

Chapter 3: The Social Network of Premillennialist Websites*

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Premillennialism is an important political phenomenon in America. It has profound implications for preference on a wide range of policy fields from foreign policy to environmentalism. This chapter offers a brief history and theory of the politicization of premillennialism in the American context and using social network analysis examines the relationship between this phenomenon and preference for policy positions on Israel, secularization, globalization, environmentalism and government regulation. Web-based network analysis which offers both an important methodological tool and a theoretical paradigm is used to examine the social structures of premillennial websites and their relationship to the policies implicit in the narrative of premillennialism. Increasingly, the World Wide Web has come to represent a virtual forum for the exchange of ideas; connecting website creators to specific and knowledgeable issue publics, as well as informing audiences about and converting them to new points of view. Using the IssueCrawler program I performed a co-link (relational) analysis. Three separate networks will be examined: Christian Right Elite Network, Beliefnet Black Spiritual Leader Network, and a Issue Centric Network. The networks are examined for evidence of premillennial policy positions to ascertain whether or not elites *link* their online audiences to the policy positions implicit in the premillennial narrative.

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Introduction

Political scientists have long been aware of the powerful influence that religion has on politics. Much research has been dedicated to better understanding the ways in which religious institutions have functioned in providing resources and developing the civic skills of citizens (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Harris 1999; Verba et al. 1993). Much scholarly attention has been paid to Christianity as the dominant religion of the western world. Studies have examined the role of Christian socialization in shaping perspectives on issues such as abortion and gay rights (Jelen and Wilcox 1993; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2007). Some studies have focused on the role religious elites play in influencing the political worldview of their parishioners and audiences (Jelen and Wilcox 1993; Welch et al. 1993). Still other scholars have focused on understanding the ways in which theology is constructed as a political agenda (Guth et al. 1995; Wilcox, Linzey, and Jelen 1991). This project presents an analysis of the ways in which religion, specifically theology, is used by elites to construct a political agenda for their audiences.

Religious messages are not politically neutral, but rather, often have profound implications for people's notions of what constitutes a right ordering of society. Systematic theologies dictate not only how one should respond to God, but also how one should respond to his/her neighbor. Thus, each theological strand prescribes a set of appropriate interactions between the Christian and the world¹. These sets of prescriptions translate into different worldviews, political orientations and policy agendas (Marsden, 1980). However the *lived experience* of each theology may be impacted by external and non-theological factors such as race, gender or sexual orientation which alter the frames through which the theology is

¹ While these prescriptions are not always political these social prescriptions have implications for how one should view the government and its policies.

understood and the ways in which it may impact society, effectively bounding the scope a theology's reach². Eschatology, or the study of the End Times³, is one element of Christian theology that has profound implications for politics (Guth et. al., 1995, 368) in determining preferences for pro-Israel, anti-secularization, anti-globalization, anti-environmentalism and anti-government regulation policies.

The internet has become an important part of life for many Americans and has the potential to inform citizens on a number of religious and political issues. While conservative Christians in general and Christian fundamentalists in particular have at times been portrayed as backward in their technological outlook, many Christian organizations have been among the early pioneers on the internet. Many media savvy religious and political actors alike have sought to take advantage of the communications possibilities of this medium in hopes of portraying themselves as morally and culturally relevant. Unfortunately, little scholarly attention has been paid to the social and political implications of religious sites on the internet, (e.g., Larsen 2000). This paper offers, through an examination of premillennialism, one example of the ways in which religious messages on the internet could come to impact the individual's preferences about politics.

This chapter uses social network analysis to explore both the relationships which exist between premillennial websites and whether the consequence of these interrelationships leads their audiences to websites which hold pro-Israel, anti-secularization, anti-globalization, anti-environmentalism and anti-government regulation policy positions. Three core groups of websites are examined; the social networks produced by five Christian Right figures (CR Network), Google generated issue centric websites (Issue Centric Network), and by the Beliefnet

² See chapter 2 for further elaboration.

³ Here the term refers to the set of events which lead up to the end of the world and of human history.

influential black spiritual leaders list (Beliefnet Network). The CR network resulted from a purposive sample of premillennial elites within the Christian Right, the Issue Centric network was chosen because of their Google ranking, and the Beliefnet Network was a compilation of the websites of Christians on the Beliefnet “Most Influential Black Spiritual Leaders List”. These sets of core groups were input separately into the Issuecrawler program. Each website in the network was examined for evidence of a political orientation using the following criteria; educate, advocate, and engage⁴. The resulting websites were then examined for premillennial policies (pro-Israel, anti-secularization, anti-globalization, anti-environmentalism and anti-government regulation). The CR, Issue Centric, and Beliefnet networks were compared and evaluated for evidence of the political outworkings of premillennial theology.

Why Premillennialism?

There are three important reasons to study premillennialism and its effects on politics. First, premillennialism is an astonishing cultural phenomenon. Proponents of premillennial eschatology, lacking support from mainstream scholarship, mainline denominations, and even some conservative theologians, have taken the message of the rapture⁵ to the Christian laity where it has been accepted and spread with enthusiasm. The *Left Behind* Series (which deals with the fate of those left behind after the rapture)⁶, coauthored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, have been incredibly successful in premillennial, general Christian, and even secular circles and is only the latest installment in the already well established premillennial fiction genre. Amy Frykholm (2004) in her study of *Left Behind* readers notes evidence of crossover

⁴ See section entitled “Criteria for Political Sites.”

⁵ Literally the term refers to an event where Christians are, without warning, caught up to heaven to be with Christ.

⁶ *The Left Behind* series is only one of many premillennial excursions into popular culture. Other popular premillennialist' works have included *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey in 1970. The novel is still in print and has sold 28 million copies (Hendershot, 2004). The *Cross and the Switchblade* (Murray, 1970) Other more recent exploits have included *The Omega Code* (Marcarelli, 1999), *Megiddo: Omega Code 2* (Brian Trenchard Smith , 2001).

readership (though not consistent) from other religious and a-religious groups. Additionally, four of the twelve books in the series have achieved bestseller status on the *New York Times*' *Bestseller List*⁷. Indeed, Gallup and Lindsay suggest that a majority of Americans are predisposed to the pessimistic moral outlook that forms the core of premillennialism, noting that most Americans expect a future moral decline (Gallup and Lindsay 1999).

Secondly, a basic reading of this theological position suggests an otherworldly orientation for adherents, and by consequence, disinterest in transformation through politics (Marsden, 1980). This point is illustrated in the scholarly response to the introduction of the form of premillennialism examined in this paper. Premillennialism was believed to pose a threat to the political project of America. One scholar asserted that premillennialism was anti-democratic because the pessimism about human efforts and governance implicit in this eschatology, made it ill-suited as a civil theology and thus as support for the national political program (Case 1918). It is difficult to understand how this theology of isolation could produce such vibrant political outcomes. Indeed, Morgan (1994) notes how paradoxically premillennialists tend to be active politically while holding that human government cannot escape failure. Wilcox et al. (1991) highlight the complexity of premillennial eschatology's impact on activism suggesting it produces both elements of inspiration and quiescence.

Finally, premillennialism is a significant political theology because it may be predictive of the political preferences of conservative Christians on a variety of important policy fields ranging from foreign policy (Martin Spring 1999) to environmentalism (Guth et al. 1995). The

⁷ "The first ten [books in the series] with sales of more than 55 million copies, comprise the fastest-selling adult fiction series ever. The previous four titles debuted at number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list as well as those of *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Publishers Weekly*...[B]ook nine, was the best-selling novel in the world in 2001." (<http://www.leftbehind.com/channelbooks.asp?channelID=95> 9/14/04). Furthermore, the creators of the series have created companion discussion guides as aids to help the incorporation of this series in family devotionals and small group studies.

narratives of premillennialism articulate several policy positions to be held by adherents. More importantly, there is a link between theological disposition and political attitude which may allow the prescriptions of conservative theology to transcend the category of suggestion, (Wald, Owen, and Hill 1990). Premillennial narrative argues that there are spiritual consequences to ignoring or denying these imperatives laid out in the text.⁸ For example, according to the narrative it is important for individuals to live in a constant state of readiness before the rapture or risk being left behind, while after the rapture it is important for individuals to avoid taking the mark of the beast⁹ or risk the exclusion from salvation.

