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Annie Jenkins voted for John McCain in 2008. She greatly admired Sarah Palin. She thought that Palin was brilliant and witty, and that she took a ferocious beating from the media because she was a woman in the limelight and that's what the media does to women. Annie loved that Palin did not keep her Christianity "quiet." These views are not unusual for someone in Annie's demographic. Annie is an evangelical Christian. She is sixty now, a gracious, gregarious, attractive woman with a big laugh and a warm smile. She lives in a sprawling suburb in southern California, the kind of planned subdivision where all the streets meet in right angles and the strip malls repeat themselves remorselessly every fifteen to twenty blocks, in a modest house filled with Bible commentaries and Christian books. Her town borders Orange County, a Republican stronghold, and most of her white neighbors who identify with a political party call themselves Republican.<sup>1</sup> Most evangelical Christians vote Republican. White evangelicals overwhelmingly vote Republican. In the 2010 midterm election, 78% of those white evangelicals that voted did so for their Republican candidate.<sup>2</sup>

But you would not have predicted Annie's current political views from her early life. Annie grew up in a staunchly Democratic household, the child of educated Catholics who would no more vote for a Republican than they would walk into traffic naked. They had a black velvet painting of JFK on the wall, next to the one of Elvis. Her father was an Italian immigrant who did scientific work on a military base in southern California—"all his stuff is classified, that's all I ever knew"--and her mother was a farmer's daughter from the Midwest. They lived a comfortable, conventional lifestyle, but by the middle of the 1960s, Annie, like many of her peers, decided that this middleclass comfort was an empty lie. Her father was an alcoholic. He never hit her mother, but as he drank she grew angry, and the household that seemed so overtly proper was full of anguish. Annie's sister withdrew and became the perfect student. Annie

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<sup>1</sup> Survey of Political and Civic Engagement in the Inland Empire. July 2007. Karthick Ramakrishnan. Dept of Political Science, UC Riverside.

<sup>2</sup> Exit polling, Public Opinion Strategies for the Faith and Freedom Coalition; the Pew Research Center reported 77%.

found drugs. They were dirt cheap, they were plentiful, and there wasn't much else to do in the Mojave desert. And the drug culture was a community, bound together by the trust you need when you're breaking the law, and by disgust at the hypocrisy of middle class convention.

That new world utterly rejected the staid middle class life their parents led. They dressed differently. They lived communally. Not literally, but they moved from apartment to apartment together. They'd crash on each other's floors and sofas, and they lived in each other's space. They shared everything—clothes, food, money, cars, bodies—and they behaved as if it should all come free. They were furious at the government for waging war, but also for not doing more for them—for not providing shelter, food, free medical care. They thought that these basic needs were basic rights. “Politically,” Annie explained to me last summer, sitting on her tidy couch, “I was very left. I mean left, left, left, as far as you could get.” She was protesting constantly against the war, of course, but also for the legalization of marijuana and for every other cause that came along. Then she became a Christian. She still went to protests. She was still a hippie. She still wore bellbottoms. “We'd cut our bells, and we'd insert even more, so they were like four feet around. It was all that—the flowers, the backless dresses, the whole thing.” But within a few years she was voting Republican and the backless halter dresses lay dumped in a box in her closet. Her roommate had asked her what she thought Jesus would think if he walked into the living room and found her wearing one of them.

Many people do not realize that the character of modern evangelical Christianity was formed in the social upheavals of the 1960s, but it is true nonetheless. How did a movement that emerged from the shadows of the antiwar protest and the Students for a Democratic Society—one of the most leftwing movements our country has known--become so clearly identified with the Republican agenda? How did the hippie Christians become the Religious Right?

Many facts about the hippie Christians are still hazy. But we know that the Christian youth movement of the late 1960s is one of the most important and understudied in American religious history, and that it involved thousands and probably millions of young people across the country. We know that

