imagine he would turn out to be an activist with what he calls a "confrontational ministry." In fact, he even offered one essay in 1973 urging people not to criticize or to assume too much self-righteousness. "When you look at yourself first—really look at yourself—you find it hard to throw a stone at someone else.... I'm afraid that several times our message has been too much condemnation and too little redemption."¹² For the most part, he seems in these books a kindly uncle with advice that is sincere, friendly, predictable, and forgettable.

Only occasionally did those books reveal the sentiments that have fueled his later activism. Only occasionally did he display an angry side that condemned the deteriorating morals of his day, or a pessimistic side that stressed not patience for better things but a belief that human beings are bad and not likely to get better. In one essay, he upheld the virtues of “righteous indignation—holy anger,” observing that “what may folks call tolerance others call cowardice.... Wrong wouldn’t stand much of a chance in our world” if more Christians got angry and did something about it.¹³ In another, he mocked conventional notions of progress, denouncing the growing acceptance of abortion in the name of women’s freedom to control their own bodies, the coddling of criminals in the name of rehabilitation, and the acceptance of “legalized pornography on the newsstand and in the movie while outlawing prayer and Bible reading in public schools!”¹⁴ Later in the same volume of short essays, he worried that the concept of sin is in decline. “It isn’t sin anymore, it is situational ethics.”¹⁵ And in one rare essay, he snapped at liberal theology, including the Death of God theology popularized by Thomas J. J. Altizer, who taught at Emory while Wildmon was a student. “Yes, I’m tired. Tired of all the people who say God is dead who never knew He was alive. They live in palaces behind the sacred walls of education and spin out fancy theories about the nothingness of God.”¹⁶

One rare example of the sentiments from the pre-activist Wildmon that came to be common for the activist Wildmon is especially clear. Writing far more darkly than in most of his short columns, Wildmon stressed in a 1970 essay called “His is a Great Love” that Christians faced ridicule from an American culture that was not merely sinful but that treated religion with scorn. American culture, he feared, taught the lesson that “You

can't get ahead in life by practicing His [Jesus'] principles, so we are told and we must all get ahead. We take followers of His and make them sissies in our movies. We show them as weak, insecure, unstable people. Most of the time we picture them as some sort of holier-than-thou hypocrite." But one of the revealing points about such a combative piece is Wildmon's conclusion. Rather than urging organized action, he reassured Christians that Jesus loves them even when it seems few people do.¹⁷

Beginning in the 1970s, Wildmon, like numerous American Christians, turned to conservative activism. The list of events and issues is well known—Supreme Court decisions about organized prayer in schools in 1962 and abortion in 1973, the numerous protest movements and experimental lifestyles that conservatives interpreted as disorder and moral decline, conservatives' effort to uphold what they saw as moral absolutes in the face of turmoil, the movement from Silent Majority to Moral Majority and rise of Reagan Republicanism.¹⁸ Wildmon shared much with the turn to conservative activism, but he has diverged from it as well, turning not to organized politics but to protests against the media. Wildmon continues the concentration on the morality of the individual as the central test of the worth of the Christian life, and, in the tradition of white southern evangelicals, he hardly ever mentions justice or equality as Christian virtues. But he has leapt headfirst into public activism as crucial to his understanding of religious commitment, and he has set a new course by addressing what he sees as the systematic problems behind sinfulness in American life.

The Apathy of the Institutional Church

Like the religious thinking in his advice books, Wildmon's theology of activism is not particularly complicated, but he has developed it from his considerable experience as an activist. His theology shows most often in his monthly columns in the **Journal** of the American Family Association. His columns are short, personally revealing sermons that try to rally the troops to more effective activism. Three points characterize his theological perspective.

First, he criticizes churches, church members and especially preachers and denominational leaders for being comfortable with the world as it is, or for retreating into the church. Much of his harshest language hits at the complacency of organized religion. His greatest criticisms, except possibly for those he aims at television executives and their corporate sponsors, mention the inactivity of comfortable Christians. He offers a point surprising only in that he feels he needs to make it. "I certainly don't have any complaint about a church helping people find Christ. I thank God for them." That is about as far as Wildmon cares to go on that topic. He continues, "But once an individual accepts Christ, what then? Is that it? Is that the sum total reason for the existence of the Church?" Wildmon concludes, in a critique of southern evangelicalism shared by Samuel Hill and countless others, that far too many churches "reduce Christianity to the act of being saved."¹⁹

Wildmon's ministry, both in writing his devotional books and in fighting overt sexuality and anti-Christian sentiment in the media, does not deal with issues of personal conversion. In his advice books and his pieces for the American Family Association **Journal**, Wildmon has never tried to convert unsaved people to Christianity. He has not written about his own conversion experience, and none of his hundreds of short columns

have called for people to examine their souls and have life-changing experiences. Heaven hardly ever seems a concern. At one point, Wildmon said he believed in an afterlife but had no idea what it might be like.²⁰ (In fact, hell seems more real than heaven, because the existence of hell was necessary to prove a foundation for Wildmon to argue that there is, ultimately, evil and that evil will ultimately be punished.)