A Theory of Premillennialism and Politics

Premillennialism is a complex and nuanced theology. Its history can be divided into two eras, each characterized by different approaches to biblical prophesy, using Weber's (1983) terms, historic and futuristic premillennialism. Futuristic premillennialism (also known as dispensational premillennialism) in contrast to historic premillennialism suggests that prophecies of human history and the last things in Daniel chapter 7 and Revelation are to be fulfilled in the future (Marsden 1980) and that there exists a script which foretells how and when (though not necessarily the date) these prophecies will unfold.¹⁰ There are three different forms of futuristic dispensational premillennialism; pretribulation, midtribulation and posttribulation premillennialism. The theological point of interest in this paper, pretribulation premillennialism, (hereafter, premillennialism), suggests that prophecies of the Bible are yet to be fulfilled and that the world will descend into chaos after true believers are caught up to heaven in the rapture.

⁸ This notion does not however deny the possibility of other explanatory pathways that might lead to the same policy initiatives. However, the premillennialist pathway may offer an important and reliable method of arrival at these policies because of a notion of penalty build into the system.

⁹ The concept is mentioned in Revelation 14-16, and 19 the mark is generally thought to be some form of numerical identification.

¹⁰ There is no specified time table in modern premillennialism, but sequences this theology does hold that there is an ordered sequence of events which serve as prerequisites for the *eschaton*.

History is violently interrupted by the rapture, which causes true believers to be taken up into heaven leaving behind those caught unready for the Christian Messiah's return¹¹. Amy Frykholm (2004) notes that Premillennialist novels and films, when portraying the rapture, often show scenes of wives being raptured leaving their unbelieving husbands and pseudo-Christians behind. Thus, the premillennialist narrative functions as a tool to hold adherents to their beliefs in two important ways.

The images of division and uncertainty within the narrative are intended to remind the Christian that he/she ought to be in a constant state of readiness to ensure that he/she is included among the raptured. Not only should non-Christians fear sudden death without the opportunity to repent, but they should also fear the still less predictable fate of being *left behind* (Weber, 1983, pg 54). While the date of the rapture's occurrence is unknown, the narrative provides *signs* of the end.¹³ Wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution of Christians and an increase in lawlessness (noted in Mathew chapter 24) are not only items on the nightly news, but are signs of the coming end of the world. In this way, the eschatology is embedded in the consciousness of adherents. When premillennialists watch the news, they are reminded of their theology and encouraged to view the end as near. Amy Frykholm (2004) notes this point when she suggests that "The [premillennialist] narrative lays out a formulaic series of events and characters. Believers do the work of filling in the blanks in order to understand and give shape to the world they live in... Morning papers and evening news broadcasts present the opportunity for [premillennialist] fiction to be read and is understood a new" (Frykholm, 2004, 120).

¹¹ Drawn from such biblical passages as Jesus' discussion of the coming of the Kingdom (Luke 17:34-35), the premillennialist's narrative is intended to show the bifurcation of human society.

¹³ Matthew 24:1-14 is often used as a proof text for the notion that there are specific signs which are harbingers of the end of human history.

The Antichrist is one of the most central characters in the premillennial narrative. After the rapture Antichrist comes to power as the head of a global government, economy, and religion. This figure is responsible for the suffering faced by individuals who convert after the rapture and it is in response to the depravity which he encourages and exemplifies that the judgments of God are released on the world in the seven-year period known as the Great Tribulation.¹⁴ The Antichrist is also central in the politicization of the premillennial doctrine. While he is not fully revealed and does not come to power until after the rapture, for those who believe the rapture will happen in their lifetime, the Antichrist has likely already been born and may already be at work on the world's stage. Much time is spent in bible prophecy circles discussing likely candidates for the role of Antichrist or else the personality traits that characterize this individual. In a recent Google keyword search thirty of the one hundred websites discussed possible candidates for the role of Antichrist.¹⁵

The Great Tribulation is another important image in the premillennialist narrative. This seven-year period is the time in which the Antichrist comes to power and is marked by rampant persecution and the rise of a Messianic Jewish movement (the conversion of the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation). At the end of this period Christ returns, the devil and his agent the

¹⁴ The term refers to a seven-year period where the world is governed by the Antichrist. While the term is mentioned in Matthew 24, the premillennialist understanding comes from Daniel 9:27 and refers to the final "week" of the seventy weeks "which must pass before the end of the desolation of Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:2). "And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator." (Daniel 9:27, ESV). According to premillennialist interpretation, "he" refers to the Antichrist, the "covenant" refers to the world's concession of authority to the Antichrist, and each day of the "week" refers to one year of time.

¹⁵ Date of Google search; 3/7/2008. Prince Charles, Pope Benedict XVI, and David Hasselhoff were all cited as possible candidates for Antichrist. Reasons for this suggestion span the gamut some websites employ numerology, astrology or provide no specific reason for their choice. Politicians are popular candidates and a Google search conducted 10/6/2008 showed several websites which suggested Barack Obama as the Antichrist.

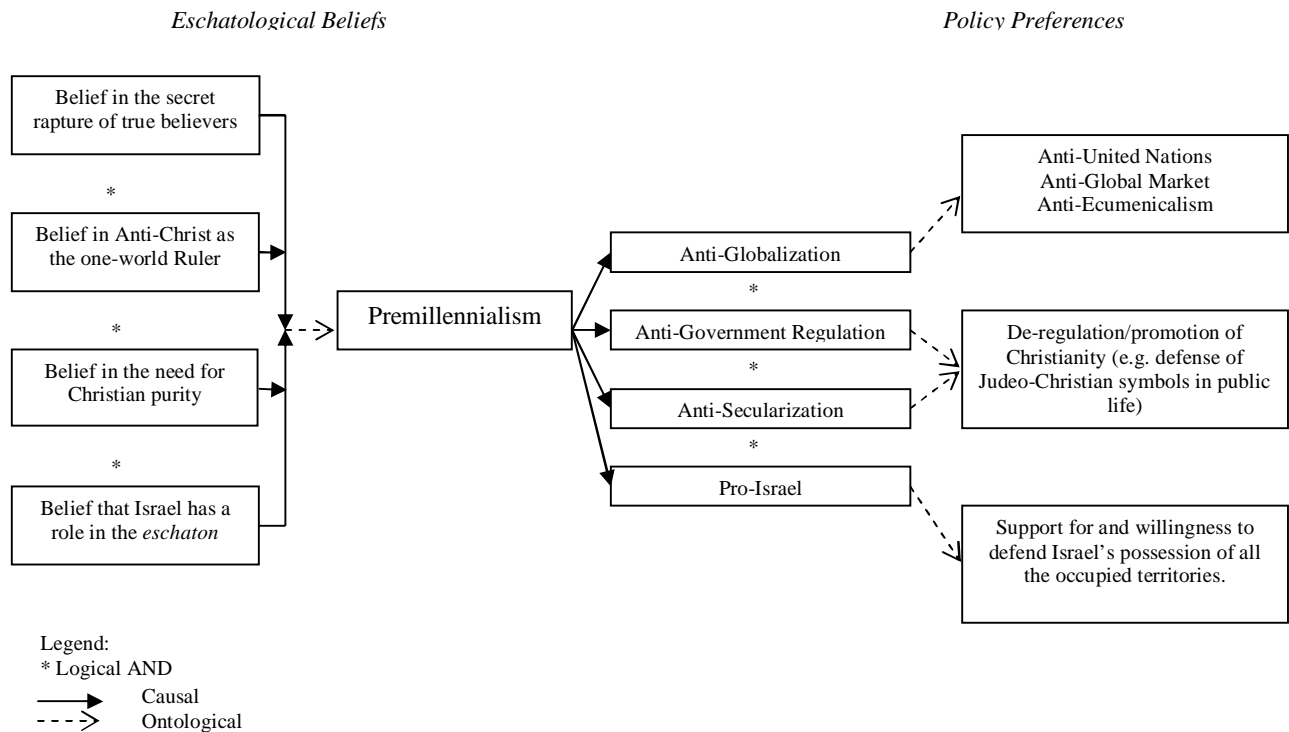
Antichrist are defeated in their last stand at the battle of Armageddon, Satan is bound, and the Millennial Age¹⁶ begins.

The Narrative and its Politics

The narrative of premillennialism prescribes specific policy positions for each adherent. These include: Pro-Israel (Ice February 2001; LaHaye September 2001; Martin Spring 1999; Watt Summer 1991), Anti-globalization (Ice March 2000; LaHaye September 1999), Anti-government regulation (Ice September 2001; LaHaye August 1999), and Anti-secularization (Ice September 2001; LaHaye September 2001) positions. In premillennialist political thought, each policy is connected to a threat or a longing expressed in the narrative and each individual must seek or resist these policies, accordingly, to secure his own holiness. Figure 1 (below) shows the causal relationship between the theological components of premillennialism and the policy positions outlined above.

