

# The Preacher Who Dared to Be President

Snubbed by party elites, Mike Huckabee swept the Southern primaries and bumped big names from the race. He has made it further than anyone expected and has galvanized a new breed of Christian voter along the way.

No one knows exactly how a political movement begins. But it is clear that something new is stirring among conservatives. It is galvanizing a new breed of Christian voter and laying a foundation that will change the future of conservative politics.

The presence of presidential contender Gov. Mike Huckabee, 52, says it all. Against all odds, his scrappy campaign has forged ahead until he trailed only John McCain in a two-candidate race for the Republican nomination for the presidency.

When he started out, Huckabee wasn't given a chance, but he wasn't daunted by statistics. He responded to the polls like the ordained Baptist preacher he is when he quipped February 9 after winning the Kansas primary: "I didn't major in math. I majored in miracles. And I still believe in them."

With little money, organization or name recognition, he was dismissed early by pundits and pompous party elites alike. Only when he snatched the crucial Iowa caucus from the hands of expected favorites Mitt Romney and Fred Thompson did the Republican movers and shakers take notice.

Since then, he's swept the West Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas and Louisiana primaries and fought

to narrow finishes in the Washington, Oklahoma, Missouri and Virginia races.

In doing so, he pushed candidates viewed as politically stronger utterly out of the picture—such as U.S. senator and Hollywood actor Fred Thompson, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and ex-governor of Massachusetts Romney.

But it's on the issues that matter most with Christians that Huckabee stands head and shoulders above all the candidates.

He consistently defends traditional marriage and is unbendingly pro-life—extending the latter to include compassionate care for the poverty-stricken, elderly and infirm. He is a devout Christian who served as pastor of several Southern Baptist churches in Arkansas. He is a devoted husband and father—married to his wife, Janet, since 1974—with three children.

As a traditional-values leader, as a Christian, as a family man, Huckabee is “one of us.” That's why Charisma endorsed him in August: He represents our core values and those of our readers. That's also why we endorsed him in July in the cover story of our magazine New Man—dubbing him “one of our own”—which made the case for how he could actually become president.

There is an unprecedented opportunity in Huckabee to have an advocate for our Christian causes in Washington. He has executive experience as governor of Arkansas from 1996-2007. He has strong moral character and integrity and isn't storing skeletons in his closet or baggage in his back room.

His Christian faith is not a mere talking point as it's been with other candidates.

"Faith doesn't just influence me; it really defines me," he said in a TV ad while running in Iowa. "I don't have to wake up every day wondering, What do I need to believe?"

"Faith is my life," he said in our New Man article. "I see no separation between my faith and professional life."

James Robison, a former Baptist preacher who hosts the Christian TV program LIFE Today with his wife, Betty, has known Huckabee more than 30 years.

"I know who he is and what he believes," Robison told Charisma. "He is able to communicate clearly with conviction the principles upon which the greatness of our nation was established."

It's evident that no candidate in the current presidential race, now or since it began, has laid a more credible claim to widespread support from Christians than Huckabee has.

### **Failure of the Religious Right**

It's baffling, then, that the most prominent evangelical leaders in the country failed to rally around Huckabee. CBN and Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson endorsed Giuliani, the tough-on-terror social liberal. Paul Weyrich, an architect of the powerful Religious Right, initially backed Romney—who wavered on abortion and gay rights—before he endorsed Huckabee on February 11.

Focus on the Family founder James Dobson rode the fence, saying at long last after Romney ceded the race that he endorsed Huckabee. Former Family Research Council leader Gary Bauer, originally a fervent Thompson supporter, leapfrogged over Huckabee to endorse McCain in February.

Why then was a candidate with the Christian convictions Huckabee holds passed over so unanimously by the nation's top evangelical leaders?

Georgia businessman Brant Frost IV says the lack of support from Christian leaders revealed an unholy dependence on political ways of thinking.

"After a generation of activism these Christian leaders lost their first love," says Frost, who helped raise money for Huckabee. "They started looking at polls and pundits instead of character and conviction. They adopted a 'D.C. mentality' and forgot that God is the one who exalts rulers."

According to Mathew Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel and dean of Liberty University School of Law, top evangelicals passed on Huckabee because hard-core party insiders in Washington diverted them early in the process.

"There are some people in the established Republican Party who do not want an evangelical to be president," he says. "They want evangelical votes. But they do not want evangelicals to have a significant voice in American public policy."

