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February 28, 2013 03:51 PM EDT

The GOP and the Christian Right: A Viral March to Irrelevance

By David Kennedy | CP Guest Contributor

Was it the message or the messenger, or perhaps the way in which the message was delivered? That is the debate going on among the political pundits assessing the post-election wounds of the Republican Party. My take? All of the above, and they had better get used to it.

The same questions could, and should, be asked by all of us who are concerned with the relevance - as well as the growing irrelevance - of Christianity in America. My take? **It is no coincidence that Christianity suffers in lockstep with the Republican Party as to its message, messenger, and delivery.**

Both are showing symptoms of a diseased process that is ravaging the Republican Party and the Christian faith. The former I could not care less about, but I grieve for what has happened to Christianity in America. I grieve for what Christian leaders are doing to the faith.

Diagnosing the problem for both camps is really quite easy. The cause? Look no further than the so-called "Christian Right."

I'm not sure when the Republican Party became entrenched as the dominate force and architect of today's American Christian movement, but its controlling influence is undeniable, as are its ruinous effects. I am sure, however, that the Christian Right was the host monkey that spread this political virus that now threatens to render Christianity in America as both spiritually impotent and socially insignificant.

What must be understood is that Christian "Right" is a description of those Christians whose primary function and purpose is the propagation of the political agenda as dictated by those on the right, e.g. the Republican Party. The late Jerry Falwell established his "moral majority" movement in 1979 with the goal of creating a political chasm within the American electorate according to a moral barometer defined by his movement. Bolstered by Pat Robertson and his well-oiled political machine, *The Christian Coalition*, these two became the faces of the Christian Right and must be credited with redefining the mission of many of the American Christian churches as political, even at the expense of the spiritual mission that is the cornerstone of our Christian faith. The biblical chasm that Christians helped bridge with the ministry of salvation (Luke 16:26), was now being replaced with one based on politically defined morals that required political party affiliation. The goal was no longer to bridge the chasm, but instead to create and use a political chasm as a clear demarcation for those with Christian morals to remain separate from the sinning masses.

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For the better part of a generation, the Christian Right has unleashed a legion of "evangelical" leaders who subscribe to its brand of politics. Despite what the name implies, their message is often not one of the good news of Christ. As they remain tethered to the political aspirations of the Republican Party, which in turn remains rooted in an alleged moral righteousness of its members, these evangelicals continue to portray Christianity to its biblical mission field as an exclusive, pious political club on the other side of the chasm. And of course what better way to ensure your club of

Christian Republicans remains exclusive than an admission based on your being willing - at least until the contrary is exposed - to abstain from the short list of politically incorrect sins.

As noted in a recent Christian Post article entitled, *Most Americans Think Religious Freedom Fast Declining in US*, a new poll showed 57 percent of Americans believe "religious freedom has become more restricted in the U.S. because some groups have actively tried to move society away from traditional Christian values." Of this group, 97 percent held themselves out as evangelicals. Even though only 31 percent were willing to cast the gay and lesbian community as "the most active group trying to remove Christian values from the country", 72 percent of this group were evangelicals. Clearly the great majority of those surveyed who consider themselves evangelical would define "Christian values" in keeping with the Christian Right standard of unacceptable sin, e.g. primarily homosexuality. Such is clearly a bi-product of Christian church leadership instilling in their congregations a political, rather than biblical, mission agenda.

One practicing biblical evangelism will do so with the biblical mission in mind, that being a bridging of the chasm separating believers from non-believers, bringing the latter to an acceptance of Christ as their Lord and Savior. (Matthew 28:19-20). You would think it goes without saying that the least effective way of doing so is a message condemning the other's sin, yet that is the ill-fated approach by those who pay homage to the Christian Right's brand of evangelism. I dare say that if you were to poll 100 potential Christians (our true mission field) and asked them what came to mind when they heard the term evangelical, at least 90% would characterize an evangelical in terms of being *against* something rather than for the promotion of Christ.

By proselytizing based on one's sin, the Christian Right evangelist has effectively misinformed both Christians and non-Christians as to what are Christian values. I believe the resulting misunderstanding explains a 2012 study by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. That study found that Protestants in the U.S. had declined from roughly 66 percent in the 1960s to 48 percent in 2012. Additionally, a rising 19.6 percent claim no religious affiliation, just below a falling percentage claiming Catholicism at 22 percent. In other words, today's Christian messengers are doing a lousy job of winning people over, most likely due to their message being the mean-spirited political drivel of the Christian Right.