¹⁶ The millennial age in premillennialism is a literal thousand year period where the Christian Messiah reigns on earth with all believers.

Figure 1
Two-level model of Premillennialism and Policy Preference



Martin (1999) indicates that this theology is politically persuasive because he suggests that it is the root of the Christian Right’s domestic and foreign policy agenda:

[On] most international issues, the motivation is the same as that driving religious conservatives’ domestic agenda: distrust of secular government; opposition to any perceived threat to “traditional values;” determination to preach and practice their beliefs without hindrance or restriction; and, less obvious to most secular observers, a conviction that increasing globalization is a fulfillment for dire Biblical prophecies foreshadowing the return of Christ and the onset of Armageddon (Martin 1999).

Members of the Christian Right also show evidence of a belief in the interrelationship of theology and policy. Thomas Ice argues, “Revelation 17-18 tells us that the Babylonian globalization will be built upon three major planks: economic trade, false religion, and centralized government” (Ice March 2000). Additionally, Tim LaHaye argues that while events such as September 11th are not prophetic events themselves, they give rise to the policies and attitudes, which ultimately result in the elevation of the Antichrist to world ruler (LaHaye

September 2001). LaHaye (September 2001) suggests that the security concerns that have consumed America in the aftermath of September 11th have engendered a state of affairs which serves to promote a more centralized government, increases restrictions on personal freedoms, and consequently lessens the individual's ability to resist or oppose anti-premillennialist policies.

The source of anti-globalization policies in premillennialism likely comes from the images of the Great Beast in Daniel 7 and mirrored in Revelation 13. These images form the foundations of the premillennialist doctrine of the Antichrist. The image is of a multi-headed beast (identified as a struggle for kingship in Daniel), who becomes the center of political, religious, and economic affection. The Beast, who premillennialists interpret as the Antichrist, comes to dominate the world militarily, politically, and economically and begins an unprecedented persecution of post-rapture converts. When reading premillennialism into the geopolitical and economic landscape, the European Union, free trade zones, and the power of the United Nations loom as signposts on the path to one world government and with it the rise of the Antichrist and a new age of Christian persecution. Thus, premillennialists advocate limiting the power and oversight of global intra-governmental organizations and protection of national sovereignty.

In much the same way, premillennialism can be understood as anti-government regulation insofar as it recognizes that the nation's institutions do not operate under Christian values. America is a wayward nation and as such, premillennialists must either separate themselves from the control of, or reform its corrupt institutions. Speaking of a post-September 11th world, Tim LaHaye (2001) suggests, "More than likely Americans will have to give up more of our individual liberties so that the government can provide safety for its citizens. An increase in governmental oversight of the individual is also preparatory for the global economic control that the Antichrist will exert in the tribulation (Rev. 13)". This concept requires that governments

refrain from interfering with individual freedoms (e.g. protection of the heterosexual nuclear family as the ideal standard). However, the freedoms in question here are only those freedoms, which are in keeping with Christian values. Civil liberties such as access to abortion are to be highly regulated and restricted by the government. Thus, anti-government regulation reflects dissatisfaction with government policies that contradict Christian social values.

Given this logic, premillennialists are also anti-secularization because they are called to stem the tide of apostasy that has overwhelmed the nation. Secularization is defined in this context as any cultural movement away from Christian values. This includes movement towards another religious paradigm, plurality, or hostility towards religions. Still speaking of September 11 LaHaye notes, “And we submit that what happened in New York and Washington D.C. is a larger symptom of the anti-God, anti-Christian spirit of officialdom in America, Europe and much of the rest of the world” (LaHaye September 2001). The Tragedy of September 11, 2001, according to LaHaye, is a consequence of secularization, more specifically the decline of conservative Christianity’s primacy across the globe. The move towards globalization, government regulation, and secularization function in the premillennialist understanding as fulfillment of prophecy and *de facto* movement away from God.

Premillennialists are pro-Israel because they hold that Israel still has a special relationship with God and that God will judge harshly those who hinder the prosperity of this nation. However, support for Israel does not necessarily mean support for all of the policy positions of its government. Rather, premillennialism supports Israel’s possession of all the occupied territories without opposition from internal or external forces. The success of the Jewish nation and the persecution it suffers at the hands of the Antichrist are in part the impetus for the return of Christ at the battle of Armageddon to purge their persecutors, his enemies and usher in the

millennium. Those who oppose Israel will be punished and those who support Israel will be rewarded.

Finally, the anti-environmentalist policies, which are associated with premillennialism, are not overt—that is premillennialists do not advocate the destruction of the environment but are likely to downplay environmental problems and place environmental initiatives in lower positions on policy agendas. After the imminent rapture the earth is inevitably decimated by manmade and divine calamities. Investing time and money in current preservation is futile.

The logic of premillennialism requires, for those socialized within this tradition, a deep concern over the globalizing, secularizing, authoritarian, environmentalist, and anti-Semitic tendencies on the world stage. As such, elites who adhere to premillennial theology should also hold the policy positions implicit in the narrative. Social network analysis affords one way of examining the consequence of premillennial belief. Some expression of premillennial policy positions should be evident within the larger network to which premillennialists belong. The next section explores the nature and consequence of the varied social networks of premillennial elites.

Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis is concerned with the interrelationship of actors in a given environment and measures the characteristics and structure of these social relationships. Networks are important to understanding the context of individual political behavior as the structural properties of a network affect the behavior of network members (Wellman 1983) and may as a consequence impact the preferences of network on-lookers (in this case, the audience of network members). In web-based social networks the actors are websites, bloggers, webmasters etc. and their relationships are determined by either site content or their links. There are a myriad of social networks on the internet (Bargh and McKenna 2004; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe

2007; Wellman 2001; Wellman et al. 1996). Membership in an internet network can have important psychological benefits for individuals (Bargh and McKenna 2004).

Linking as a type of Network Relationship

The internet is a very public medium. Website creators intend to connect themselves to the larger electronic world and communicate specific ideas to their audiences. As such, presentation of self is an important concern on the internet (Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino 2006; Walker 2000) and hyperlinks are an important part of this communication. Hyperlinks function as a way for website creators to connect to the broader world of the internet, connecting the content on their site to other sources of information and illustrations of their arguments. The hyperlinks on an individual page says much about the website creator's preference. Thus linking may represent a friendship or trust relationship and be an important indicator of reputation within the network (Park 2002b; Rousseau 1997). Many social networks are based on homophily; shared sociodemographic, behavioral, or intrapersonal characteristics (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001) and this may result in shared values and goals.

Hyperlinks can be either unilateral or reciprocal. Linking may indicate a variety of relationships. Determining the nature of the relationship likely depends on the context in which the hyperlink is found on a given webpage. Individuals may link to other websites in order to connect their audiences to specific issues (through news outlets), to illustrate a point, and to associate themselves with some other entity. Reciprocal relationships likely indicate trust between both parties. There are, however, exceptions to the trust rule.¹⁷ Trust is an important part of the relationships between these premillennialist figures and their audiences, as virtually all of the websites examined rely on donations to support their not-for-profit organizations. It is in their best interest to offer their support-base a clear and consistent representation of themselves, their

¹⁷ See Sunstein, Cass R. . 2001. *Republic.com*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

preferences, and their goals. As such, the choice to connect their audiences to other organizations is likely a well thought-out decision for two reasons: presentation of self and homophily.

Trust/friendship are the easiest form of relationship to communicate to audiences. McPherson et. al. (2001) suggests that homophily is a principle which structures a wide range of network ties, including friendship networks which likely involve trust. This study suggests that there is a tendency towards homogeneity in networks with regard to a variety of measures including interpersonal characteristics. Thus, the type of relationship implicit in the act of linking is, given the potential risks associated with dependence on audience donation, likely akin to a friendship relationship where the linking party expresses trust for the party being linked. In this way hyperlinks likely communicate information about the website's preferences and agenda (Jackson 1997; Park 2002a). If the linked organization should represent a position significantly different from and/or in opposition to the position held by the premillennialist webpage that audience may become confused about the premillennial websites position or think wrongly the the website agrees with the linked organization when it does not. If the issues involved are significant, supporters may choose to punish the premillennialist figure by withdrawing support.