Some establishment Republicans went as far as to publish articles critical of Huckabee. The conservative, anti-tax Club for Growth—a Washington-based political action

committee-distributed white papers last year blasting Huckabee's record on taxes. In the days leading up to Huckabee's big win in the Iowa caucus, the Los Angeles Times reported that Club for Growth had waged a \$550,000 campaign against the former preacher.

Staver says insiders wished to criticize Huckabee's "alleged economic policies in order to run him down" and that "evangelical leaders [fell] into their trap."

Joel Hunter, pastor of Northland Church in Orlando, Florida, and author of *A New Kind of Conservative*, believes the religious establishment backed off of Huckabee in part because of two ideologies that are not necessarily Christian—small government and strong defense.

"I think some people may have a wallet or a gun where there heart should be," he says. "I say that in a very non-condemning way. But there are some evangelicals who are more concerned about the lowest possible taxes ... to the exclusion of some other issues."

Brannon S. Howse, president and founder of the American Family Policy Institute and a conservative talk-show host and columnist, says Huckabee was the obvious choice from the start.

"Dobson, [Jay] Sekulow, Bauer and Robertson should have come out early on and supported the pro-life, pro-family candidacy of Gov. Huckabee," he notes. "After Fred Thompson dropped out, Huckabee was the only 100 percent pro-life, pro-family candidate."

In the meantime, however, Romney was winning over fiscally conservative Reaganites, and Giuliani was attracting national defense conservatives. For the sake of those platforms, evangelical leaders overlooked candidates' liberal positions.

By doing so, they ironically set back Christian causes instead of advancing them, says Dick Bott Sr., president of Bott Radio Network, a group of Christian stations with an audience of some 30 million listeners.

"If the pro-life leaders' voice would have been clear from the day it was obvious whose pro-life and marriage record was most believable, who knows where the pro-life cause would be now?" Bott asks.

Staver believes Huckabee just didn't have the credentials evangelical leaders wanted. "I think this particular election has been very telling. When we were staring David right in the face, he doesn't have the kind of armor we deem that he needs to win," Staver says of Huckabee, drawing a biblical allusion. "[Evangelicals] want to place him in armor that they deem is winnable, as opposed to looking at principle."

Harry R. Jackson, co-author of *Personal Faith, Public Policy* and pastor of Hope Christian Church in Washington, D.C., says in the failure to endorse Huckabee we have witnessed "the failure of the current Christian philosophy of political engagement."

"The only reason that Gov. Huckabee did not win more votes from evangelicals was their concern about the non-spiritual aspects of [his] candidacy," he says.

In the end, most conservative Christian leaders let down Christian voters.

Says Staver: "When all of them should've gotten behind Mike Huckabee, at that moment in time when they were called to be leaders, they flinched."

### **Leading a Movement**

Although some evangelical leaders may have failed Huckabee, charismatics did not. They made room for him in their churches and endorsed him publicly.

Late last year prominent Pentecostal churches helped introduce Huckabee to evangelical voters. Congregants at Larry Huch's New Beginnings church in Dallas-Fort Worth prayed over the former Baptist preacher in November. At Christmastime, thousands more heard Huckabee preach a Sunday service at Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, pastored by John Hagee, who later endorsed McCain on February 28.

Bishop Keith Butler, founding pastor of Word of Faith International Christian Center near Detroit, called Huckabee "a proven leader who has embraced and supported the values throughout his career of which all Republicans can be proud."

Butler, who ran for the U.S. Senate in Michigan in 2006, says he backs Huckabee because he believes "he is the best choice for the future of America." Along with 29 other Christian leaders, Butler is a member of the Faith and Values Coalition formed by Huckabee to support his candidacy and assist and advise him on policy issues.

Other members of the coalition include Charisma publisher Stephen Strang, who was one of the first Christian leaders to endorse Huckabee, along with Michael Farris, chairman of the Home School Legal Defense Association and chancellor of Patrick Henry College. Other early supporters were John Gimenez and his wife, Anne, founders of Rock Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and organizers of the 1980 Washington (D.C.) for Jesus rally.

John Gimenez, who died February 12, had said of Huckabee: "I have been waiting for God's man to emerge. I believe that Mike Huckabee is our man."

Huckabee was a guest last fall on evangelist Kenneth Copeland's Believer's Voice of Victory TV program. Copeland said God prompted him to issue the invitation to Huckabee and told him:

"Don't invite him as candidate of anything; he's an ordained minister of the gospel. And talk to him about the integrity of character, what somebody does when nobody but God is watching."

Many unheard-of Christians also have supported Huckabee enthusiastically.