this movement was the push behind the transformation of American evangelical Christianity as it moved into the mainstream in the decades after the Vietnam war—the source of its distinctive, lilting music, its come-as-you-are informality, its charismatic intimacy with God. Of course, American evangelicalism has deeper, older roots, but the hippies changed the way that Americans were Christians. They made speaking in tongues common. They made reading the Bible literally mainstream. They made the idea of rapture, when Christians will be spirited up to heaven as Jesus comes back to engulf the world in flames, commonplace. They made many features of theologically conservative Christianity which had been aberrant and idiosyncratic part of what it meant to be a committed Christian in 1970s and 1980s America.<sup>3</sup> “Born again” may be a Jesus People term. And we know that most American evangelical Christians are now often vehemently right wing, and that most hippies were decidedly not. They seem to have been mostly apolitical or, like Annie, on the left. What empirical data we have about the hippie Christians supports this claim. A survey of over 800 former hippie Christians in 2004 found that only 22% of them thought of themselves as politically conservative back in the day, while 57% described themselves as politically conservative now. It is also true that the political divide between the religious and the non-religious begins in 1972 with the campaign of George McGovern and takes off after that.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I make the case for the central influence of the Jesus People in *When God Talks Back*; Randall Balmer (*Mine Eyes have seen the Glory*), Mark Noll (*The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and *The Old Religion in the New World*) and Don Miller (*Reinventing American Protestantism*), and Preston Shires (*Hippies of the Religious Right*) agree with me (and with Larry Eskridge), although not everyone does. Darren Dochuk (*From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*) gives them a much more minor role. But there are some basic historical facts that are hard to ignore. Pentecostalism was socially backward in the 1950s, though a bestselling book about its efficacy in converting gang members had been read by many; speaking in tongues privately in prayer, a direct supernatural relationship with God, and the idea that God is a personal friend—these practices and ideas are now commonplace. According to the Pew Research Center, 18% of Americans speak in tongues at least several times a year (another poll found about 18% of all Christians); 26% have had a direct revelation from God. These trends are typically called “neo-Pentecostal.” Rick Warren’s *Purpose Driven Life*, which makes explicit the importance of God as a personal friend, has sold 30 million copies, more than any other hardback book in American history apart from the Bible. The New York Times described Hal Lindsey’s book on the rapture, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, “the no. 1 non-fiction bestseller of the decade.” One of the minor facts that speaks loudly to me is a little survey in the back of George Marsden’s splendid biography of Fuller Theological Seminary (*Reforming Fundamentalism*). When Fuller was founded in the 1950s to bring theologically conservative Christianity into the mainstream and out of the social and political backwards in which it had been languishing, the dominant presumption was that the supernatural miracles described in the Bible had been real, but were located squarely in the past and were not accessible in the modern world. By 1982, 44% of the students described themselves as charismatic or Pentecostal and 43% said that they had spoken in tongues.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Putnam and David Campbell’s *Religion in American Politics* documents the growing gap between the religious and non-religious, although it also points out that the number of unaffiliated is growing, and that the young evangelicals have a different stance on social issues than their elders.

Something happened that took a hippie ethos woven around gentle Christian communalism and transformed it into a politically conservative firebrand.<sup>5</sup>

One way to tell the story of political transformation is that the rightward shift was sheer accident, the happenstance of the pastors who were there at the time when the hippies who became Christians needed someone there to help. The movement largely began in California, spurred by an intense search for meaning, a hunger for immediate experience, and the chaos that follows from throwing conventional behavior and practical organization out the window. By 1967, the summer of love, more than a hundred thousand young people had found their way to San Francisco. They came to create a new way of being human. They thought they were leaving behind a corrupt world of hypocritical elders and joining a revolution that would change the world. They found a city in which the services had collapsed. There was little free food, less housing, and almost no helpful police presence. Young people kept coming, and many simply slept on the street at night, hungry and unwashed. Women may have had the hardest time. “Make love, not war” meant that easy sex could seem to be a political right. Even before that famous summer, a hippie broadsheet remarked that “rape is as common as bullshit on Haight Street.”<sup>6</sup> Many Americans were bewildered by the movement. But some evangelicals—including Billy Graham, then at the zenith of his fame—understood and even approved of the search for meaning (if not of the LSD). Graham wrote that, looking at a group of hippie Christians in bellbottoms and beads from his float in the 1971 Pasadena Rose Bowl parade, “I had an almost irrepressible urge to get into the street and identify with them.”<sup>7</sup> A few pastors began to venture into the constant disorderly party that was Haight Ashbury. They offered coffee, food, rent-free shelter--and safety. And, of course, the gospel. In a store front called “Living Room,” a young pastor and his wife painted scripture verses on the walls with psychedelic suns and got food and coffee donated from a local grocer. As many as twenty thousand people came through their doors in two years.

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<sup>5</sup> The story of the Jesus People has not yet been fully told, although some fifty popular books were written at the time, along with thousands of articles. Larry Eskridge’s terrific dissertation is *God’s Forever Family* (2005 PhD, Stirling University) and it is his survey, done with David di Sabatino, that reports these political figures. The popular books and articles are chronicled with zealous bibliophilia in di Sabatino’s *The Jesus People Movement*.

<sup>6</sup> Eskridge 2005: 81

<sup>7</sup> Billy Graham, *The Jesus Generation*. It sold half a million copies.

The Jesus that emerged in these coffeehouses, and eventually in other coffeehouses and on the beach and in communes around the country, looked a lot like a hippie, with long hair, sandals and flowing robes. Like the hippies, this Jesus was a radical revolutionary. Like the hippies, he had a vision of an utterly transformed world in which people would be who they could be, not who they were raised to be. Like the hippies, he spoke of love and peace and joy. Like the hippies, he hung out on the street. A popular poster read:

WANTED: JESUS CHRIST

ALIAS: THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD, KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS, PRINCE OF PEACE, ETC.

- Notorious leader of an underground liberation movement
- Wanted for the following charges: —
- Practicing medicine, winemaking and food distribution without a license. —
- Interfering with businessmen in the temple. —
- Associating with known criminals, radicals, subversives, prostitutes and street people.
- Claiming to have the authority to make people into God's children.
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- APPEARANCE: Typical hippie type—long hair, beard, robe, sandals. Hangs around slum areas, few rich friends, often sneaks out into the desert.

BEWARE: This man is extremely dangerous. His insidiously inflammatory message is particularly dangerous to young people who haven't been taught to ignore him yet. He changes men and claims to set them free.

WARNING: HE IS STILL AT LARGE!<sup>8</sup>

This was someone with whom the counterculture could identify.

