H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mark J. Rozell, Clyde Wilcox. *Second Coming: The New Christian Right in Viginia Politics.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. xii + 285 pp. $32.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-5297-8.

Reviewed by William R. Glass (Mississippi University for Women)
Published on H-Pol (July, 1997)

Religion and Politics in the Recent South

The influence of conservative Protestants in the Republican Party has been a source of headlines for nearly two decades, while the growth of the Republican Party in the South has captured the attention of scholars from a variety of disciplines. Mark Rozell and Clyde Wilcox make a significant contribution to the study of both issues in *Second Coming*. The authors use Virginia as a case study of the impact of the New Christian Right on the Old Dominion's Republican Party. They carefully define their terms, describe briefly the historical and cultural contexts of Virginia politics, and provide a detailed analysis of two elections (the 1993 race for governor and Ollie North's 1994 run for the Senate) in which the Christian Right figured prominently in the result. They end by evaluating the role of the New Christian Right in Virginia politics and speculate on its future.

Definitions of terms is key to an accurate understanding of the movement of theologicially conservative Christians into politics, and the authors have largely gotten them right. Rather than lumping all such Protestants as members of the New Christian Right, they reserve that term to denote the organizations and their leaders that pursue political strategies in an effort to effect policy changes reflective of their moral values. They correctly note that the constituency for the Christian Right is divided into three groups: fundamentalists, pentecostals and charismatics, and evangelicals.

Their definitions though tend to emphasize religious behavior not belief. Consequently they misportray the reasons for the divisions among the Christian Right's constituency and underestimate the challenge the Right faces in trying to forge a political alliance among these groups. For example, they suggest that the antagonism between fundamentalists and pentecostals resulted from the competition in the early twentieth century to recruit members from the same social strata. Works by George Marsden and others on fundamentalism and studies by Vinson Synon and Edith Blumhoffer on pentecostals show that these movements attracted very different followers and that doctrinal disputes is what divided them and keeps them separated. Rozell and Wilcox, however, correctly note the difficulties these kinds of divisions present in forming a coalition to win elections.

Furthermore, they demonstrate how these divisions affected the two phases of development of the New Christian Right, one in the 1980s with the Moral Majority being the most prominent organization and the other in the 1990s centering around the Christian Coalition. The authors correctly point out that one main weakness of the Moral Majority was its close association with Jerry Falwell's fundamentalist denomination, the Baptist Bible Fellowship (BBF). Many of its organizers were pastors from the BBF and tended to alienate allies with insensitive remarks about other religious conservatives. Activists during this phase learned much about strategies and tactics that were put to good use during the "second coming" of the Christian right in the 1990s. The most well known organization in the 1990s is the Virginia-based Christian Coalition led by a charismatic, Pat Robertson. The Coalition is not alone. The authors also include in their analysis organizations like the Family Foundation and Concerned Women for America in Virginia. The organizations of this second phase are marked by a political pragmatism that accepts compromise as a means to making incremental change and has tried to broaden its base by addressing a variety of economic issues.

Rozell and Wilcox's analysis of the two elections is at the heart of the book. They examine the 1993 gubernatorial election in which the Republican George Allen won in a landslide and with the backing of Christian conservatives, but the Right's own candidate, Michael Farris, running for lieutenant governor on the Republican ticket, lost by twelve percent. They also dissect Ollie North's 1994 losing effort to win a seat in the Senate. Both elections illustrate the possibilities and the limitations of the

Christian Right to play a pivotal role in influencing the outcome. The Virginia Republican Party has a very open nominating process. It allows those who can mobilize supporters to attend a Party convention as delegates to dominate the selection of candidates and the party platform. In both 1993 and 1994, members of the Christian Right arrived in sufficient numbers to insure that their preferred candidates won nomination. In both general elections, their candidates lost, but the effect of Farris and North's presence on the ballot differed. Farris's involvement as an organizer with the Moral Majority in Washington came back to haunt him and doomed his chances to win. But his presence seemed to make other conservative candidates appear more moderate helping elect a Republican as governor and a near Republican majority in the legislature. In the year in which Republican gained control of both the U.S. House and the Senate, North lost to the scandal-weakened Chuck Robb, as did four GOP challengers for seats in the House. Rozell and Wilcox demonstrate that in all five races the Democratic incumbents' ability to link the Republican candidate to the Christian Right helped give them their margin of victory. Furthermore, North's loss was especially bitter and resulted in a deep division between moderate Republicans and the social conservatives of the Christian Right. The former blamed the latter for the nomination of the one person whom voters would not elect over Robb and the latter charged the former with disloyalty to party for their criticisms of North.

The authors argue that these results suggest there are limits to the Christian Right's pragmatism and its ability to work within the two-party structure of American politics. Additionally, while Rozell and Wilcox admit that they do not agree with the Right's policies, they value its ability to move a largely apolitical group to participate in politics.

Rozell and Wilcox, both political scientists at the University of Virginia and Georgetown University respectively, have a short sense of history and a narrow understanding of the relationship between religion and society, at least as seen in this book. They do not push their efforts to describe the origins of the New Christian Right beyond the beginnings of the Moral Majority in 1979; thus, the longer historical context of conservative Protestant political activism is missing. Furthermore, apart from some very broad generalizations, the place of religion in Virginian and southern culture needs additional consideration. For example, the authors do not discuss the fratricidal struggle between fundamentalists and moderates within the Southern Baptist Convention for its impact on the hape of the Right's ability to build a coalition. These criticisms are minor and intended to suggest that there is still a need to marry this kind of sophisticated analysis of politics with an equally refined examination of religion within Virginian society.

This book would be useful in a variety of advanced undergraduate and graduate courses. Its most obvious application is in political science classes on interest groups and state and local politics, but it could also be assigned profitably in classes on the modern South and American religion. It certainly deserves a place in libraries with strong holdings in southern studies and religion.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu. [The book review editor for H-Pol is Lex Renda <renlex@csd.uwm.edu>]

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: William R. Glass. Review of Rozell, Mark J.; Wilcox, Clyde, *Second Coming: The New Christian Right in Viginia Politics.* H-Pol, H-Net Reviews. July, 1997.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1141

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.