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Jon A. Shields. *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2009. 216 pp.

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Jon A. Shields' *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right* is guaranteed to unsettle many readers' assumptions as to the role played by the Christian Right in American politics today. In a book full of surprises, the author demonstrates how the legacy of the New Left of the 1960s and 70s lives on in current movements of the Christian Right, whereas today's liberals have sometimes found themselves defending conservative positions. Mobilizing voters around strongly held convictions, encouraging the "value vote," the Christian Right, often decried for its tactics in the mainstream media, has simply adapted for its own purposes those methods pioneered by New Left radicals of an earlier age. As for the conservatism of today's liberals, Shields refers here to their defense of the landmark Supreme Court case of 1973, Roe vs. Wade, which legalized abortion in the United States. In the longstanding cultural conflict the Court's decision set in motion, liberals have been confronted by pro-life activists, engaged in what they believe to be a revolutionary struggle for the "civil rights" of the unborn.

Their strategy, with the exception of radical fringe elements, is a firm grounding in the methods of deliberative democracy. How those methods are taught and how they are put into practice are the main topics of Jon Shield's book, and he argues for a reassessment of the Christian Right's contribution to American democracy. Making use of the tools and theories of both sociology and political science, Shields also claims for himself the role of the political anthropologist: in case studies he observes first-hand how organizations such as the Christian Coalition or Concerned Women of American (CWA) train their activists to conduct themselves in the public square. Such fieldwork into grassroots politics can, the author contends, go far in improving political and social theory by taking into account the empirical realities of political life.

But before moving on to the empirical, Shields first defines the norms of deliberative democracy: 1) the practice of civility and respect; 2) the cultivation of real dialogue by listening and asking questions; 3) the rejection of appeals to theology; 4) the practice of careful moral reasoning; and 5)

openness to alternative points of view—norms catalogued by the author and all individually emphasized by political scientists and social scientists (19). That done, wedding the theoretical to the empirical, Shields analyzes point by point how these norms are practiced in such groups as the Christian Coalition, CWA, and National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), to name three national groups, as well as in smaller movements at state or local levels. For his study, and in his role as political anthropologist, he has gathered information from newsletters, magazines, web-based documents, pamphlets, radio broadcasts, and especially training seminars, where the rank-and-file activist is formed. He has also interviewed leaders of thirty different organizations and many activists at the grassroots level. As for the nature of the groups surveyed, most exist to promote a pro-life position, which might be considered the number-one moral cause of the Christian Right today. The conclusions of the author's research and fieldwork have led him to argue that the practice of deliberative democracy by such groups has increased the political awareness of evangelical Christians, making better citizens of a segment of the American population traditionally suspicious of politics. More importantly, Shields argues, it has also improved the tenor of American democracy in general. Both his fieldwork and statistical evidence bear this out.

Yet, throughout the book, Shields emphasizes that the deliberative norms of such groups are always in the service of a religious agenda which excludes openness to other points of view. Nor does he neglect to present the exception to the general rule of improved democracy among the Christian Right: the author devotes a chapter to the anti-abortion movement's radical fringe, represented by Operation Rescue, a group whose militant violence is condemned by the vast majority of Christian pro-life groups. Shields himself considers such groups on the wane. It is interesting to note that his book had most likely gone to press before Doctor George Tiller, the head of an abortion clinic in Wichita, Kansas, was shot and killed by an anti-abortion activist on May 31, 2009. Such an act goes far to undermine the efforts of grassroots pro-life activists committed to civility, reason, and Christian love to get their point across.

In the statistical section of his book, where Shields presents much valuable information on the voting practices of the Christian Right over a period of more than thirty years, he leaves aside his study of the practice of deliberative democracy within the pro-life movement to turn his attention to a quiet revolution among evangelical voters. Traditionally the most apathetic of citizens, they have increased their political awareness and taken to voting in record numbers. However, Evangelicals often vote in response to a strong

moral issue, and without one, the evangelical vote has a tendency to falter. Also, though "revolutionary" when it comes to abortion, on most other moral issues the Christian Right comes across as conservative and on the defensive, such as in the cases of gay marriage or the acceptance of Gays into the military.

For all those interested in the mingling of religion and politics, Shields' book has much to teach about the American political scene and the uses of deliberative democracy by religious groups committed to precepts whose ultimate source is their God. Undeniably the norms of deliberative democracy have increased the political awareness and the tolerance of pro-life activists. Shields' book is rich in examples of such behavior in action. However, most activists would agree that their ultimate goal is spiritual redemption, one that has no place in the public sphere in a nation governed by separation of Church and State. The reviewer would also take issue with Shields' juxtaposition of the embryo- or foetus-oriented approach of pro-life groups as opposed to what he contends to be the pro-choice group's focus on the symbolic meaning of women's lives. Not once does Shields mention women's bodies, the true battleground of the abortion debate.