By 1971, there were Christian hippies in Washington and Wichita and Dallas and Detroit. There were as many as six hundred Christian coffeehouses. Thousands of people had been baptized in the ocean, teenagers with dripping clothes and goofy smiles. The cover of the June 21 issue of *Time* showed the familiar face of Jesus framed in acid orange. “Jesus is alive and well and living in the radiant spiritual fervor of a growing number of young Americans ... If any one mark clearly identifies them, it is their total belief in an awesome, supernatural Jesus Christ, not just a marvelous man who lived two thousand

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<sup>8</sup> This version is taken from the 1971 *Time* article, but there are a variety of them.

years ago, but a living God ...”<sup>9</sup> It was a diverse and disorganized movement that spilled over into the clean cropped Intervarsity mission and included some occasionally bewildered newly charismatic Catholics, but it was large enough that in 1972 Campus Crusade for Christ could pull in 800,000 people for a single event in Dallas in 1972. The hippie Christians—they were also called Jesus Freaks and Jesus People--kept the clothes and the hairstyles, the communes, the street papers and the rock music. They replaced the intense high of drugs with intense high of Pentecostal style spiritual experience. They spoke in tongues, a language-like babble its speakers take to be the language of God. They collapsed in laughter as the Holy Spirit filled their bodies. Sometimes, the trade off between chemical and religious ecstasy was uneven. In a documentary about the most important of the hippie Christian leaders, Lonnie Frisbee, a high school friend remembered: “we hiked up to Tahquitz Falls [near Palm Springs]. Lonnie wanted to go to the very top fall, and once we got there he spread his backpack and he spread out—I remembered LSD, and he had marijuana, and he had all of his oil paints, and I remember that he proceeded to paint a picture of Jesus on the rock, a full size picture on the rock. Then he got kind of into a yoga position, and he pulled out his Bible, and he said, we’re gonna read the Bible now. He was reading about John the Baptist and how John the Baptist baptized, and he baptized us up at Tahquitz Falls, even though we were all on drugs ...” Among the early hippie Christians, that’s what people did. Another friend recalled, “I took my LSD and lay down on the floor for a few hours and when I got up I was a Christian. It was really that simple.”<sup>10</sup>

The most important pastor to take charge of the Jesus Freaks was Chuck Smith, the new straight-edged pastor at an undistinguished non-denominational church in Costa Mesa called Calvary Chapel, home to some two dozen members.<sup>11</sup> He had been raised Pentecostal, but he wanted to build a different kind of church. In fact there was a new impulse in many quarters of the old time religion. The churches that had banded together under the label “fundamentalist,” because they clung to the biblical fundamentals they took liberal churches to be rejecting, were typically so world-rejecting that some of

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<sup>9</sup> Time June 21, 1971, author unclear; the essay contains the figure of 600 coffee houses.

<sup>10</sup> David di Sabatino’s *Lonnie Frisbee* is an excellent documentary on his life, and the best source of information about Lonnie anywhere.

<sup>11</sup> There are certainly other important pastors and street missionaries like Ted Wise, Ken Philpotts, and Arthur Blessit, but Smith’s legacy is visible and large.

them even forbade congregants to vote. Now, many began to reach towards the mainstream. Chuck Smith wanted to be in the world, not in a backwater. The bead-wearing, draft-dodging hippies on Huntington Beach troubled him and fascinated him, and he thought they needed help. He urged his daughters to introduce him to one of them. “One evening around five o’clock our doorbell rang. There stood ... a real, honest to goodness hippie—long hair, beard, flowers in his hair, bells on the cuffs of his pants.” That was Lonnie Frisbee, who had drifted south from San Francisco, preaching on the beaches.<sup>12</sup>

The beach-dwelling kids often had nowhere to stay. Smith, through Lonnie, offered them his house. Then he rented a house for them—they called it “the House of Miracles”—and then, as they kept coming, another. He made his services casual, so that the rebels who hated middle class ticki-tackiness (as Pete Seeger would call it) could come to church. Older church members, appalled at seeing dirty feet on new carpet, hung up a sign that read “no bare feet allowed.” Smith yelled at the board and threatened to tear out the carpet. He took the pulpit on Sunday, but he gave Wednesday evening to Lonnie, and in that service Lonnie spoke as he was: long hair, beard, bells on his pants—“the hippie preacher.” “The doors blew open at that point,” a congregant recalls. Chuck Smith invited the hippie bands to play their music, and invited back the bands that the audience liked. No one apart from the beach kids had ever heard Christian music like that before, and now the music became its own draw, a mixture of folksy yearning and upbeat rock. The Jesus who presided over these sessions was the hippie and countercultural Jesus: personally attentive, unconditionally loving, a Jesus with a great big bearhug of acceptance. Smith believed in that Jesus. “It was different,” recalled a man who discovered Smith’s sermons at Calvary and became a Christian. “He wasn’t like reading a portion from the Bible and then saying a bunch of words ... he was telling me about his personal friend.”<sup>13</sup>

In six months Calvary Chapel grew from two hundred congregants to two thousand. They ran out of space at the original church, rented another, and outgrew that too. They purchased a school, and built a new chapel with three hundred seats and ran out of space the first Sunday. They purchased eleven acres

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<sup>12</sup> I tell this story in more detail in *When God Talks Back*. It can be found on Calvary websites in a variety of iterations.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus* 2003: 138-139.

and put up a circus tent to hold 1600 folding chairs and planned two services. That night, before the first tent service, Smith recalled, “I looked out on that sea of folding chairs. I had never seen so many folding chairs in my life! I turned to Duane [a volunteer] and I asked, ‘how long do you think it will take the Lord to fill this place?’ He looked at his watch and said, ‘I’d say just about eleven hours.’”<sup>14</sup> Duane was right. By 1974 they built a permanent sanctuary that could seat 2300 and within three weeks they were holding triple services. Members were holding housegroups in other cities, and they were becoming churches and influencing other churches. Smith and his congregation founded the first (and wildly successful) contemporary Christian music studio, Maranatha! Music. These days, there are hundreds of Calvary Chapel churches in the United States and thousands more like them. Smith has trained hundreds, maybe thousands, of pastors.<sup>15</sup> And like many of the old time evangelical pastors, Chuck Smith was, and is, politically quite conservative.