When Huckabee's campaign was too cash-strapped to produce paraphernalia, it didn't matter. Homemade "I Like Mike" signs, hats and T-shirts popped up at rallies across the country. YouTube videos of the former governor, showcasing his wit and warmth, garnered millions of views.

Businessman Frost helped launch a fundraising effort for Huckabee called "Team 100"—an attempt to recruit



businesspeople to commit to raising \$100,000 each. About 50 people were recruited, who raised more than \$2.5 million.

The campaign with a homemade feel has turned into a groundswell—a movement that's bottom up, not top down; grass roots, not AstroTurf. A striking example of Huckabee's "from the people" support has come in the form of some young enough to be his children.

Twins Brett and Alex Harris, 19—brothers of I Kissed Dating Goodbye author Joshua Harris—started , an online rallying point for supporters. To date the "army" has nearly 20,000 volunteers and is growing into a movement.

"What Gov. Huckabee has started and what [he] is doing is not so much a campaign. It really is a movement. It's a movement of a lot of people who haven't been excited about a candidate before, who haven't ever contributed to a candidate, who have never volunteered and followed a primary election before in their lives," Alex Harris says.

"Gov. Huckabee has a message that appeals to people, and he has ideas that are innovative," Harris adds. "He has a vision for an America that's better than the America we have now. And I think that's something that transcends just a temporary single election."

Harris' assessment means that when the dust of the current presidential race settles, the David-and-Goliath campaign Huckabee has spearheaded is likely to have permanently changed the future political landscape for evangelical voters.

**Changing of the Guard**

Although some members of the old guard of religious conservatism have worked to deny Huckabee the Republican nomination by withholding their support, it is likely that strategy will backfire against them in the future.

Christian leaders emerging on the national scene are bringing with them new ideas and ideals. Key among their precepts is a belief that a new day is dawning in the evangelical community.

"The evangelical movement is maturing," Jackson notes. "There must be an emphasis on positive change along with protection of life, family and marriage."

"[Traditional conservative leaders] are not as influential as they used to be," Hunter says. "[But] they will always be honored as the pioneers that got us into the public square."

Howse puts it more bluntly, writing about the evangelical leaders he believes should have supported Huckabee early.

"I want to thank Bauer, Sekulow, [Tony] Perkins, Dobson and Robertson for their service to our country and the pro-family, pro-life movement. You have accomplished many good things," he says.

"However, your time has now passed and you have failed a huge test. Thus I must no longer follow your lead or trust your instincts. If others can still follow you, then I believe they may do so at the peril of our cause."

During the primaries, Republican candidates invoked Ronald

Reagan's name at debates and speeches. It was a way to honor the father of contemporary Republicanism. But the movement Reagan helped unite is in flux. Issues are broadening, and Huckabee has emerged as a key figure riding in the lead car of a movement headed our way.

Alex Harris, who is a generation younger than Jackson and Hunter, believes Huckabee embodies a new identity in conservative values and, more broadly, in the Republican party of the future.

"What excites us personally about Gov. Huckabee is, he's not bringing the same solutions that a Democrat or a liberal would bring. He's bringing a conservative philosophy to these issues, but he's recognizing that conservatism does speak to these issues—that a lot of Americans are struggling with these very issues and the Republican party needs to address them," Harris says.

Jackson agrees, viewing Huckabee as a reformer whose influence will be felt for years to come.

"Mike Huckabee's candidacy will give us a clear operational blueprint of how to reform politics in the years ahead," Jackson says. "Huckabee's presence gives us hope that a new values-based leader can emerge."

### **What's Next?**

Huckabee's candidacy proves evangelical Christians are willing to continue to forge ahead in politics despite recent setbacks and disappointments at the polls.

In fact, the tide of Huckabee support has only swelled as his campaign has moved forward. A recent GodTube poll showed that 47 percent of the more than 40,000 respondents preferred Huckabee for president. Just 9 percent said they favored McCain.

Butler sees Huckabee's strong campaign as proof of his broad appeal and believes if McCain prevails he should pick Huckabee as his running mate, since Huckabee carried the South.

Yet, says Butler, Huckabee will need evangelical support to sway McCain's decision. "We should be calling the McCain campaign and pressuring him to add Huckabee to the ticket," he says.

Regardless of that outcome, Huckabee has permanently carved his niche into the American political scene. Jackson believes Huckabee will be "a major player in U.S. politics for the next decade."

"He has shown us by example," Jackson says, "that our deepest-held moral values can be presented in an appealing way."

In him, conservative Christian voters hear a message that resonates loud and clear. The reason is simple: As Huckabee himself says pointedly to his fellow believers: "I am not coming to you. I am coming from you."