Many of the linked organizations also depend on public donations for funding. The choice to hyperlink to another organization likely indicates approval of the goals of that organization because an audience with finite resources may have to choose between the two. If the premillennialist webpage is in agreement with the philosophy and aims of the linked organization, concern about linking is likely reduced because there would be no confusion about interests. Additionally, website creators may more readily risk loss of funding if the linked organizations share the same aim as the premillennialist figure or if this organization is in someway connected to a premillennial webpage. In such cases, there is no net loss in ability to

accomplish the specified end. Given the centrality of trust in the linking process, it is clear that by examining the social network of these websites we will be able to, in essence, follow premillennialist doctrines to their natural conclusions by following the connections from one website to another. Friedkin (1991) supports this assertion by suggesting that inter-group relations have an important effect on opinion formation.

The political potential of premillennialism depends on production of premillennial political hyperlinks by influential network members and my examination is thus concerned with centrality (measured as involvedness and prestige), and core-periphery relationships. An important measure of the success of premillennialism will be determined by the hyperlinks between central religious websites and political websites with premillennial policy positions. Centrality is a key concern for social network methodologists (Scott 1991). Here, centrality is defined in concord with Wasserman and Faust (1994) as the prominence or visibility of an individual within the network. This relationship between the individual actor and the rest of the network can flow in multiple directions (from individual to network/from network to individual) and measures the individual's connectedness to the network. Prestige and involvedness are directional forms of centrality.¹⁸ Involvedness measures the individual actor's connectedness to the network and prestige or influence measures the network's connectedness to the individual. In this chapter, centrality is measured in terms of link relationships between actors; involvedness is measure in terms of outlinks (individual → network) and prestige is measure in terms of inlinks (network → individual).

Data and Method

¹⁸ See Wasserman and Faust Wasserman, Stanley, and Katherine Faust. 1989. Canonical Analysis of the Composition and Structure of Social Networks. *Sociological Methodology* 19:1-42. for elaboration.

Procedure for Choosing Websites for Analysis

All websites which met the following criteria for inclusion were analyzed using the IssueCrawler network visualization software. The IssueCrawler program searches the specified starting points (in this case, the list of websites which meet the criteria) for hyperlinks to other websites (primary links), then searches those websites for hyperlinks (secondary links) and then performs a co-link (relational) analysis of all the links extracted from the search. IssueCrawler then visualized the network produced by the relationships between starting points, primary, and secondary hyperlinks. The resulting map shows only those websites which have received two or more links from the total list of websites. Primary and secondary visualized hyperlinks were examined for political content in keeping with the policies of premillennialism. Importantly, starting points for each social network were not examined for political content. This will constitute a stricter test of the political veracity of premillennialism, because the search for premillennial policies takes place farther away from the network source or starting points; thus, providing a strong test of the range of premillennialism political impact. In the subsections that follow I discuss criteria for selecting websites used to generate the three distinct networks: the Christian Right Network, the Issue Centric Network and the Beliefnet Network.

Christian Right Network

The starting points for the elite social network were chosen because they are key premillennial figures within Christian Right circles. The decision to include these figures was based on the following criteria: an individual is popular/widely known and his/her works/organizations include premillennial material. Individuals were identified as premillennialist if their websites, books, or speeches contained premillennial content. Once individuals are identified as premillennial, the organizations they head and the websites affiliated

with those organizations are assumed to be premillennial. The websites of Tim LaHaye, *Left Behind* co-author and pastor; Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind* co-author; James Dobson, child psychologist, radio broadcaster, and founder Focus on the Family Ministries; Paul Crouch, founder, Trinity Broadcast Network; Jerry Falwell, founder Liberty University and Moral Majority; and their associates, were chosen for analysis.

Issue Centric Network

The starting points for the second network were generated using keyword searches in Google's Advanced Search tool.¹⁹ Only the first one hundred websites in each keyword search result were examined using the criteria listed below. Google uses a network approach to page ranking.²⁰ Page value or rank is determined by the amount of hyperlinks between websites. Each hyperlink to a website is considered a vote for that website's importance or rank. The importance of the websites doing the voting also matters. If website A is highly ranked and links to (or votes for) website B, then that vote has more weight than the vote (or link) from website C which is less highly ranked.²¹ The keywords *rapture signs*, *antichrist*, *end times*, *premillennialism*, and *pre-tribulation* will be used individually and in groups to generate lists of premillennial websites. Inclusion in IssueCrawler's network location and co-link search engine will be dependent on each website meeting the following criteria.

¹⁹ While this list of Issue Centric starting points is contrasted to the *Christian Right* starting points it is important to note that elites may also be included in this list. The contrast is between a purposive sample based on relationships between premillennial figures and a Google generated sample which is based on the centrality of premillennialism to the websites makeup.

²⁰ Google's keyword search results gather those websites in which keywords are found. However, the search engine does allow for some permutations, including plurals and variant tenses. Keywords appear either in the text of the webpage or in the links pointing to the website. For example, website A may appear with the search results for the keyword premillennialism when the term does not appear on website A itself, if website B uses the keyword premillennialism in its link to website A.

²¹ See <http://www.google.com/technology/>

²³ For example see: http://www.historicist.com/related_subjects/rapturestudies.htm

1. *Espouse premillennialism.* Websites to be included should espouse premillennialist views. All websites in which the keywords appear but are either unrelated to premillennialism or espouse views which contradict premillennialism were excluded. These websites are not truly premillennial sites. For example, keywords may appear on websites whose purpose is to debunk premillennialist views.²³ Similarly, the terms used by premillennialists, *rapture* or *tribulation* for example, have multiple meanings and usages outside of the premillennial narrative these websites will be excluded.²⁴
2. *Include links.* Website to be incorporated should include hyperlinks to other websites. Linking is a virtually costless task for web-designers. The failure to add links to a website may represent intellectual isolation from other websites on the internet, extreme technological simplicity, or a desire to remain set apart within the group of websites which espouse a premillennial worldview. Furthermore, the goal of the analysis is an examination of the interrelationship between websites and its consequences. If a website chooses not to connect with other websites is not included in the analysis.
3. *Be a single occurrence.* Each website will be input in the IssueCrawler engine once, regardless of the frequency with which it occurs in the search. The frequency of appearance in search results for each website will not affect IssueCrawler's determination of that websites centrality or weight within the network. While some may argue that websites with multiple keywords and consequently multiple appearances represent a fuller expression of premillennial eschatology, frequency of appearance in search results (in contrast to rank) does not impact network status.

²⁴ For example the second ranked website for the single keyword *rapture* 2/15/07 was the website for the indie quartet The Rapture.

4. *Not be damaged or outdated.* Periodically, Google takes snapshots of websites on the internet and stores these images in its database. Thus, keyword searches may produce websites which no longer exist on the internet. These websites are excluded from analysis. Similarly, damaged sites, websites without content, or with other accessibility problems are not included on this analysis.
5. *Not be encyclopedic and definitional.* Many websites on the internet are geared towards informing the public about general topics and are primarily definitional or encyclopedic in nature. For example, www.wikipedia.org, a website which provides an encyclopedic account for a wide range of topics is highest ranked in Google's keyword results for the word *rapture* and *postmillennialism*. These websites do not advocate for any particular position, but simply provide definitions and descriptions. Sites which have this type of premillennial content are not truly premillennial because, while they may describe premillennial theology they do not advocate for premillennialism or a premillennial worldview.

Beliefnet Network

Beliefnet.org which is produced by the Fox Entertainment Group is a clearinghouse for spiritual information from a variety of faith traditions. Beliefnet offers devotional material and access to clergy, practitioners, and faith services. Starting points for the Beliefnet Network are derived from an article entitled "Beliefnet Who's Who: The Most Influential Black Spiritual Leaders" produced by Beliefnet.org in 2006. The list consists of twenty four individuals who are representatives of both Christianity and Islam. For the purposes of this paper, only individuals who belong to the Christian faith will be analyzed. This results in a list of twenty-two individuals, among them T.D. Jakes, Creflo Dollar, Jessie Jackson, Al Sharpton, and Archbishop

Wilton Gregory; all noted figures within the African American community. These individuals represent the gamut of the African American spiritual landscape but all represent focal points within a community that has a prominent and largely shared tradition of premillennialism. Not all the individuals on the list are premillennialists, most notably; the official eschatological position of the Catholic Church, and by extension Archbishop Wilton Gregory, is amillennialism. Some individuals on the list are also not visualized within the network because the organizations which they head to not operate websites. However, the group will be examined as a whole because there are historic and social ties which bond the entire group in ways that are different from the rest of the American public.

