

OF GOG AND NABOTH: THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE
TO THE PANAMA CANAL TREATIES OF 1977

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ABSTRACT

The debate over ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties in 1977 illuminated many fissures among American Christians. Theological conservatives such as evangelicals and fundamentalists, fearing that a transfer of the canal's sovereignty to Panama would serve as a boon to Communism in the Western Hemisphere, strongly opposed the treaties. Because many of these conservatives feared the global ambitions in Communist rhetoric, an alliance between theological conservatives and political conservatives soon developed, leading to the rise of the New Christian Right in the 1980s. In addition to other domestic issues, foreign policy concerns became an area in which Christian leaders, such as Jerry Falwell, and newly elected Ronald Reagan could agree. On the other hand, theological liberals and evangelical moderates supported the treaties, because they felt the aim of the United States foreign policy should be commensurate with social justice. Given the inequitable terms of the original 1903 treaty with Panama, organizations such as the National Council of Churches encouraged Congress to pass the treaties in an effort to shed any perception of a colonial or imperial past. Eventually the treaties were ratified, conservatives having failed to organize effectively into a political lobby. This failure served as a motivation for the establishment of an effective Christian lobby in Washington, leading to the establishment of groups such as the Moral Majority in 1979.

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DEDICATION

For Susan Paschal Hinkson

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