Sounding like many preacher-activists who want to inspire Christians to more action outside their congregations, Wildmon has combined two of the main critiques of a Christianity concerned primarily with saving souls. Like many preachers, he argues that an orientation toward salvation and the next life tends to ignore problems and possibilities in the world. For Wildmon, those problems involve an acceptance of sin in society, and the possibilities involve combating those sins. A bit more uniquely, he suggests that churches that are only concerned with saving souls risk becoming too concerned with numbers—with doing whatever it takes to bring new people into the pews and keep them there. Thus, the goal of converting the unconverted has turned too often into a kind of church boosterism complete with the reassurance that, at least within the church, everything is basically okay. Thus, he argues that a conservatism rooted in apolitical interest in saving souls becomes a conservatism rooted in acceptance of church life as it is. In 1999, Wildmon's column listed a number of news items he found morally troubling, and concluded, "Now to the important church news. Our church supper is scheduled for next Tuesday. Attendance was good even though it was down slightly last Sunday. The preacher delivered a good message about loving the earth. Our building fund is still growing. We need volunteers to help with the nursery next week. And our

committee will meet on Thursday to decide the color of paint to be used in the youth Sunday School room.”²¹

In a 1994 column, Wildmon ripped the mainstream churches in language one expects of an activist. “Our society is so saturated with this ‘winning’ attitude that we have forgotten what gives meaning and substance to life. You don’t fight battles because you are guaranteed victory. You fight battles because it is the right thing to do—regardless of the outcome.... This ‘health and wealth’ attitude has been adopted by our society. Unfortunately, and at a loss of authenticity, this ‘peace and prosperity’ gospel has been preached by some of the best known ministers in America.” His concluding sentence was particularly biting for a critic of American popular culture and its advertisers. “And millions of Americans have bought into it.”²² He made the same comparison between marketing and American Christianity in the harsh conclusion of his autobiography. “We have packaged Christianity similar to a social club and often judged it by the same standard the world uses to judge—size, power and riches.”²³

This repeated critique seems especially revealing because it differs so much from his earlier writing. In an article the **Mississippi United Methodist Advocate** published a month before his life-changing television experience in 1976, Wildmon praised “The Influence of the Church on America” as the story of one success after another, starting with Columbus coming to America on the Santa Maria, to the Anglican priests in Jamestown, to the religious ideals of the Puritans, through numerous recent examples of churches supporting education, building hospitals, and caring for the poor. He concluded, “I feel comfortably within the mark when I say that no other institution has influenced our country for good in anywhere near the proportion which the Christian

church has.”²⁴ Since he has become an activist, Donald Wildmon would likely not reject the idea that Christian churches have influenced America for the good; more importantly, however, is the fact that he has never made that point. He concentrates instead on the ways churches have failed America, especially in a society overwhelmed by entertainment media. In 1996, he concluded that “those who should be your greatest allies ignore the battle. The greatest disappointment I’ve had in this battle has been the apathy of the institutional church.”²⁵

As a definer of family, Wildmon has thus rejected one of the tradition evangelical definitions: that the church congregation has a parental role of encouraging new births, and that the congregation serves as a kind of parent teaching the basics of religious life to newly birthed Christians. It might be possible to argue that fighting pornography is part of the effort to evangelize the world and therefore to argue that Wildmon’s efforts are ultimately about saving souls. Perhaps, if there are opportunities for sin, sin everywhere, sin that is widely accepted, sin not condemned, then potential Christians both old and especially young will never have life-changing conversion experiences. But that is clearly not what Wildmon thinks about his ministry.

Sex and Secularism

The second feature of Wildmon’s theology as an activist surprised him. He began his activism pretty simply to change the content of television shows. As he understood it, he was fighting forms of sinfulness that resulted from market forces, and he was especially protesting the decisions of irresponsible corporate leaders who were getting rich by offering consumers something he believed approached a publicly accepted

pornography. Sexual content on television, he believed at first, came from network decisions to attract viewers with images that were immediately compelling. As he put it simply, “The hard truth is that sex and violence appeal to the base instinct in man. It’s easy to get a crowd.”²⁶ The marketplace, Wildmon believed, had the potential to be morally neutral, and he wanted to use the influence of large numbers of Christians to change it.

