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THE NEW CHRISTIAN CONSERVATISM

AN ANALYSIS OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT 1970-1997

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree
of Master of Philosophy
in Sociology at
Massey University

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the social and political mobilisation of groups of conservative Christians in the period 1970 to 1997, via a theory of cultural articulation. Previous ways of accounting for moments of conservative Christian activism, such as the secularisation thesis, are critiqued for their inability to account for the periodic resurgence of such activism in New Zealand, particularly in the period since 1988. Alternatively, cultural articulation theory forces an analysis of the multi-dimensional determinants of mobilisation, by taking advantage of the subjective, structural, dramaturgical, and institutional approaches to cultural analysis, and by placing a focus on how a social movement interacts with changes in the social/cultural/political environment. By tracing several key moments in New Zealand’s recent history, the mobilisation of conservative Christians is therefore explained in terms of the opportunities these moments gave for the formation, development, and continuing articulation of a conservative Christian ideology. This “exploration” revealed a critical moment around 1988 when, although many factors were predictive of a busy period of activism, the mobilising ideology of Christian Conservatism became hindered by a lingering tradition of church-state separation. The solution for conservative Christians, in the form of a New Christian Conservatism, was the result of an ideological innovation which re-mobilised the movement, by claiming that all spaces were political and hence contestable. This re-narration of their core ideology was matched with a greater flexibility, and professionalism, in the movement’s articulations with its environment in the 1990s. Two examples of the New Christian Conservatism are highlighted as evidence of the movement’s potential with this new ideology, as the identity of conservative Christians was re-moulded to suit the political culture in the 1990s. The New Christian Conservatism is finally posited as a movement that challenges the prevailing legitimacy of political pluralism in New Zealand, and which has the potential, if properly organised, to gain entry into the formal political sphere under MMP. However, this can only be achieved if the movement overcomes the fundamental problems of accommodation and compromise, issues which have prevented the movement from expanding in influence to date.
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# The New Christian Conservatism

An Analysis of a Social Movement 1970-1997

## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Notes on the Research Methodology</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter One: A Discussion of the Literature To Date</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Secularisation Theory</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Secularisation and modernisation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Secularisation and pluralism</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Conservative Christian Activism in Social Movement Literature</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Status defence, culture defence and relative deprivation theory</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Resource mobilisation theory</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. New Zealand Literature</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The Utility of a Theory of Cultural Articulation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Two: The Theory of Cultural Articulation</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Levels of Analysis</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Cultural Articulation Theory - the Production, Selection and</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalisation of Ideology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) The social production of ideologies</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Ideologies and selective processes</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Recruitment</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(ii) Participant mobilisation

(iii) Structural determinants for ideological selection

(c) Ideological institutionalisation

III. Summary

Chapter Three: The Formation of Christian Conservatism in New Zealand

I. Debating the Secularisation Thesis: Reflections on New Zealand’s Christian Heritage

II. Episodes Facilitating the Formation of a Conservative Christian Social Movement

(a) The 1960s and 1970s: challenges to the social democratic order and organic crisis

(b) Christian church realignment and the formation of the Christian Conservatives

(c) Christian Conservatives and the hijack of the conservative right

III. Summary

Chapter Four: The Ideological Conflicts of Christian Conservatism during the 1980s

I. Christian Conservatism as Ideology

II. Post-1984 and New Zealand’s Cultural Revolution: The Capture of Social Spaces by Social Liberals

(a) The production of libertarian hegemony

(b) Christian Conservative articulation around the Homosexual Law Reform (1): niche seizure
Chapter Five: The New Christian Conservatism

I. Theological Innovation and Changes to the Fundamental Ideology of Christian Conservatism
   (a) Reconstructionism and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand
   (b) Post-millenialists under the bed: late-at-night literature

II. New Christian Conservatism in New Zealand
   (a) The organisational dimension to the New Christian Conservatism
      (i) E-mailing Jesus: a social movement in an information age
      (ii) Developing and accessing core networks
      (iii) Integrating physical and ideological mobilisation

III. The Cultural and Political Framing of New Christian Conservatism
   (a) Ideological diagnosis: a “culture war”
   (b) Ideological prognosis: “think biblically, talk secularly”
   (c) Framing and the ideological structure of New Christian Conservatism
      (i) Flexibility in New Christian Conservatism’s ideological elements
(ii) Core ideological re-narration

IV. Summary

Chapter Six: Recent Manifestations of New Christian Conservatism

I. The New Zealand Education Development Foundation

II. The Christian Coalition

(a) The failings of the Christian Coalition in the 1996 elections

Conclusion

A Final Note

Bibliography