By the time of her high school graduation, Annie was addicted to cocaine. She never did much LSD—she was scared of hallucinogens—but she smoked plenty of pot. By the time she moved to Bakersfield for community college, she was selling. About twice a month she drove to San Francisco and spent the weekend in Haight Ashbury. She would sell there, but mostly, she would party. There were parties on every corner. She would go from one to another, sampling their drugs, hanging out. It was grand and glorious and she was part of the revolution, and she was making money hand over fist. She made so much money that she bought herself a Porsche and flew up and down the freeway to San Francisco like she was living the California dream.

Except that after a while it didn’t seem so romantic. She thought that Haight Ashbury was horribly unsafe, especially for women. She thought that a lot of the people she met were naïve, too innocent to recognize that they were being used. She started to notice that free love looked like guys

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<sup>14</sup> Don Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism* 1997: 34

<sup>15</sup> Smith has published many books and there is an extensive history on Calvary Chapel website. One of his more instructive texts is *Charisma and Charismania*, in which he gives a theological account for what he dislikes about Pentecostalism and churches, like the Vineyard, which are too charismatic for him.

taking advantage of women too stoned to say no. “I mean, a lot of them probably realized that they were having sex. But at that point, your mind is so relaxed that you lose your cognitive ability to be rational, to get yourself out of a dangerous situation.” She saw that some of the sex was a deliberate exchange for drugs or money, by women who were hooked or cash poor. “A lot of them prostituted themselves. There was a real sleazy side to Haight Ashbury.” That really got to her after a while. “I saw how dark it really was.” Young people now, she said to me, shaking her head dismissively, they’re so fascinated by that era. “They see the fun and the drugs and the music and hippies all over the place. That was the top of the pyramid. The bottom was sludge.”<sup>16</sup>

But she had no place else to go. She wasn’t going to go back to her parents’ conventional life. She’d seen that and loathed it. She did get a job, but she was still smoking dope every evening and driving up to San Francisco every other week. She moved in with her sister in San Diego, but soon her sister—the perfect student, the good girl—threw her out. Somewhere along the way she went to an addiction treatment center, but she didn’t like it. She went back home with the Bible they gave her anyway. She never opened it.

One day when she was 21 and living with her boyfriend in Ocean Beach, she came home to find that her boyfriend had become a Christian. Just like that. He met someone who told him that he wouldn’t get to heaven unless he accepted Jesus, and so he accepted Jesus. He’d been deep into LSD and mescaline—all the hallucinogens, Annie said—and that afternoon, he began to speak in tongues and had given up alcohol and drugs by the time Annie came home from work.

The remarkable thing—and the best testament to Annie’s claim that she hated the life that she was living but didn’t know how to get out—is that Annie took this at face value. “It was the weirdest thing. I was listening to him, and something inside said, ‘he’s right, he’s right, he’s right’.”

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<sup>16</sup> I heard something like this from a number of ex-Christian hippies. In *When God Talks Back*, I tell the story of a woman I call Sally, who put it this way: “We were marching against the war, we were involved in the civil rights movement, we were burning bras, we were having lie-ins where we’d all sort of sit around and make out. Yeah, it was political. But when it got to this other level, it was not political. It was kinky, bad, self-destructive, and scary, and I didn’t like it.”

The boyfriend said that they could no longer live together. She gathered up her things, got into the Porsche, and drove to the place she'd rented but hadn't really used. There she sat in her room and thought, "what just happened?" She got back into her car and drove to the nearby cliffs and parked at the rail, looking out into the pitch black darkness above the ocean. She remembers thinking, "I should just go over the edge. What am I doing here?" But she drove home and took out the Bible they had given her at the addiction clinic and began to read. By this time she was bawling, great gulps of tears. "It was the King James translation. I couldn't understand it, all the 'thees' and 'thous' and the 'goest' and 'comest,' that stuff. But I was reading and I read the Psalm that said 'Tears may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning.'"