As he got deeper into his campaign, however, he came to believe that forces more powerful than the market were at work. In his autobiography he described how he was skeptical when other religious leaders began denouncing secular humanism as the root cause of America’s moral decline. After considerable thought, he came to believe that the problem lay in an anti-Christian conspiracy. Displaying as much sexual content as possible seemed to Wildmon to go hand in hand with ignoring or ridiculing Christianity. Television, he decided, was the “unrecognized foe of the Christian faith and its values,” because it glorifies immediate pleasure, upholds a relativistic understanding of the world, and does not take religion seriously. Taking on the mantle of the hated and misunderstood martyr, Wildmon decided to make his position clear in a speech to a group of television executives in 1981. He criticized the lack of religious characters and respect for Christianity, and said that all sorts of smaller groups receive treatment from television that is more frequent and more favorable. He detailed “how network television has taken many Judeo-Christian religious values (i.e., marital and pre-marital fidelity, honesty and integrity in dealing with others, a helpful or service-minded attitude, stewardship, forgiveness, etc.) and ridiculed, belittled or basically ignored them.” Finally, he attacked networks for portraying Christians as “non-people.”²⁷ (The seeds of this understanding of

the world were there from the beginning of his activism. In an interview in 1979, Wildmon awkwardly made the same points. “Nothing on television is unintentional. These people want to sell their values through the best medium available.... These people want all America to end up like they are. They are from different backgrounds than we are. They have different lifestyles. They are very successful, usually from the East and basically Jewish. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not anti-Semitic. I have a Jewish brother-in-law.”²⁸) Wildmon seemed more certain in the first lines of his 1986 book **The Case Against Pornography**. “There is a great spiritual war being waged. An intentional effort is being made to change the very foundation on which Western civilization is built, to replace the Christian concept of man with a secular and humanist concept.”²⁹

It seems fair to judge that much of Wildmon’s argument that current television intentionally rejects positive values is blatant overstatement. Forgiveness, kindness and helpfulness are enormously popular on television programs. Honesty often wins the day, although television characters consistently try big or small lies first before they learn their lessons. Television dramas frequently offer heroes whose jobs or passions inspire allow them to heroic work in the interest of law and public good. But is he completely wrong about his larger point? Despite his overstatement, it seems fair to say he accurately assessed at least three primary points about television programming:

1. American popular culture, especially popular music and television programs, concentrates to an extraordinary degree on love and especially sex between attractive young people. Other things matter sometimes, but not nearly as much. In an extraordinary number of television programs and movies, sex as desire,

pursuit, culmination, pleasure, joke, basic reality, whatever, is indeed at the center, and often at the margins as well.

2. American popular culture tends to be wary of any assertion of moral virtues other than the virtue of tolerance and respect for all people. Kindness is fine, but the greatest kindness often comes in overcoming intolerance. The best people are those who do not judge others.
3. Most American television programs, movies, and popular music have little positive to say about religious life. Much of that popular culture does indeed tend to stress Christians' intolerance toward non-Christians, although it avoids religion more often than ridiculing it.

While Wildmon is certainly wrong to suggest that television executives represent a conspiracy of secular humanists scheming together to portray Christians in a negative light, it is certainly possible to suggest that calling many television programmers secular humanists is in fact a great compliment.³⁰

Wildmon has never accepted a primary tenet of popular culture—that it demands novelty, and that some of the most novel and exciting sides of that culture come by pushing beyond the boundaries of what is widely acceptable and respectable. He rejects the common notion that good art—art that is cutting edge and provocative--should surprise and will often shock. In fact, the tendency of television and the movies to go as close to the line of what is acceptable, to make jokes about the sacred, to use sexual puns to say things shows could not say more directly, all seem especially offensive. Media makers' attempt to push every rule to its brink, and the fact that the very pushing to the brink was part of the entertainment, has suggested to Wildmon that all popular culture is

about disobedience. The television comedy episode that was about masturbation without mentioning masturbation, the talk show guests whose language is bleeped to the amusement of the audience, the actress whose award-show dress really should fall off but doesn't, the shampoo commercial in which a woman is so happy with her hair that she sounds as if she is having an orgasm—all these are about going as far as the lines of acceptable conduct allow, and then daring to step beyond those lines. The question of what is acceptable for network television at some times but not at others, the questions of what is acceptable on cable television but not on network television and what is acceptable on some cable stations but not others, the question of what “partial nudity” really means—all these questions suggest that the issue of standards for different times and stations and shows is not really about standards at all; this is all just a complicated and cynical game.

This sense of a culture of breaking rules to offer more sex and violence makes Wildmon angry. In a 1996 column called “Please pray for Steven Bochco,” Wildmon bemoaned the television producer’s boasted that he was “going to push the limits of television as far as I can push them.” What Bochco saw as pushing limits, in shows such as *Hill City Blues*, *Public Morals*, *NYPD Blue*, and *Philly*, Wildmon interpreted as efforts “to see how much trash he can put on television.”³¹

The group that preceded Wildmon’s National Federation of Decency was the Catholic League of Decency, which operated in 1934 until the 1960s. It is fair to say that the League of Decency did not just play the game; it helped create the game of setting standards of acceptable conduct to show in motion pictures. The motion picture industry had grown up early in the twentieth century by appealing to an audience of urban

immigrants, many of them Catholic, and it had no intention of losing Catholic viewers. The various boards the motion picture industry created to set and enforce standards of moral conduct tried hard to satisfy the League of Decency, and the system produced a generally friendly back-and-forth process, in which movie makers received the stamp of approval for their movies by cutting a little profanity here and a lot of adultery there, staying clear of any evidence of homosexuality, and suggesting that good almost always triumphed over bad. By mid-century, directors and writers were writing against the production code, trying to make art that was provocative by breaking the rules, with sexual double-entendres, and plenty of violence that had either to be punished or to serve a good cause.³²