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Drew Dyck is editor of . Charisma editors Paul Steven Ghiringhelli, Adrienne S. Gaines, Maureen D. Eha and Jimmy Stewart also contributed to this report.

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## Christians and the New Political Reality

The tide is turning against our liberties like never before. What would you do if you knew the next president could snuff them out? A new book calls us to action.

By Marc Nuttle

In 1964, Ronald Reagan made an important prediction about the future of the United States. He said, "You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We will preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we will sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness."

I agree with Reagan: In the face of the many forces in operation today that are trying to limit or eliminate our freedoms, we can't just sit back and do nothing. You and I have an obligation to pass on to our children a free nation. That's what we inherited, and that's what we must be committed to handing down to them.

Unfortunately, the threat of a world managed by experts and bureaucrats is increasing in many places today. Democratic countries that were once a lighthouse of liberty and democracy are sinking slowly into the darkness of state socialism and moral decline. And several of the presidential candidates vying for our votes appear to be totally in sync with the idea of expanding government control and limiting personal freedom. How can we let that pass?

The greatest thing this nation can do for humanity is to preserve and protect our liberty. Cultures that do not respect

individual liberty and freedom from government interference are little more than sitting ducks for the next dictator who happens along.

But the problem isn't limited to Third World countries; it's gaining momentum and intensity here, too, as individuals in the government, the universities and the media continue pushing the European model and calling on Americans to give up our long-standing customs and beliefs.

We have good reasons for protecting what we have. This nation serves as an example to the entire world of what a proper balance between government authority and individual liberty should look like. We must remain vigilant at home and reject any suggestion from politicians, professors and pundits that we can sacrifice our freedoms and still remain free.

Right now America is the only nation in the world where we have the freedom to do whatever we wish with our families for their benefit—through education, the jobs we choose and the ability to practice our faith as we see fit. Let us never relinquish that freedom or merely let it slip away unnoticed.

How do we protect it? We must be willing to take action.

The primary way we can ensure that our country remains the greatest nation on earth and the "last best hope of man" is to become active politically. This requires us to first determine who we are and what we believe. Then we must outline our most important concerns and define how we will address the government in concert with our beliefs. Third, we must prioritize the issues that are significant to us. Finally, we must take a leadership role.

Each of us has at least 10 people who look to us for information—our spouses, our kids, the people we work with, our friends, the people at our church, our neighbors next door. We all have people in our lives who want to know what we think about the issues facing our country—from illegal immigration to taxation to the energy crisis to Social Security reform.

When someone asks you, don't hesitate to tell them what you believe. Be prepared to help them consider the issues and the implications of their vote.

And then decide: What else can you do that will make life better for your family and your nation? What can you do to hold back the darkness?

Do you volunteer? Do you become more active in politics? Do you participate in group discussions? Do you write a column or a blog on the Internet? Do you run for elective office yourself or give your support to someone who truly understands what needs to be done?

What do you do? There are a million ways you can make a difference, but the one thing you must not do is sit back and say, "It's not my problem, so I'm going to let somebody else worry about it." The health and well-being of this nation is the personal responsibility of every American. We are all responsible for what happens next.

These are transitional times. How we respond to them will ultimately result in one of two possible futures. America will either stand alone as an island of freedom in a sea of foreign bureaucracies or we will bow to the yoke of Europeanization.

The path we choose will depend on what we decide in the coming year and the leadership we empower in the elections of 2008.

Will we turn back the clock and follow the path of servitude to big government, or will we make a new commitment to personal liberty and limited government? If we choose the latter path, as I hope we will, we're going to need leaders who understand our passion and will pledge to make our battles their own. I call such men and women the third wave of leadership.

The first wave was led by Ronald Reagan. The second was led by bold men and women at the state and national levels who followed in his footsteps. This second wave included all the leaders who emerged in 1975 on the Christian Right, the New Right, and the supply-side Right. Jerry Falwell, James Dobson and Pat Robertson led the Christian Right to a national movement.

Newt Gingrich, with "The Contract for America" in 1994, captured control of Congress for the Republicans. And President George W. Bush maintained the Reagan coalition through the 2000 and 2004 election cycles.

The third wave will gain full force as the collective actions of individuals, one-by-one, change the cultural dynamic by taking responsibility for the future of this nation, using their talents, resources, and deepest passions to preserve our great cultural heritage. This third wave of leadership is not only critical to pursuing a new birth of freedom, it is absolutely essential to our survival as a free people.

