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The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right

Jon A. Shields

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The Christian Right is frequently accused of threatening democratic values. But in *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right*, Jon Shields argues that religious conservatives have in fact dramatically increased and improved democratic participation and that they are far more civil and reasonable than is commonly believed.

Shields interviewed leaders of more than thirty Christian Right organizations, observed movement activists in six American cities, and analyzed a wide variety of survey data and movement media. His conclusions are surprising: the Christian Right has reinvigorated American politics and fulfilled New Left ideals by mobilizing a previously alienated group and by refocusing politics on the contentious ideological and moral questions that motivate citizens. Shields also finds that, largely for pragmatic reasons, the vast majority of Christian Right leaders encourage their followers to embrace deliberative norms in the public square, including civility and secular reasoning.

At the same time, Shields highlights a tension between participatory and deliberative ideals since Christian Right leaders also nurture moral passions, prejudices, and dogmas to propel their movement. Nonetheless, the Christian Right's other democratic virtues help contain civic extremism, sharpen the thinking of activists, and raise the level and tenor of political debate for all Americans.

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