The next morning she went to visit her boyfriend's brother, who had the reaction you might have thought Annie would have had: he thought the guy was crazy. Wacko, he said. But Annie wasn't so sure. She had always believed in God, even though she hadn't attended church after her confirmation. Church represented all that she was protesting: her family, the military, rules and regulations. But as it happened, someone told her about a church group meeting close to her apartment. They played guitar and they dressed like she did and she liked it. She started going regularly. She was still smoking dope and doing cocaine and going to psychedelic concerts where people blissed out on drugs to strobe lights and the guys on stage wore glitter on their hair and shoes. She found the tension between the two terribly confusing. "I was hearing scripture, talking about God, but also taking the drugs and then there was my boyfriend. I didn't know what to do with him. Someone told me that when you get saved, you become brand new, and I grabbed hold of that line like it was my lifeline." She began to pray, with a young woman she liked. They'd hold hands as they prayed, and she felt—different. Lighter. Hopeful. As if she had her life back. She moved in with this woman and her boyfriend moved out of town. One evening the glitter band she followed came over for some lines of cocaine. "All of a sudden the lead singer took his wig off, and I saw who he really was. He was a bald man and when he took that wig off it was like pulling back the curtain of his soul. I just saw him, and I thought, he is empty, absolutely empty, and everything about him is fake. I thought, *whoa.*"

Meanwhile, that housegroup outgrew its first house. It outgrew its second. It moved to a large building down in the center of the city, and moved again. Annie thought it offered people what they'd wanted out of the counterculture but which the counterculture had been unable to produce for them: a different way of being in the world, a better way, a revolution that they wanted to belong to. "Coming to Christ, was one way of getting some of the joy and sense of community that we had been seeking in the counterculture but hadn't gotten. We had done it our way, but it hadn't worked. Jesus offered us what we couldn't create for ourselves." It offered her the community she'd wanted, but with rules. No sex. No charade that sharing your body was a political act. No men taking advantage of women in the name of a new freedom. No lying. No stealing. No taking for granted that because the capitalist pigs were corrupt, anyone can make off with what you thought was your personal property. In her new Christian community, her body and her stuff was safe. And there were no drugs that messed with that body and muddled her mind. Slowly, Annie got herself off the drugs, without going to rehab. She became as regular at church as she had been at smoking pot.

And now she began to vote Republican because that's the way people in church voted. The housegroup she had joined was a Calvary Chapel offshoot, founded by a man who had himself been a strung out druggie who had found his way to faith. Like Chuck Smith, Mike McIntosh is quite conservative politically. These days, someone who attends his megachurch in San Diego has little doubt about its political orientation.<sup>17</sup> The politics made Annie a little nervous at first, but it soon seemed comfortable. It began to make sense that the biblical was the political—that what the bible said about marriage became the way you voted on marriage. If the biblical interpretation sometimes seemed surprising to her—well, she knew she was new at this. "I went along with it because it was my home church and I was finding the Lord and I was growing in my Christian faith. My Christian family was there."

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<sup>17</sup> This is Horizon Christian Fellowship, in San Diego. McIntosh's autobiography is *For the Love of Mike*. I spend over six months doing fieldwork in the church and interviewing congregants, and I wrote about the church in "Metakinesis" (2004, *American Anthropologist*).

This narrative of the way many evangelicals became rightwing is one many Democrats like. In this account, Annie and the many people like her did not consciously choose to be Republican. She simply happened to become Republican because the pastors to whom she entrusted her life were Republican, because when the hippies encountered old time evangelical pastors, those pastors were politically as well as theologically conservative, and those who followed them veered inexorably to the right.

The claim--that the political leanings of a few shifted the politics of many--gains traction from abortion politics. When the Supreme Court established the right to legal abortion in 1973, the decision shocked these Christians, and mobilized them into political action. This was not inevitable. The assumption that the Bible forbids abortion is now so clearly established in our culture that when I asked Annie how she knew that life began at conception, she gave me a startled what-bush-did-you-crawl-from-under look. "From scripture, where it says, 'I formed you in your mother's womb.'"<sup>18</sup> But the derivation is not obvious, and one can argue that it was the deliberate manipulation by a few individuals who made family values—abortion and homosexuality above all--the masthead of the Republican party, and who made it clear that the Christian agenda was the Republican agenda.

One of these was Francis Schaeffer, whom many credit with jump-starting the Religious Right. "No one," explains the historian Preston Shires, "was more influential in bring evangelicals to a prolife position, the position that made political activism not only possible but potent, than the guide of counter-cultural Christianity, Francis Schaeffer." Schaeffer was a major influence on Randall Terry, the man who founded Operation Rescue. Its slogan: "if you believe that abortion is murder, act like it's murder." He influenced James Dobson, who founded Focus on the Family. He influenced Pat Robertson. His views were dramatized by Tim LeHaye, who went on to co-author the Left Behind series.<sup>19</sup>

Early in his career, Schaeffer was apolitical. He was a quirky Christian. He read the Bible the way the counterculture hippies read it: true as written and relevant for today. But he ran what was a cross

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremiah 1:5

<sup>19</sup> Preston Shires *Hippies of the Religious Right* 2007: 164. Robert Wuthnow's *The restructuring of American religion* describes the emergence of anti-abortion politics as symbolic warfare in the battle for political authority.

between a philosophy seminar and a spiritual retreat in L'Abri, Switzerland, and people of all religious stripes came to it. He seems to have been regarded as kind of hippie Socrates—challenging, questioning, and supremely confident of his intellectual authority. In the early 1970s, he refused to align himself to any political party, but he was part of the elite Washington circuit (he was a friend of Jack Kemp), and he was more warmly received by Republicans than Democrats. As he struggled to define his Christianity, the Roe decision provoked him to assert that Christianity protected all life, even the smallest, and that abortion was an unchristian act. “The basic problem of the Christians in this country in the last eighty years or so, in regard to society and in regard to government, is that they have seen things in bits and pieces instead of totals.” In *How shall we live* and later books, he used abortion to identify theologically conservative Christianity with conservative politics, and liberal Christianity with liberal politics, and to argue that their difference was not between two different moral worldviews, but between a worldview with morals and one without them. He argued that liberal Christianity began from the same ethical position as Hitler and Stalin had done. *How shall we then live* (1976) sold forty thousand copies in its first three months and three years later, it was still selling 1500 copies a month. Michele Bachman remembers that the movie based on the book changed her life.<sup>20</sup>