Sometimes the American Family Association seems to be playing the same game, publicizing examples of television shows that cheat and reminding broadcasters to play by the rules. As Wildmon remembered in his autobiography, he was troubled by fact that they were all disobeying authority and getting away with it. More importantly, it is clear that Wildmon believes the whole game of setting standards so the networks and studios he views as secular pornographers can find ways to violate them is so corrupt that he wants to get outside it. In rejecting—even condemning--the race for novelty and the sense that art comes from breaking rules and the open-ended openness to different experiences, he has turned against basic elements of American popular culture, and really the central elements of American consumer culture.

We should consider Wildmon a kind of anti-media fundamentalist. He rejects the term, and he told a reporter in 1983, “If you find me one United Methodist minister in the United States who’s a fundamentalist, I’ll give you 50,000 bucks.”³³ But along with the

fundamentalists, he rejects cultural optimism, keeps up a sense of angry defensiveness toward American culture, and upholds the importance of Biblical inerrancy. Religious historians have noted that fundamentalism, as an organized movement of self-identifying Protestants, was slow—perhaps surprisingly slow—to get started in the American South.³⁴ As William Glass has argued, southern fundamentalism developed in the early twentieth century South not among the large and established denominations but in newly established Bible institutes and conferences outside existing centers of denominational organization. As Glass suggests, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians in the region did not join a self-conscious movement of fundamentalists largely because the South did not have an organized modernist movement for them to reject. In the early twentieth century, since not many people in the evangelical-dominated South believed the modernist credos that human knowledge was expanding, that human beings know more, can do more, can help other people more than they could in the past, evangelicals did not see much reason to fight that perspective.³⁵

But by the late twentieth century, those ideas were all around, often mixed with other ideas, less optimistic about the future of the world but full of a kind of confidence in human potential. As a Methodist, Wildmon has been spared much of the fundamentalist-moderate turmoil of the Southern Baptist Convention. The idea that the Bible is the only source of truth is not something he would reject, but his Christian advice books showed that Wildmon believes people could learn a lot from other people and their examples. Mississippi's United Methodists have not spent time and energy debating Biblical inerrancy, and they certainly hold no suspicions that social activism reflects doubts about the Bible. Wildmon has not often railed against liberals and modernists

within the United Methodist Church. Although he says he was disappointed when ministers in the North Mississippi association of his church considered but did not support his early boycotts of television networks, and he was angry and aghast when some of the same ministers supported homosexual marriage,³⁶ he has generally considered churches irrelevant to the issues he cares about.

For Wildmon, the most troubling and especially the most pervasive face of a generally modernist perspective came through entertainment media. His narrative of recent history is one of steep decline, brought on by television, and people in churches did not really notice while the agents of an insidious form of modernism more or less took over. In a 1993 column, he recalled a bucolic small town childhood, with orderly communities based on religious principles. Back then—and this would have been Mississippi in the 1940s and early 1950s--“Society as a whole viewed moral behavior as being an important element in life. The combined pressures from society’s institutions managed to keep the publicly accepted morality based on Judeo-Christian values.... Back in those days our streets were safer, our homes and families more solid, our crime less violent and our moral standards higher. Sure there were wrongs. But there was also a norm which could be used to address these wrongs.” Wildmon continued by stressing television as the culprit, devious, relentless, and pernicious. “Then came television—and, unfortunately, a change in the attitude and values of those in the entertainment media. The old prohibitions were removed. The Playboy philosophy came to be the norm in Hollywood and at the network headquarters in New York.” The crisis continued. “Before long those who held contempt for the old values gained new friends.... in education, the media, the legal system, and other areas of influence.”³⁷

The demand for entertainment, especially the need for novelty, could lead to challenges to the Bible. Occasionally, Wildmon refers to the Bible as literal truth in ways that show his similarities to fundamentalists. In condemning a television movie about the life of Jesus in 1980, Wildmon spoke up for inerrancy. A CBS movie that was trying to be sympathetic to Jesus' story made several creative changes to the Bible, and Wildmon took offense. "This may seem like an insignificant issue.... But you walk a mile by going the first half inch. If you take the liberty to contradict the Biblical account with even a little sentence, it could very well be that 10 years from now, you could take liberty to rewrite an entire Biblical episode."³⁸ Eight years later that prophecy seemed to come true, with the filming of **The Last Temptation of Christ**. Like many Christians, Wildmon was troubled with that film for a scene in which Jesus dreams about having sex. He was concerned as well about the film's tone that portrayed Jesus as a tormented soul worrying about his own sins, lies, and desires. In the end, Wildmon and many other viewers decided, the film suggested Jesus was put on the cross not for humanity's sins, but for his own, and he was not resurrected. The specific misrepresentations of Jesus were troubling enough, but Wildmon offered a fundamentalist's interpretation of what was most offensive about the film. "The big problem with **The Last Temptation of Christ** is this: It intentionally lies about the One whom Christians hold precious and dear. Indeed, as Christians we owe everything to Jesus Christ. For someone (or some \$3.5 billion company) to lie about him on purpose is offensive."³⁹