Some scholars have suggested that the premillennial tradition and the otherworldly orientation with which it is associated has led to quiescence within the Black community (Nelsen and Nelsen 1975) and thus suggest that there is no prospect of a political role for premillennialism within the African American community. However, some more recent scholarship such as Calhoun-Brown (1998) has pointed to a political role for this tradition. She suggests that this otherworldly worldview can provide the context for separatist oriented racial empowerment. While there may be a political role for premillennialism, it is not clear whether it will manifest itself in the same ways for African Americans as it might for other members of the Christian community in America. The ways in which theology is *lived* by the individual is likely a negotiation between crosscutting values. This is likely true of all groups within Christianity. For African Americans, race may function in ways that produce different political outcomes. Network analysis examines the political implications of the interrelationship of these groups.

Technology

The program used in this analysis is IssueCrawler, developed by Richard Rogers from the Govcom.org Foundation. This program is used to access and visualize the social network of premillennial websites. IssueCrawler is a network location and co-link analysis engine. Here, three separate lists of websites or starting points (CR, Issue Centric, and Beliefnet) are input into the software which then performs a co-link (relational) analysis of the links extracted from the search and visualizes the network produced by the relationships between starting points, primary, and secondary hyperlinks.

Process

IssueCrawler offers multiple ways for searching the starting point websites. The mode of analysis used here was a search by page with a single iteration of method and three layers of depth. These choices offered particular advantages for the type of network analysis being investigated in this paper. The “by page” analysis allows the program to search not only the front or introductory page of the website but allows for deep page searches. This program crawls through multiple pages within the website and captures the hyperlinks present to build a picture of the social network within which the starting point webpage is embedded. For each network, IssueCrawler repeats this process for all the starting points and then creates a map which visualizes those websites with shared hyperlinks. This co-link relational analysis visualizes only those outlinks with at least two websites have in common.

The procedure here employs three levels of indepth analysis. The starting points of the analysis are the first layer of depth. The second layer of analysis is the set of hyperlinks found on the starting points’ pages (primary links). The third layer of analysis is the set of hyperlinks generated from the links produced by the starting points (secondary links). A single iteration of method was used in this analysis, this option allows for the mapping of social networks. That is,

there was one instance of searching the starting points and the hyperlinks they produced, creating a snapshot of the network at the time of analysis.

Criteria for Political Sites

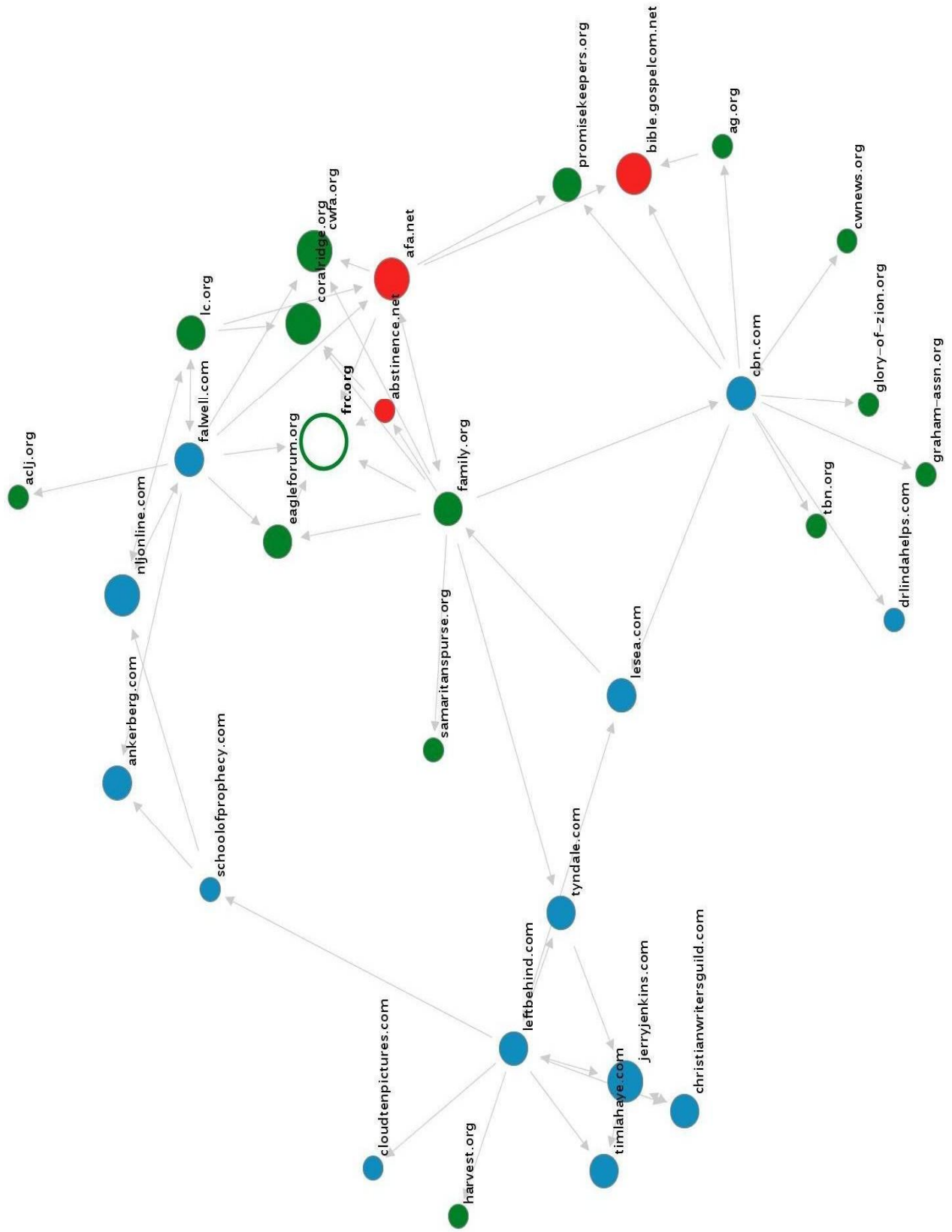
Websites chosen as political have met the following criteria for advocating or pursuing political action in that they; (1) educate individuals about politics (including suggestions about what are appropriate policy positions), (2) are themselves engaged in policy action through advocating for the change of laws and/or organizing protests and demonstrations on political issues, (3) and/or encouraging or instructing individuals to work towards specified political ends (such as, calling government officials and forming lobby groups etc.).

Network Visualization

The maps that follow are representations of the social networks of the selected Christian Right elites websites, the Google generated Issue Centric websites, and the Beliefnet black spiritual leaders websites; map 1, map 2 and map 3 respectively. Following each of these maps a second picture of each network is presented; map 1a, map 2a and map 3a. These maps visualize the location of political websites (in red) with respect to the rest of the network (in gray) and shows only those links which flow from the network to the political website and from the political website to other network members.