As you define yourself, your beliefs and your priorities,



please remember that there's a fundamental philosophical difference between what we believe as Americans and what people in other nations believe. Our forefathers wrote eloquently about the duties of free men and the sovereignty of God in a democratic republic. They believed that in a democracy, God is sovereign over both man and government, and man is sovereign over government.

Modern liberalism, on the other hand, believes government is God and sovereign over man. Dictatorships and monarchies believe a man can be both God and government, and is sovereign over man.

I can't think of what our forefathers sacrificed for our freedoms without feeling a deep sense of gratitude and pride. But there are times when I can't help wondering if we've lost our appreciation for what we have. It's time to look at our lives in generational terms—perhaps this is something the Chinese can teach us.

We've inherited such a great country from our fathers and mothers. They helped advance the American Dream and protected us all from assault in World War II. The current generation has made some important strides, but we're consuming more than we've produced.

It's unfair to take from the next generation that which is necessary for our own pleasure and convenience in the present. But that's what we are doing if we don't make some adjustments in our thinking and our policies.

We have a moral imperative to at least give the next generation the same footing, the same foundation, the same

freedoms and the same hope that we received from the previous generation. I would urge you at a time such as this to step out of your comfort zone, take up a cause greater than yourself, pursue it with passion and make a contribution to this new third wave of leadership.

If you want to participate in government, you can. And if you feel the desire to be part of a movement, or to start one, then I hope you will do that. Talking about it isn't enough. Wishful thinking isn't enough. It will take imagination and personal sacrifice to come up with a system that will benefit future generations.

We have a responsibility to never take even one step toward "a thousand years of darkness." "Darkness" is too much government taking too much freedom for too little in return. It's much better to defend the balance we've been guaranteed by the Constitution with every breath we take, regardless of the cost. If we don't, we will have only ourselves to blame when our wonderful way of life is gone.

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Marc Nuttle is an attorney who specializes in international trade and foreign policy and was an adviser to President Reagan on trade and tariffs. He has lectured across Eastern Europe on political reform and was a consultant on free elections in Bulgaria and Ukraine following the dissolution of the USSR. He is the author of *Moment of Truth* (FrontLine), from which this article is adapted, and lives in Oklahoma.

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### **Mike Huckabee: In His Own Words**

In a Charisma interview broadcast on GodTube, Huckabee tells

how his faith influences his political strategies—and why having a preacher in the White House would be good for America.

**STRANG:** Some secularists act as if having an evangelical Christian in the White House would be the worst thing for America. How do you respond?

**HUCKABEE:** I'm always amazed when people think it's dangerous to believe in God. You would think it would be dangerous to not believe in God. Being a Christian does not mean that you're going to use the government vehicle to try to make people Christians. I think it means that you will have compassion. I think that we ought to be afraid if we had a president who didn't have compassion for the people at the bottom and only was concerned about the people at the top.

**STRANG:** What are your thoughts about broadening the social-conservative agenda beyond abortion and gay marriage?

**HUCKABEE:** I do think that the Republican base needs to be concerned about not just the sanctity of life and same-sex marriage, but they ought to be concerned about the stewardship of the earth and the environment, because it is God's creation. I think I should also be concerned about disease, because that takes not only a huge amount of economic power out of our culture, but it is also a thief to the family. Poor health habits mean that people not only have less money to spend on things of value, but they have less life to live with their families.

**STRANG:** Would you create a citizenship path for illegal immigrants, and how would that look?

**HUCKABEE:** The path would be that they would have to start the process at the back of the line. I think [amnesty] is a terrible idea because it's an insult to all the people who have faithfully waited and gone through the proper steps. It's not about not wanting immigrants; it's a matter of saying: "We want people to come here, but we want you to come through the front door."

**STRANG:** What role should government play in taking care of the aging and infirm?

**HUCKABEE:** The family is the first line of defense, and I wish that every family made arrangements for their own. That's the ideal. When we make the government the court of first resort, it does two things. One, the government rarely does it as well as it could be done by families or the private sector. Two, families then tend to cede over responsibilities and say, "Hey, that's what the government is for." Well, actually it's not. The ideal society is one in which the government gets involved only when everything else breaks down.

**STRANG:** How concerned are you about your electability?

**HUCKABEE:** I got elected in Arkansas twice as lieutenant governor and twice as governor—in a state where if it was ever going to hurt me, it should have hurt me there. I was not only a pastor running for office, but I was a Republican in a state that has only elected three in history to a statewide office, and hadn't done so in 15 years. What people ultimately look for is, can you get the job done. I proved that I could.

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**Visit to see publisher Stephen Strang's interview with Gov. Huckabee during his campaign.**