The broader way Wildmon identifies with a fundamentalist perspective lies in his rejection of the optimism and human-centered nature of entertainment media. The innovations in technology that television and the movies rely on seem to Wildmon simply

to bring more experiences into people's lives. He rejects any ideas that human beings are making intellectual or moral progress, and his language condemning popular media sounds very much like fundamentalism in its call for basic, unchanging Christian principles. Near the end of his autobiography he clarified his understanding of the relationship between entertainment and religious crisis. He said too many Christians believe they can separate themselves from unwanted forces "But like a cancer spreading slowly through a body, the moral decay does not stop at superficial wall we have established. It touches us and ours.... We have accepted, nearly without question, the creed of the secularist that freedom is free—a license; that left to himself man will naturally progress to his highest...."⁴⁰

Confrontational Ministry

Wildmon's third theological point stresses that confrontation is essential to Christian life. Perhaps his most important theological belief is that Christians should be active. Reviewing the success his and other organizations had in limiting the theatrical release of **The Last Temptation of Christ**, Wildmon said the thing that cheered him most was the simple fact that so many Christians got involved. "...I believe our side won because multitudes of Christians decided they would no longer passively sit back and watch the entertainment industry's assault on their faith and values. Though many did no more than sign their names on a petition, that was more than they had done in the past."⁴¹

The American Family Association **Journal** encourages a kind of full-tilt activism: keep your eyes open for things that are particularly offensive, and write your congressman,

write the networks, write the sponsors of television programs, speak out, boycott, picket, be vigilant. The valleys we walk through get darker all the time. Fear no evil; fight it.

Wildmon's movement from a consoling message to a confrontational ministry shows especially clearly in his willingness to go public in condemning things he finds offensive. The issue of manners and protest is significant, in part because of the Deep South setting in which protest was so clearly linked to civil rights activism and in part because of a broader sense that protesting was bad manners. Protesting means saying one is superior to somebody else, and it means bothering people. Before he became an activist, Wildmon wrote in one of his religious advice books that if people with power would only listen, most protest would be unnecessary. In 1971 he offered a parable of a child whose parents only noticed him when he yelled, "Pass the butter!" No one had noticed when the child had softly asked for the butter, but when he yelled, he was punished. Wildmon concluded, "If we would have listened to the pleading of the colored man years ago perhaps our problems in race relations wouldn't be as great today. And if we had listened to the common man, perhaps the unions would be controlled by a different breed of men today."⁴² After becoming a protestor, Wildmon still occasionally said that he feared becoming too aggressive or self-righteous, or at least that he felt uncomfortable taking on the tools of secular protestors. As he recalled in his autobiography, "At first I felt very strange carrying a placard which screamed, 'Boycott Sears' in big, bold, black magic market letters. When I had watched civil rights and Vietnam war demonstrations on television I had never envisioned that I would one day be doing the same thing. In my mind, carrying a sign conjured up images of rebellion, disrespect for authority and even violence. That's something good Christians just didn't

do.”⁴³ A National Federation for Decency protestor made the point even more directly as she explained why and how she was picketing an ABC television station for showing episodes of Soap in 1978. “You can turn it into a bad thing—picketing and all this—because it seems to have a bad connotation in Mississippi.... We’re trying to do it in a nice way.”⁴⁴

Overcoming any worries that nice people don’t picket, Wildmon developed a taste for confrontation. At the scene of his first picket and boycott, in Chicago at Sears’s headquarters, he and other members of the National Federation for Decency cut up Sears credit cards as journalists watched.⁴⁵ He learned that insulting language drew attention. In 1979, for example, he called ABC “the prostitute network,” and later called R.J. Reynolds the “number one ‘Porno Pushing Advertiser.’”⁴⁶ While picketing ABC headquarters in New York, he tried to deliver a funeral wreath with the words “The death of constructive programming on ABC” to network executives.⁴⁷ Wildmon was proud when the ACLU named him Arts Censor of the Year, and even the title of his autobiography, **Don Wildmon: The Man the Networks Love to Hate**, celebrates the fact that people hate him. In 1993, he wrote of earning “the privilege of being persecuted,” and asked what he thought about it. “I praise God for it! I consider their condemnation to be a high honor. It means I’m doing my job right.”⁴⁸