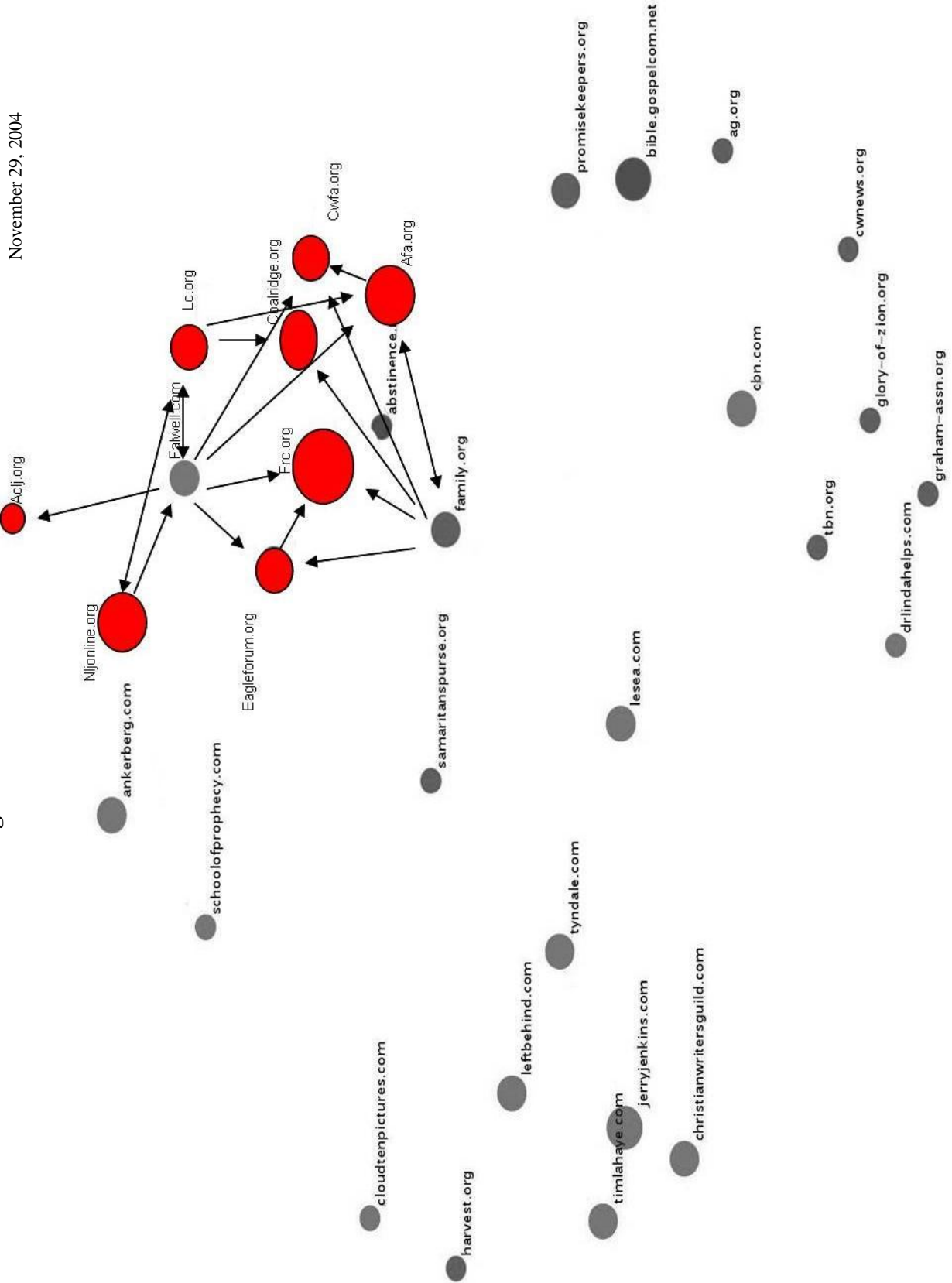
Map 1 Christian Right Premillennialist Website Network

November 29, 2004



Map 1a
Political Websites
Christian Right Premillennialist Website Network

November 29, 2004



**Table 1
Elite Premillennial Websites Network**

Starting Point	Ministry/ Aid Organization/ Evangelism/Church group	Christian Political Action	Christian Journal/ News/ Television	Christian Resource Center	Other
Cbn.com			X		
Fallwell.com		X			
Family.org	X			X	
Jerryjenkins.com	X				
Leftbehind.com	X			X	
Schoolofprophecy.com					
Tbn.org			X		
Timlahaye.com				X	

Links	Ministry/ Aid Organization/ Evangelism/Church group	Christian Political Action	Christian Journal/ News/ Television	Christian Resource Center	Other
Abstinence.net	X			X	
Aclj.org		X			
Afa.net		X			
Ag.org	X				
Angleforum.org					
Ankerberg.com	X			X	
Bible.gospelcom.net				X	
Christianwritersguild.com					X
Cloudtenpictures.com					X
Coalridge.org		X			
Cwfa.org		X			
Cwnnews.org			X		
Eagleforum.org		X		X	
Drlindahelps.com	X				
Frc.org		X			
Glory-of-zion.org	X				
Graham-assn.org	X				
Harvest.org	X				
Lc.org		X			
Lesea.com			X		
Nljonline.com		X	X		
Promiskeepers.org	X				
Samaritanspurse.org	X				
Tyndale.com					X

Note: This network contains hidden connections not evident through hyperlinks. For example, while timahaye.com and cwfa.org (Concerned Women for America) are not hyperlinked directly, Beverly LaHaye (Tim LaHaye's wife and ministry partner) is head of the Beverly LaHaye Institute which is a part of the Concerned Women for America organization. Consequently, the relative isolation of Tim LaHaye, Jerry Jenkins and the Left Behind home page may be an artifact of the composition of the pages in question (personal pages and book promotional site) and not an indication of their relative status in the network.

Analysis of the Christian Right Network

The results of the social network analysis of the Christian Right websites are compelling. All of the figures share hyperlinks in common at either one or two degrees of separation and some of these hyperlinks are dedicated to political action. The website of the Family Research Council (Frc.org), a premillennial political website, is the most central node in the network, i.e. is the most preferred as a linking partner, and advocates for all five premillennial policy positions. Five other websites in the network have hyperlinks to this organization. The starting points produce relatively few outlinks. Jerry Falwell, James Dobson and Pat Robertson appear to be the most active members within the network with slightly more hyperlinks than other network members.

Perhaps the most pressing concern in the analysis is the isolation of certain segments of the network. The websites of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins are relatively isolated within the larger network. None of the seven websites belonging to Tim LaHaye, Jerry Jenkins and Paul Crouch appear as hyperlinks on other websites within the network. This would suggest that Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins are (in spite of their popular success) relatively marginalized within the community of premillennialism. However, their isolation within the network is likely an artifact of the type and construction of their websites.²⁵ Hyperlinks may not exhaustively demonstrate all the relationships that an individual holds. In fact, Tim LaHaye is ideologically and organizationally *linked* to Jerry Falwell as a charter member of the Moral Majority and his wife Beverly LaHaye, with whom he has coauthored many books, is the founder and chair of Concerned Women for America. Jerry Jenkins is *linked* more broadly in the Christian

²⁵ The IssueCrawler program is limited in that it visualizes only those network members who have two or more websites linking to them. Thus it does not present all linking relationships. IssueCrawler is also limited in that it does not capture all types of links possible between network members (e.g. organizational and ideological links) which are not necessarily expressed through hyperlinks.

community with James Dobson's Focus on the Family. The latter has endorsed the statement of faith (a brief systematic theology) set out by Graham and the former served as ghostwriter for Graham's influential autobiography *Just As I Am*. Thus, there are hidden links within the network and their existence suggests that the analysis underestimates the level of cohesion present among these highly disparate premillennialist figures. Any political messages produced by the outlinks can more confidently be identified as a consequence of the ideology of the entire starting point group.

Political Websites

The political websites examined in this section were analyzed for evidence of premillennial policies (see table 2). The results of this analysis are consistent with the hypothesis, suggesting that premillennialist leaders link their online-audiences to some organizations which support political positions in keeping with the premillennialist narrative: pro-Israel, anti-globalization, anti-government regulation, anti-secularization, and anti-environmentalism. Each website approached these issues from various vantage points; only the Family Research Council addressed all of the issues in question. However, each organization undertook positions in keeping with aspects of the premillennialist narrative. Anti-environmentalism was the policy which received the least attention. Perhaps this is because environmental opposition is not explicit in the narrative. Anti-secularization on both national and international levels received the most attention on these websites. This may be a consequence of the broadly defined nature of this issue and its centrality in both the narrative and history of fundamentalist premillennialism. The table below represents a synopsis of the presence of these policy positions in the websites.

Table 2
Presence of Premillennialist Politics in the Links of the Christian Right Network

Links	Anti-Secularization	Anti-Globalization	Anti-Government Regulation	Pro-Israel	Anti-Environmentalism
<u>aclj.org</u> American Center for Law and Justice	X	-	X	X	-
<u>afa.net</u> American Family Association	X	-	X	X	-
<u>coralridge.org</u> Coral Ridge Ministries	X	-	X	-	-
<u>cwfa.org</u> Concerned Women for America	X	X	X	-	X
<u>eagleforum.org</u> Eagle Forum	X	X	X	-	-
<u>frc.org</u> *Family Research Council	X	X	X	X	X
<u>lc.org</u> Liberty Council	X	-	X	-	-
<u>nljonline.com</u> National Liberty Journal	X	-	X	-	-

*Represents the most central node in the link.

Note also that each 'X' represent only the presence of said policy position without regard to intensity or frequency.