In this way of telling the story of the hippies’ rightward political shift, abortion becomes the dividing point, a river Jordan. I sat at my kitchen table this summer with an evangelical pastor, a former hippie, and his family, and asked him why the Christian hippies had become so conservative. “Abortion,” he replied immediately. He said that when Roe came through, it was clear that you had to make a choice and that the choice was clear. Democrats would support abortion. And so you could not vote for them. There was no other moral option. Annie remembers that she became politically active only with Operation Rescue. She would stand and shout in front of clinics and hand out pamphlets and go onto busses to talk young pregnant girls into making a different decision. And she remembers a whole cluster of issues about which she suddenly became very conservative: marriage (no divorce), homosexuality

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.walkingtogetherministries.org/FullView/tabid/64/ArticleID/32/CBModuleId/401/Default.aspx>. Bachman’s life is characterized in Ryan Rizzo’s portrait in the New Yorker: ‘The leap of faith’ August 15 2011.

(always wrong). Calvary never preached politics from the pulpit, she said, only values. But values, Annie said—“well, I mean your values will direct you to vote.”

But the dividing line was not permanent, at least not for everyone. The pastor who sat at my kitchen table told me that he, too, had been part of Operation Rescue. He had walked on picket lines and held signs and chanted slogans. But soon, he said, he noticed that the people on his side of the line was white and affluent, and that many of the women on the other side of the line were not. And he thought that given that difference, if Jesus showed up, Jesus might not be standing on his side. So he quit. For all the power of the feelings around abortion, it doesn't seem strong enough to explain what happened.

There is another way to tell the story, which is that fundamentally, the politics of the Christian hippies never changed and the movement which grew out of them carries those values still. Hippies hated the government and anything that smacked of the establishment during the Vietnam war, and many evangelicals hate the government now. In this telling of the story, the hippie Christians become the Tea Party.

There is truth to this version as well. When Larry Eskridge—author of the most thorough scholarly student of the Jesus People--went to a Midwest reunion of old Jesus Freaks in 2010, a number of those who showed up made it clear that their heart was with the Tea Party. About half of those who identify with the Tea Party also identify as evangelicals.<sup>21</sup> The message varies across messengers, but the Tea Party throughline is an intense dislike of being governed and an insistence that the government should leave people alone. When Michele Bachman warns people that government should not control their lives, she could be quoting Students for a Democratic Society.

Last summer I also spoke to a man in Rhode Island who had been a hippie Christian. He met Lonnie Frisbee even before Lonnie moved to southern California, back when Lonnie and his wife were living in the basement of a commune in northern California called the House of Acts. He remembers the first time he met Lonnie. “It was one of the most amazing experiences of my life because as I walked

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<sup>21</sup> Public Opinion Strategies for the Faith and Freedom Coalition 2010

down the stairs it was as if I was walking into a warm swimming pool of warm liquid, which was the love of God. All these—my friends, lying across the floor. There's tie-dye hangings and incense burning. My wife's lying there. She's weeping. She's laughing. She's singing in tongues. And Lonnie's wife took me by the hand and she sat me down. 'Don't worry. That's just the Holy Spirit. He's given her the gift of a new language to praise God with. Would you like that gift?'" David said no, and kicked himself later for it. But he remembers the day as one of the most intense spiritual experiences of his life.

David is politically quite conservative these days, but he did not think of himself as political when he was a hippie. He didn't think that politics per se were a big deal to the hippie Christians. But he was very clear that institutional authority was. Like any other hippie, Christian hippies saw their enemy as institutional authority. "And those two, political issues and institutional authority, they definitely go together. There was a tremendous sense of the way institutions—family, community, civil government, college administrators, the whole thing—had been manipulating and exercising power for their own sake." He sees those values in the Tea Party now.

Annie's journey can be made to fit this story line as well. Although she describes herself as "as left as you can go," in fact she was not so much driven by specific political issues as by a general contempt for and mistrust of the government. "I used to picket so much I forgot what in the world I was picketing about." She hated the government back then. That was the verb she used: hate. "I blamed them for everything. We were *so* anti-establishment." She saw herself as fighting anything she associated with the establishment, which was the word she used for everything she opposed. The war, where people she knew were shipped off to die or came back so mis-wired that when a car backfired they dove under a table. An economy with haves and have-nots. People her age wearing suits. "They were traitors in my mind." What was bad was big government, and "a government that was not for us."

Annie still doesn't like the government. She doesn't like any attempt to tell her how to live. She thinks that if people want to own guns, they should. She doesn't like anything that smacks to her of socialism, which she defines as "where everybody gets what everybody else has." So she doesn't like the health care plan. She thinks that welfare has grown way out of hand. She thinks that the people who run

the government are out of touch. “They sit in those big mansions and they get all these statistics. Those aren’t people. Those are numbers.” She thinks a lot of her way of thinking now has its roots in those hippie days. “That anti—‘you’re not gonna tell me what to do’ or ‘just get in my face, I dare ya,’ you know? That very well could have fostered the way I think now. You know, ‘you are not gonna tell me what to do, I live in America.’”