For Wildmon, the life of Jesus provides the theological justification for naming sinners and taking the wrath of critics. Since the late 1970s, he has consistently said that confrontation and sacrifice are the essential elements of Christian life. He takes satisfaction in being frustrated and persecuted for a cause, because that tells him he is following Jesus’ example. “The cross is a symbol of suffering and shame, hurt, rejection,

humiliation, pain, sacrifice, even death.” He urges more churches to call their members “to sacrifice—real sacrifice. I don’t hear many calls for people to suffer for Christ, forget all else and press on toward that high calling.”⁴⁹ Wildmon is especially frustrated by people who tell him that Jesus was a nice fellow who did not criticize or condemn people or that Jesus stood above all for tolerance and kindness. No, he replies, Jesus stood for righteousness. He condemned the moneychangers, idolaters and government officials who called on religion to support their authority, and he suffered and died for it.⁵⁰

In 1991, a group of ministers asked him if he thought his effort to reform television could ever be successful. “My response to that question was the same as it has always been. God did not call me to be successful, only faithful.”⁵¹ More frequently, Wildmon has stressed, “The goal in life is not happiness, as many seem to think. The goal in life is holiness. Living your life in the will of God. Investing your life in something which will outlive you. Contributing to those who have preceded and those who will follow you.”⁵² This is the theme Wildmon repeats most frequently in his columns, certainly to inspire readers and possibly to reassure himself. In 1996, for example, he responded to a rhetorical question with this certainty: “No, my life was not wasted. When one seeks a high goal, pursues it with all the strength and ability he has, then that life is never wasted.... I have lived long enough to learn that God doesn’t call us to be successful.... God does, however, call each of us to be faithful. And that, we can do.”⁵³

This understanding of holiness is a tragic if commonsensical idea of doing the best one can, even if that means unhappiness, exhaustion, and persecution. Perfection is not possible, success is not likely, and total devotion to making the world a better place is

the only real Christian life. Wildmon quoted Dietrich Bonhoeffer, without attribution, that there is no such thing as cheap grace, and he has consistently stressed the price of Christian activism.

Wildmon's continuing religious assault on the entertainment industry has such a tragic and exhaustive sense because the entertainment industries create such a total experience. People who hear Wildmon's story about the three television channels in 1976 laugh because today's television offers so many more options. If television is all about sinfulness, more sin comes with more channels. The mass nature of mass culture is central to Wildmon's belief that Christians should fight back as consumer activists. He had heard and generally if uncomfortably believed that we should have the freedom to choose or not to choose movies, television programs, and the like, because that choice is a basic feature of market society. And the range of choices available, he had heard and generally believed, reflected the openness and diversity of American culture. But as he heard, again and again, just turn it off, **you** don't have to watch that show or buy that magazine or rent that movie, he turned his anger toward the people who were surrounding everyone with those choices, in television, at the movies, on the radio, in easily available magazines, on the internet. Popular culture is always there, and fighting it means always fighting.

The sense that Christian life should mean the life of an outsider sounds familiar. The search for outsider status sometimes reaches a kind of chicness in Christian thinking, as in many forms of contemporary culture, as people interpreting and applying their theologies often claim that their understanding of Christianity holds the truest way to escape the expectations and power relations of society as it exists. The intriguing (though

certainly not entirely unique) things about Donald Wildmon's claims to outsider status are, first, that he defines the center of American culture as television and a broader perspective it seems to embody. Second, he is a conservative who often sounds like Christians on the left, condemning do-nothing churches and the insidious effects of corporate power.

So, for Wildmon, what should Christians do? They should fight the power of corporate America with an onslaught of boycotts and letters to advertisers, television stations, production companies, and government officials. They should patronize only the businesses that do not offend them. They should learn about connections among corporations, who knows whom, who partners with whom, and they should hold those corporations accountable for the actions of all of their partners and subsidiaries. To read the **American Family Association Journal** is to wallow in the association's understanding of sinfulness. On a multi-page spread in every issue, the association's television viewers, apparently with clinched teeth, heads shaking in disgust, eyes tearing in dismay and rolling with near disbelief, list the problems with specific episodes of television shows. Long lists of plot summaries detail which shows featured which types of sex jokes, which shows portrayed extramarital sex—heterosexual and homosexual—as an acceptable option, which shows upheld dishonesty as an apparent virtue, which shows glorified violence, and which shows mocked Christianity. As a page one story began in 1999, “So, what's on the tube tonight? Let's see, the new fall season is underway, and featured on prime-time network television are . . . bestiality, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and pedophilia. There are endless jokes about all sorts of sexual situations and perversions. What's going on?”⁵⁴ Each issue of the **Journal** lists the

writers, producers, and advertisers of each show, often in stories with unflattering headlines like “Sara Lee supports teen sex theme in ABC’s ‘Doogie Howser’” or “Ford, Sony ads on NBC pro-homosexual show.”⁵⁵