The Politics of Linked Websites

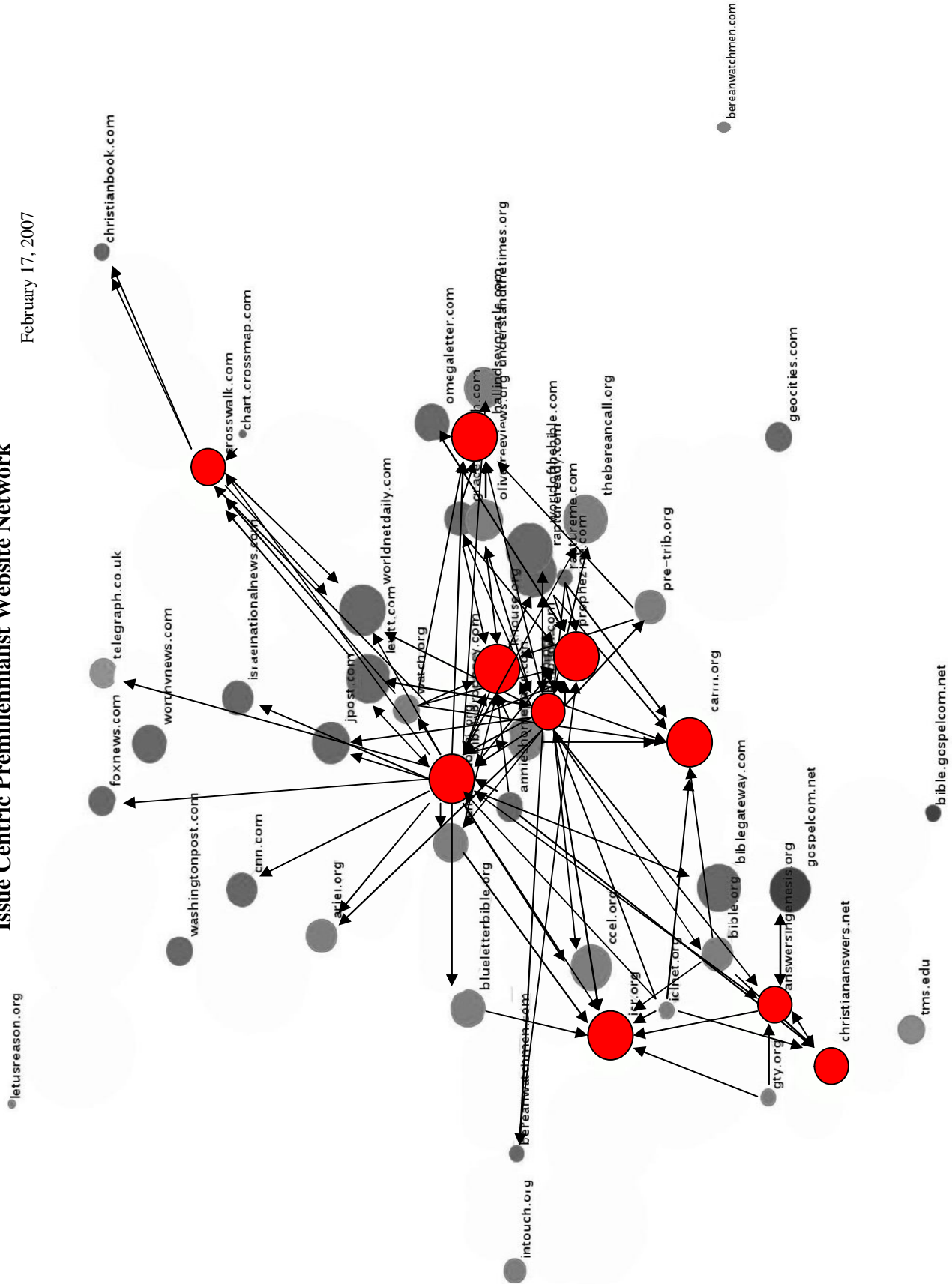
Perhaps what is most surprising about the websites listed here, is the fact that even though their stated purposes is by and large the protection and promotion of the traditional concept of family, most are engaged in anti-government regulation and anti-globalization projects. This may suggest the pervasive influence of premillennial eschatology in varying sections of religious life.

Pro-Israeli sentiment is less pervasive in the group, though none have stated anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian positions. Most importantly, the analysis shows the pervasiveness of the anti-secularization sentiment and may suggest that this phenomenon is the driving force in the politics of this group. It is the stated reason for many anti-government regulation and anti-globalization policies and it is also the driving force in the premillennialist narrative. It is the expected moral decline (for this group seen in secularization trends), which initiates the destruction of the world. And so, not surprisingly, it is the central focus of the websites examined here. However, it is also

important to note that there are other compelling reasons that may inspire religious groups to abhor secularization (which is by definition antithetical to religion) and further research is required before a more definitive statement about the relationship between premillennialism and the anti-secularization policies of these organizations can be made.

Map 2a
Political Websites
Issue Centric Premillennialist Website Network

February 17, 2007



Analysis of the Issue Centric Network

The Issue Centric network is characterized by its density. This is especially evident when compared to the Christian Right network. The actors within the Issue Centric network are more likely to have multiple links connecting to and from the network at large. This is likely a consequence of the type and focus of these starting point websites. In contrast to the Christian Right network where starting points were made up of theologically conservative but occupationally disparate figures, the starting points for the Issue Centric network have the propagation of premillennial eschatology as a primary focus of the website.

The most central node in the Issue Centric network is Bible-prophecy.com with forty-one hyperlinks to the network and six hyperlinks from the network. While other websites in the network may surpass Bible-prophecy.com in prestige (measured here as the number of hyperlinks from the network), no other website in the network is more involved (has more outlinks). Importantly, Bible-prophecy.com links to six (Family.org, frankcaw.com, frc.org, icr.org, khouse.org, and prophezine.com) and receives a hyperlink from one (lamblion.com). Of the political websites. Bible-prophecy.com is a clearinghouse for information on prophecy and current affairs. Other websites deeply involved in the network are levitt.com a messianic Jewish ministry (nineteen outlinks and five inlinks), lamblion.com a premillennial prophecy ministry (fifteen outlinks and five inlinks), Gospelcom.net a clearing house of online ministries and bible translations (twelve outlinks and three inlinks), Olivetreeviews.org an Israel focused prophecy ministry (twelve outlinks and seven inlinks), and Raptureready.com an apocalyptic barometer (fifteen outlinks and seven inlinks).

Raptureready.com monitors the coming apocalypse. Using a forty-five point index (measured from 1-5), which tracks changes along a wide spectrum of social phenomenon from

ecumenism to global floods, the Rapture Ready Index offers a barometer for the likelihood that the rapture will occur at any given time. The record low for the rapture index is 57 in 1993; the record high is 182 in 2001. Measures for 2007 have fluctuated between 156 and 163 which, according to the website, indicates heavy prophetic activity.

Olivetreeviews.com, khouse.org, worldnetdaily.com, jpost.com, hallindseyoracle.com, and thebereancall.org are among the most prestigious websites in the network, each receiving at least six hyperlinks from the network. These websites are popular because they are desired as linking partners and thus are influential within the group. Moreover, the political websites within this network are largely comprised of influential websites. Nine of these websites have received five or more hyperlinks from the network. Frc.org received twelve, jerryrobinson.org received twelve and both icr.org and khouse.org received nine hyperlinks from the rest of the network. Only two political websites (endtime.com and trumpetsounds.com) received less than three hyperlinks from network. This has important implications for analysis. Not only does the Issue Centric network produce political websites, but some of these websites are among the most influential in the network.

In contrast to the political action websites, some of the most influential or prestigious actors within the network are outsiders to premillennial circles. This is evidenced in the unilateral linking relationships which exist between certain actors and the rest of the network. For example, Jpost.com, foxnews.com, washingtonpost.com, and cnn.com have received multiple hyperlinks from the network while reciprocating none. This highlights a different type of relationship at play within the network. These websites have influence on the network while not being influenced by the network and likely appear as hyperlinks only because they contain material viewed by network members as being relevant to premillennialism. Other network

outliers have received only one hyperlink from the network; rcm.amazon.com, preteristarchive.com, watchman.org. These websites are on the periphery of the network and the linking relationship may indicate something other than trust. For example, preteristarchive.com is an eschatological website which posits a view that is in deep contention with premillennialism and the single hyperlink from the network to this website may indicate a relationship of disapproval rather than trust (see Sunstein (2001)). This finding complicates the basis for understanding of the function of network relationships in premillennial circles as mediated by a neutral observe like Google.