But Annie’s not a member of the Tea Party. For that matter, neither is David.

I think that there is a better way to tell the story, and while it is a story about hippies, it is also a story about what it means to be an evangelical Christian today. This is also the version of the story that many secular liberals miss because they get sidelined by politics they despise and they assume, because of these politics, that evangelical Christians are sheep who follow the fools at the head of their party. This version of the story begins with what it meant for these young Christians to take seriously the attempt to follow Jesus.

The radical innovation of the Jesus movement is the claim that Jesus is a person and that he has a personal relationship with you—with you in particular, not just as one of his people. This Jesus thinks, he feels, he loves, he weeps and he gets angry, just the way he did in Palestine, but he’s still alive and he wants to have the kind of friendship with you that you have with your best friend, only better. The words sound commonplace now, or at least they should. This is the way most evangelical Christians talk about God (the word ‘God’ is often used interchangeably with ‘Jesus’ in this context.) But they weren’t commonplace in 1965. When Sam and Mary thought back to their youth as hippie Christians, that’s what they remembered. They told me about the first man they knew who spoke about Jesus as a friend, as someone he knew. “It was language we had never heard associated with God.” They had the man to dinner, and they asked him to say grace, “knowing he’s a religious guy”—and he turned and spoke in a conversational voice as if God were sitting at them table with them. They’d never heard anything like it before.

These days Sam and Mary run a church in Michigan. They grew up in Detroit. Like Annie, like David, they came to the Jesus movement because it was a way out of a revolution that was no longer working for them. “I grew up,” Sam said, “going to church, and it was just a rote, routine thing. And then my parents got divorced, and then we stopped going to church and then I started having sex and dabbling in drugs and my life became--disorganized. And then someone told me about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” They wanted out of the life they had been living. But what drew them in and still made them shake their heads with wonder, now more than four decades later, was how remarkable the idea of God as a person seemed to them.

This way of thinking about God profoundly changes the way the believer believes. If God is a person, what some human person says about God doesn't really matter. You get to ask God. That was the point of the famous “Wanted” poster. These new Christians didn't want the church. They didn't want priests. They didn't want anyone to interpret Jesus for them, even the apostle Paul. The hippie Christians wanted God the *person*, the guy who wept when his friend Mary said that if only he'd come around sooner, her brother would still be alive.<sup>22</sup> As Sam put it, “you know, Jesus in action, Jesus in conflict with the Pharisees, Jesus the revolutionary. I remember saying, ‘this is a compelling figure. He pisses me off. I don't agree with him. His teaching on divorce and marriage seems excessively strict. But he's messy. Complicated. He was a person. He was not flat.’”

And that of course was the problem. Jesus says “follow me” in the gospels. But he does not say how.

The Gospels are a patchwork of anecdote and sayings, retold in different ways by authors who seem to have been writing to different audiences. In one gospel, Jesus tells those who recognize him not to tell anyone. In another, they are to proclaim him. He protects a prostitute from being stoned but then curses a fig tree for not bearing fruit, even though it's not the season, and the poor tree withers and dies. His parables often make little sense and his followers understand them less often. In one gospel, his parents behave as if he has become mad. Again and again he seems to look out of the gospel story directly

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<sup>22</sup> John 11:35

at the reader and ask: “who do *you* say I am?”

This of course is the central question of Christianity. When the hippie Christians discovered Jesus, they came to him across two thousand years of interpretation and exegesis. It would be naïve in the extreme to imagine that they truly came at him fresh and immediate, as if they sat down to read the gospels and simply discovered, by spending time with the text and time in their prayers, who he was.

But that seems to have been what it felt like for them. When former hippie Christians talk about Jesus, they tell stories about how hard it was in the beginning, when they were so confused even about how to recognize what God was saying to them, and how they learned. They talk about God as if he were an imaginary friend who is real, so that the relationship becomes a history of walks and conversations, held in the imagination but shaped through their reading of the Bible, and always with a sophisticated awareness that what they are imputing to God might not be God after all, but their own fickle thoughts. That’s the way modern evangelical Christians talk about faith, too—as if it is a discovery process in which you are always trying to understand who God is and what God wants from you. This is the language of faith that I heard from person after person, in book after book, in the ten years I spent researching evangelical Christianity. It is the fundamental attitude of this faith in its many permutations.<sup>23</sup> The consequences of this way of thinking for politics are that evangelical Christians are always imagining themselves as who God wants them to be, rather than who they are.

When Annie became a Christian, Democrats just seemed too out there. To be sure, part of this sense that she wasn’t like them came from family values concerns. She was clear back then that homosexuality was an abomination to the Lord and that scripture condemned abortion. But even in those early days, her views were not absolute. One of her best friends at Calvary was a closeted gay man. Many of her friends had actually gotten abortions. She thought that abortion was not always wrong. “I thought,

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<sup>23</sup> I did my work in the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, which I take to exemplify the shift in American Christianity in the post 1960s era. There are of course many different kinds of evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity. Some emphasize specific behaviors—rules—more than others. But the talk of a personal relationship with Jesus and a personal walk with God is exceedingly common and found in a very wide variety of literatures, churches and sermons, and that relationship imposes the need to figure out who you are in the relationship.