Other American Family Association initiatives have never strayed far from keeping up steady opposition to mass culture. Not surprisingly, as television has expanded, the AFA has expanded its watch to target MTV, movie services such as HBO and Showtime, and worst of all the Playboy Channel. It encourages local communities to fight the expansion of such services in their towns and cities. Sustained boycotts, with occasional pickets, of bookstores and convenience stores that sold pornographic magazines produced some successes when some stores and, eventually, some corporations got out of the business. Boycotting Holiday Inns for having in-room access to pornographic films had similar characteristics: seeing, publicizing and fighting evil in a local, familiar company people knew and considered safe and comfortable. Increasingly in the 1990s, Wildmon and his organization thought and fought more broadly. The AFA led protests against Time-Warner for publishing Madonna’s book **Sex**, and against Pepsi Cola for supporting a Madonna tour and video. In 1993, the AFA published **The Fight Back Book**, a short publication that listed all television stations and pornographic magazines and all of their advertisers, with their addresses and telephone numbers. In 1996, about twenty-five years after Wildmon identified Walt Disney as someone with virtues Christians should emulate, the AFA targeted the ever-expanding Disney corporation as a source of particular concern, for its movies and television programs and its “Gay Day” at Disneyworld in Orlando. When Disney formed a partnership with McDonald’s, the AFA condemned it as well.

It may come as a surprise that Wildmon offers little sense of an ethical theory. He does not explain proper moral behavior or proper family behavior; he assumes his readers already know that. His job, as he defines it, is to inspire them to fight immorality as part of their understanding of Christian life. From what he says is wrong, it is not difficult to deduce what Wildmon thinks is right: a heterosexual relationship between adults, who become parents of children they treat with love and kindness, teaching them Christian beliefs and protecting them from the harmful effects of a sinful mass culture. The striking thing is that Wildmon hardly ever makes those points. Instead, he concentrates on the difficulty—maybe bordering on the impossibility--of living out his understanding of Christian family life, and thus the need to fight.

Wildmon differs from most figures on the Religious Right in that he does not refer to or rely on a stated eschatology. In 1978, Sacvan Bercovitch theorized that Americans since the Puritans have tended to offer jeremiads that, while sounding angry and countercultural, are in fact full of confidence that the future will bear out their ultimate righteousness. Writing broadly, Bercovitch concludes, “Only in the United States has nationalism carried with it the Christian meaning of the sacred. Only America, of all national designations, has assumed the combined force of eschatology and chauvinism.... Of all symbols of identity, only **America** has united nationality and universality, civic and spiritual selfhood, secular and redemptive history, the country’s past and paradise to be, in a single synthetic idea.”⁵⁶ Wildmon is interesting in part because, unlike most figures on the religious right,⁵⁷ he does not fit Bercovitch’s model. He does not suggest things are moving toward the final days. If he believes Jesus is coming soon, he has never mentioned it in print. Nor does he believe Americans, or

more particularly American Christians, are pressing on toward a better, more Christian society. Things are not getting better, not from a Christian perspective, and not as part of an American narrative of progress. He has repeatedly said with considerable sadness that his goal is to do what he can to keep things from getting much worse. The world is in rough shape, and it is our job to fight it.

Wildmon's religious outlook, at least as he expresses it in public, is nearly joyless. Christians should look into religious radio, music, entertainment, internet services and the rest, without ever thinking they will be isolated from sinful forces. The most joyful noise produced by the AFA, certainly, is the expanding American Family Radio network, which combines Christian music with Christian talk shows. But while Wildmon works hard to build up that network, he hardly ever celebrates or even mentions it in his ever-combative columns. In fact, AFA **Journal** publishes a special report on its radio network in every issue, but that report lies outside the rest of the journal, on a different grade of paper, as if to symbolize that the upbeat, building elements of the AFA do not fit comfortably inside the angry, fighting side.

Instead, Wildmon consistently stresses that confronting everyday forms of sinfulness in everyday ways is painful. Early in his activist days, he said, "What I'm doing is constant confrontation. Day in and day out. That gets to be old hat after awhile." More sadly, he summarized the course of his ministry by stressing its consequences: "the past 15 years have not been easy, and rarely enjoyable. They have taken their toll on me, my wife and my children. I have paid a price, and so has my family."⁵⁸ Family, for Wildmon, has thus become less the Victorian refuge from sinfulness that helped begin his activism, and more a rallying cry for more activism. One

cannot stay inside the Christian home separate from the forces that violate his understanding of home life, any more than one can stay inside the church. Instead, the only Christian thing he sees to do is to search for more and better forms of activism, and keep up the fight.

¹ Samuel S. Hill, Jr., **Southern Churches in Crisis** (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967); Hill, et al., **Religion and the Solid South** (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972); Hill, **The South and the North in American Religion** (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

² Donald E. Wildmon with Randall Nulton, **Don Wildmon: The Man the Networks Love to Hate** (Wilmore, KY: Bristol Books, 1990), 28.

³ Wildmon, **Don Wildmon**, 31-32.

⁴ **Mississippi United Methodist Advocate**, May 8, 1957, 5.

⁵ See Vaughn L. Grisham, Jr. with a forward by William F. Winter, **Tupelo : The evolution of a community** (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 1999).

⁶ **Mississippi United Methodist Advocate**, May 8, 1957, 5; **The Purple and White**, sports stories and columns, 1958.