In the run-up to the 2012 elections, we repeatedly heard a cry of hypocrisy from those who, justifiably, questioned Republican positions on moral issues. Republican operatives and self-described evangelicals stumbled all over themselves to explain how "right to life" legislators could simultaneously oppose abortion, birth control options for women, and healthcare for newborns. Equally inexplicable to most Americans are the inconsistencies by those who on the one hand profess to recognize the great Commandment to "...LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," (Mark 12:29-31), but on the other hand ridicule Nuns on the Bus fighting against social injustice, poverty, a lack of healthcare for those very neighbors. Voters are simply tired of the Christian Right Republican chorus of boos being leveled against their neighbors because of a sinning lifestyle, especially when it comes from a group they see as indifferent to the social concerns that are consistent with their biblical teachings, such as providing for the sick, the lame, the blind, elderly and children.

As an example of just how infectious politics has become in the life of our churches, consider the actions in 2012 when prominent Christian leaders spoke the biblical truth in media and via their websites, denouncing Mormonism as a theological cult deceiving Christians and non-Christians alike. This was a principled stand taken by them over several years. (2 Timothy 4:1-5). Thereafter, being the good political soldiers they were, they publicly supported Mitt Romney, opening themselves up - in particular as evangelical Christians - to ridicule and mockery.

There is no denying the significant role played by the Romney family, including Mitt, in the establishment and proliferation of Mormonism in America. By their chosen definition, these Christian leaders had to consider Mitt Romney a cult leader. For them to do an about-face and support Mitt Romney for president was certainly their prerogative. But these men actually scrubbed their websites clean of what once was a principled warning of the dangers of Mormonism, acts that must be seen as nothing less than choosing Republican Party politics over the fate of their "neighbors," and potentially causing untold numbers to stumble. To do so was inexcusable and a failure of leadership, but that is the price paid when we give politics a place at the pulpit.

Satan does some of his best work in our churches. We pave a path for his success when we give politics a voice in those churches, regardless of whether it be from the right or left. Nothing is more divisive to a church body than this man-made institution whose very lifeblood is money and power. The time is long overdue to recognize the political

program that is the Christian Right for what it is: the most insidious, destructive force within the American Christian faith.

The political program instituted by the Christian Right over the better part of the last forty years has successfully established self-proclaimed "born again," "fundamentalist," "evangelical" politicians as the major power bloc setting public policy directives for the Republican Party. Consequently, they are the messengers, and their message is one that the majority of Americans simply are not accepting, such as: weird positions of whether rape and the resulting pregnancies are voluntary; legislation requiring forced vaginal ultrasounds; demands for unenforceable anti-abortion legislation with no exception for the health of the mother; demands that the federal and state debts be reduced by cutting social safety net programs for the poor, elderly, children; attacks on public education and calls for vouchers; attempts to overturn Obamacare that provides healthcare to the poor and children; constant fear-mongering against homosexuals, immigrants, Sharia law, Muslims, and just an entire litany of bogeymen that the rest of the country are just not buying.

If you are a Republican, just imagine what the rest of the country on the other side of the chasm thought about your party when during the primary debates the Republican audience cheered Rick Perry for his having governed a record number of human executions. The rest of America watched in horror that night as, in response to the moderator's question, each and every Republican candidate for president tacitly approved the verbal thumbs-down shouted by that same audience to let the hypothetical poor neighbor die as punishment for not carrying health insurance. The public positions taken by the "family values" party simply don't withstand the hypocrisy test.

Plain and simple, the Republican Party planted the Christian Right into the American Christian movement with the purpose of changing the very definition of "Christian values." The success of the program cannot be denied. Churches became the Republican Party's personal petri dishes for the cultivation of what now pains both the Party and the Christian churches. Quite frankly, they are getting what they asked for, and both are suffering.

The messages of the Republican Party are those as delivered by the protégés of the Christian Right. At this point it really doesn't matter which was the host and which the carrier, for one cannot separate itself from the other. Both the Republican Party and the Christian Right are suffering from a virus that, like all viruses, will simply have to run its course, which I don't see happening any time soon.

(Underscored emphasis added.)