Gosh, if a woman is raped and severely beaten, how can she raise a child and not see the child in that event?" She stopped participating in Operation Rescue after a while. They seemed too adamant. Too mean.

Her real problem with the Democrats was that after she became a Christian, Democrats just seemed whiney. They seemed weak. "I think I grew up, not just as a Christian, but as a person, being aware that we have responsibilities, realizing—as a Christian—that God intends us to work." What she once thought of as rights, she now thought of as handouts. And she chastised the hippie she had been. "Back in the hippie days, we were all entitled. We all felt that. I think we all grow out of that. Hopefully."

You could call this naïve individualism, and many Democrats do. In our national conventions this year, Democrats responded to the Republican "he built it" chants by insisting that no one builds a business without the infrastructure government provides. And of course they are right. You could call this a commitment to responsibility, as Jonathan Haidt does, and of course it is.<sup>24</sup>

But it would be more precise to say that it is a commitment to living a life in which the person you can be and should be is always emerging from the person that you are. Evangelicals call this "growing in God." Evangelical Christians talk not so much about believing in God as if God were a yes-no proposition, but about walking with God. They ask each other where they are "on their walk," by which they mean, are you becoming more confident about what God wants of you and are you becoming more like the person he wants you to be?

In this view of the world, the prototype for sin is addiction. That is not new. Augustine thought that addiction was the prototype of sin, too. But Augustine was describing the human condition of frailty and the difficulty of doing what we know we should. He saw sin as the human struggle against the self: "This was just what I longed for myself, but I was held back, and I was held back not by the fetters put on me by someone else, but by the iron bondage of my own will."<sup>25</sup> In contemporary American evangelicalism, sin is modeled much more directly on substance abuse. "We are all addicts!" roared a

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<sup>24</sup> Or a commitment to fairness. Jonathan Haidt's *Righteous Mind* identifies six underlying values: care, fairness, liberty, loyalty, authority and sanctity.

<sup>25</sup> *The confessions of Saint Augustine*, 2001 [1963]: 158--Book VIII, chapter 5.

leader at a conference I attended. He strode back and forth on the stage, pummeling the air with his fist, insisting that we turned to addiction to fill the emptiness inside, to deal with the loneliness, to deal with our disappointing jobs and marriages.

For Annie, the bad word is ‘dependence.’ “I shifted from wanting everybody else to take care of me to me wanting to take care of not just me but anyone I could help. I am all for those kinds of government programs that help people in the interim. It’s when we become dependent on them—that’s where we cross the line.” Annie believes in social justice. She believes that maturing in faith means not expecting people to be like her, and in accepting them as they are. But she has a near visceral flinch when she thinks about help that people come to depend upon like a drug. In that flinch, she imagines government as the problem and not as the solution. “I think welfare was good when it started. I think unions were good when they started. But I think they have just gone crazy. And now, we’ve created monsters. And I feel like the Democrats would just keep feeding these monsters.”

Monsters: it is like a vision from Revelation, where the beast surged forth with demonic strength to grab the land, and the servants of the Lord rode out in armor to the battle. Here growth is on the side of the angels, and handouts are on the side of the beast. “As we take handouts, we’re stunting their growth. Because when we rob ourselves or our kids or our husbands from responsibilities, we’ve stunted them. We’ve robbed them of growth. And that keeps them from progressing forward, being what they can be, what they want to be, what they were meant to be.”

The good news for Democrats is that this way of thinking is not necessarily rightwing. Many Democrats would agree that help is good and dependency bad. Moreover, there are many signs that the right wing evangelical coalition is breaking down. I met many Democrats in my time at church, and the green evangelical movement is growing. Many young people raised in evangelical families are far more liberal than their parents on homosexuality and abortion.<sup>26</sup> Sam and Mary believe that the evangelical church will become irrelevant if it digs in its heels on those issues.

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<sup>26</sup> In a 2008 poll, a plurality (44%) of younger evangelicals characterizes their political views on social issues as liberal. They are more likely to support gay marriage. They are still pro-life, but abortion does not determine their vote: one third of them voted for

But in the meantime, it will be hard for Democrats to reach evangelicals unless they appreciate that the way evangelicals imagine politics is fundamentally different from the way they do. When secular liberals vote, they think about the outcome of a political choice. They think about consequences. Secular liberals want to create the social conditions that allow everyday people, behaving the way ordinary people behave, to have fewer bad results.

When evangelicals vote, they think more immediately about what kind of person they are trying to become — what humans could and should be, rather than who they are. From this perspective, the problem with government is that it steps in when people fall short and creates the conditions in which people just stop trying. It is a way of thinking that originated with the hippie Christians who hated government and who wanted to talk to Jesus and hear him talk back. Hippie Christians came to Christ because they wanted the joy and community that the counterculture promised and they hated the drugs that were so important to the hippie movement. Their contemporary descendents still hate what they see as drugs—the human addiction to the easy way to do things. To someone like Annie, it’s all about the struggle to change. “I still battle that with wanting to do it my way. That’s a daily struggle. You know? I always think I have a better idea than God.”

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Obama. (*Economist* May 5 2012). This shift away from their elder’s views may be responsible for the striking increase of the church-unaffiliated to 16% of the population (Robert Putnam and David Campbell *American Grace*).