⁷ Donald Wildmon, **Living Thoughts** (Tupelo: Five Star Publishers, 1973, orig. 1971), 13-14.

⁸ Donald Wildmon, **Nuggets of Gold** (Tupelo, MS: American Family Association, 2000, orig. published 1970), 11-32; Wildmon, **Pebbles in the Sand** (Tupelo: Five Star Publishers, 1970), 22-24.

⁹ Wildmon, **Practical Help for Daily Living** (Tupelo, MS: Five Star Publishers, 1972), 5, 15.

¹⁰ Wildmon, **Practical Help**, 24.

¹¹ Wildmon, **A Gift for the Graduate** (Tupelo: Five Star Publishers, 1973, orig. pub., 1968), 59.

¹² Wildmon, **Windows to Life** (Tupelo: Five Star Publishers, 1973), 52.

¹³ Wildmon, **Practical Help for Daily Living**, 32-33.

¹⁴ Wildmon, **Pebbles in the Sand** (Tupelo: Five Star Publishers, 1970), 19.

¹⁵ Wildmon, **Pebbles in the Sand**, 80.

¹⁶ Wildmon, **Pebbles in the Sand**, 104-105.

¹⁷ Wildmon, **Pebbles in the Sand**, 96.

¹⁸ For a narrative, see William Martin, **With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America** (New York: Broadway Books, 1976).

¹⁹ Wildmon, **American Family Association Journal**, November/December 1990, 29.

²⁰ Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, April 1994, 2.

²¹ Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, January 1999, 2.

²² Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, January 1994, 2.

²³ Wildmon, **Don Wildmon**, 211.

²⁴ Wildmon, "The Influence of the Church on America," **Mississippi United Methodist Advocate**, November 10, 1976, 6.

²⁵ Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, February 1996, 2.

²⁶ **Jackson Clarion Ledger**, April 8, 1981, 12A.

²⁷ Wildmon, **Don Wildmon**, 124, 126.

²⁸ **Jackson Clarion Ledger**, October 14, 1979, 1E.

²⁹ Wildmon, **The Case Against Pornography** (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 7.

³⁰ Historian Timothy Smith made this point in a graduate seminar in the early 1980s.

³¹ Wildmon, in **AFA Journal**, September 1996, 2.

³² Gregory D. Black, **The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Black, **Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Frank Walsh, **Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Frank Miller, **Censored Hollywood: Sex, Sin, and Violence on Screen** (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1994).

³³ **Jackson Clarion Ledger**, January 20, 1983, 1F.

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- ³⁴ This characterization of fundamentalism comes primarily from George Marsden, **Fundamentalism and American culture : the shaping of twentieth century evangelicalism, 1870-1925** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Marsden, **Understanding Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); James J. Thompson, Jr., **Tried as by fire : Southern Baptists and the religious controversies of the 1920s** (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982); and in its emphasis on the rejection of progress, James Turner, **Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America** (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1985).
- ³⁵ William R. Glass, **Strangers in Zion : fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950** (Macon, Ga. : Mercer University Press, 2001).
- ³⁶ On the North Mississippi Annual Conference, **Jackson Clarion-Ledger**, July 5, 1981. On some United Methodist ministers in California supporting gay marriage, Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, January 1999, 2.
- ³⁷ Wildmon, in **American Family Association Journal**, April 1993, 2.
- ³⁸ **Jackson Daily News**, March 19, 1980, 7E.
- ³⁹ Wildmon, **Don Wildmon**, 201.
- ⁴⁰ Wildmon, **Don Wildmon**, 215.
- ⁴¹ Wildmon, **Don Wildmon**, 207-208.
- ⁴² Wildmon, **Living Thoughts**, 38-39.
- ⁴³ Wildmon, **Don Wildmon**, 51.
- ⁴⁴ **Jackson Daily News**, November 1, 1978, 4B.
- ⁴⁵ **Jackson Daily News**, June 17, 1978, 1B.
- ⁴⁶ **Jackson Daily News**, January 6, 1979, 1B; **Mississippi United Methodist Advocate**, May 14, 1980, 3.
- ⁴⁷ Wildmon, **Don Wildmon**, 56.
- ⁴⁸ Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, December 1993, 2.
- ⁴⁹ Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, August 1991, 2.
- ⁵⁰ See especially, Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, September 1993, 2.
- ⁵¹ Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, April 1991, 2.
- ⁵² Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, February 1993, 2.
- ⁵³ Wildmon, in **AFA Journal**, February 1996, 2.
- ⁵⁴ **AFA Journal**, November/December 1999, 1.
- ⁵⁵ These quotes appeared in the **AFA Journal**, January 1993, 7, but similar stories appear in every issue.
- ⁵⁶ Sacvan Bercovitch, **The American Jeremiad** (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 176.
- ⁵⁷ Sara Diamond, **Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right** (New York: Guilford, 1998); Michael Lienesch, **Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Martin, **With God on Our Side**.
- ⁵⁸ **Jackson Clarion-Ledger**, January 20, 1983, 1F; Wildmon, **AFA Journal**, February 1993, 2.