Political Websites

Table 3
Presence of Premillennialist Politics In Primary and Secondary Links in the
Issue Centric Social Networks

Links	Anti-Secularization	Anti-Globalization	Anti-Government Regulation	Pro-Israel	Anti-Environmentalism
endtime.com Endtime Ministries	-	X	-	X	X
family.org Focus on the Family	X	X	X	X	X
frankcaw.com The Ultimate Deception	X	X	X	-	-
frc.org Family Research Council	X	X	X	X	X
hallindseyoracle.com Hal Lindsey Report	X	X	-	X	X
icr.org Institute for Creation Research	-	-	-	-	-
jerryrobinson.org Jerry Robinson Ministries International	X	X	-	X	-
joelrosenberg.com Joel C. Rosenberg	-	X	-	X	-
khouse.org Koinonia House	X	X	X	X	X
lamblion.com Lion and Lamb Ministries	X	X	-	X	-
lds.org Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints	X	-	X	-	-
prophecywatch.com Thy Kingdom Come, Inc.	-	-	-	X	-
prophezine.com Prophezine	X	X	X	X	X
str.org Stand to Reason	X	X	-	-	pro-
trumpetsounds.com Trumpet Sound	-	-	-	X	-

Anti-Globalization is the premillennialist policy that occurs most frequently among the political websites within the Issue Centric social network. Anti-government regulation and anti-environmentalism occurs least frequently with nine of the websites in this category failing to approve of these policies. Only the icr.org (Institute for Creation Research) fails to exhibit any of the policy positions implicit in premillennialism. Importantly, one of the political websites advocates for a policy that is in contradiction to premillennialism. str.org (Stand to Reason), while decrying liberal environmentalists, embraces the concept of protecting the planet as a part of Christian stewardship.

In contrast to the political websites produced by the Christian Right social network, those produced by the Issue Centric network emphasize anti-globalization and pro-Israeli policy positions; policies among those least favored by the Christian Right network. This may be a result of core differences between networks or time effects. For example, the Christian Right network, as a purposive sample of the websites of key premillennial players and their associates, was intensely personality-driven, where the Issue Centric search was focused on the core concepts and was driven more by adherence to premillennial doctrines (rapture, Antichrist, and tribulation, etc.). Differences may also be a result of the passage of time²⁶. Since the Christian Right network was visualized in November 2004, evidence of globalization has continued to increase with continued trends of integration of world governments (European Union) and the development of global governing bodies (World Court). It is possible that either of these two possibilities, some combination of the two, or a third unknown element, may be responsible for these differences. In order to rule out the first two possibilities, future research should include concurrent visualization of all networks.²⁷

One important weakness in the results for the Issue Centric social network analysis when compared to the elite social networks is the proportion of political websites to the total number of websites. Out of the one hundred and forty-seven websites in the Issue Centric network only fifteen were deemed political by the criteria previously outlined. In contrast, out of the thirty-one members of the Christian Right network, nine were considered to be political in nature. This may indicate that the political implications of premillennialism are activated by certain elite actors or that the political veracity of premillennialism has waned over time. The later possibility seems less likely as premillennialist triggers (events which would lead individuals to believe the end is

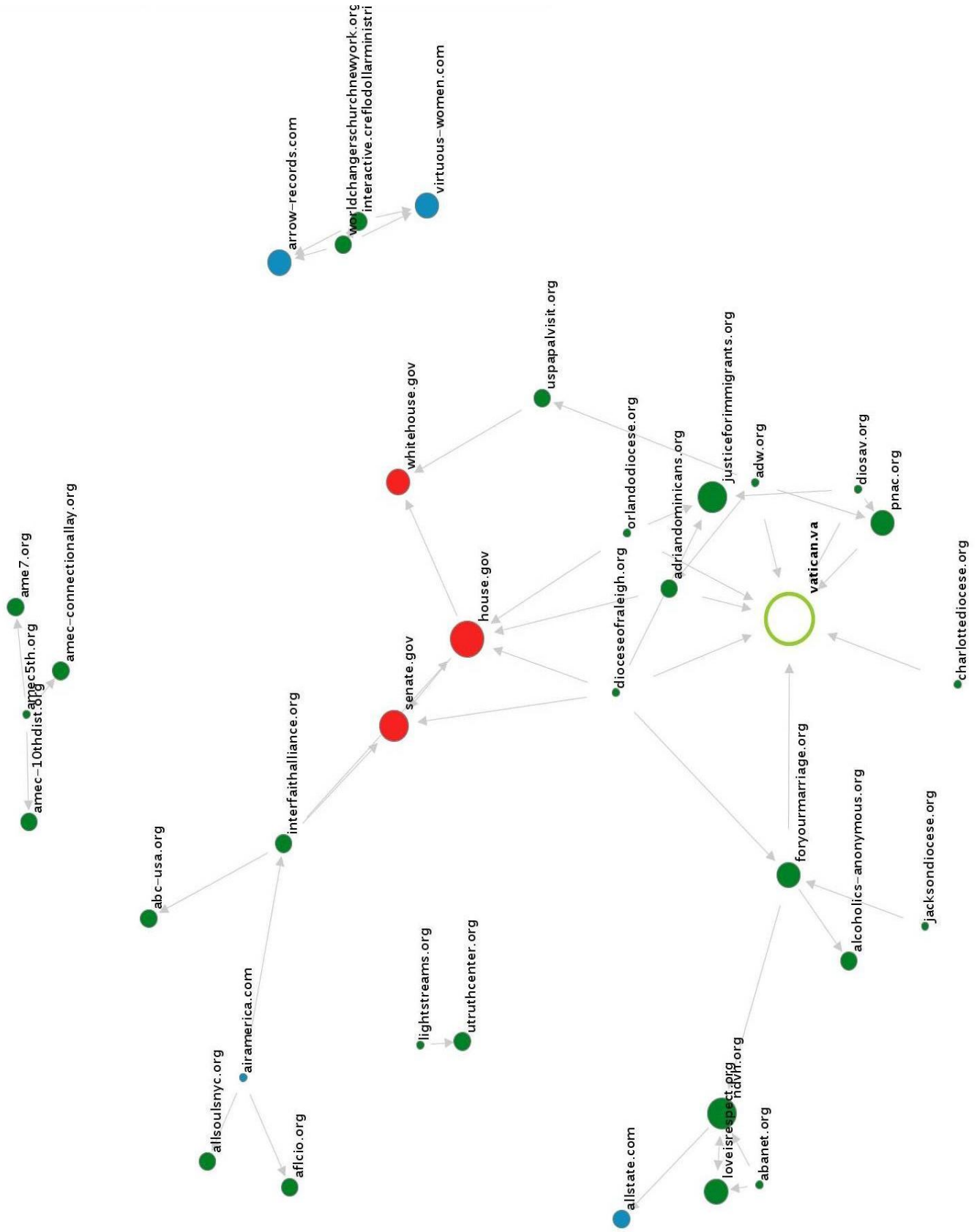
²⁶ The Issue Centric network was visualized in March 2007 and the Christian Right network was visualized in November 2004.

²⁷ Time constraints and monetary requirements made this concurrent visualization extremely difficult.

near) have, according to raptureready.com, increased over time. It is also important to note that the fifty-three starting point members visualized in the social network were excluded for evaluation of their political nature. The inclusion of starting points in the evaluation of political websites may boost the number of political websites, and importantly, may indicate the presence of policies of premillennialism at multiple stages in the network.

Map 3 The Social Network of Beliefnct Influential Black Spiritual leaders

January 24, 2008



Analysis of the Beliefnet Influential Black Spiritual Leaders Network

Influential Black Spiritual Leaders Network Starting Points ²⁸		
The Rev. Calvin O. Butts, III	The Rev. James Forbes, Jr.	The Rev. Vashti M. McKenzie
The Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell	Archbishop Wilton Gregory	The Rev. Otis Moss III
The Rev. Johnnie Coleman	The Rev. Jesse Jackson	Bishop Gilbert Earl Patterson
Dr. Creflo A. Dollar	The Rev. T.D. Jakes	The Rev. Eugene Rivers
The Rev. Floyd Flakes	Elder Bernice King	The Rev. Run
The Rev. Al Sharpton	The Rev. William J. Shaw	The Rev. William G. Sinkford
The Rev. Gardner C. Taylor	The Rev. Conrad Tillard	Iyanla Vanzant
The Rev. Jeremiah Wright		

There are thirty-five nodes in the Beliefnet Influential Black Spiritual Leaders Network visualized in Map 3 above, which represents the interrelationship of the starting points on the internet at a second and third depth of analysis. There are a total of eighty five websites discovered in the IssueCrawler search of the starting points. The network is not as densely connected as the Issue Centric network. This may again speak to the differences between elite-generated websites (map 1 and map 3), which tend to be more personality-driven, therefore more isolated, and issue-specific websites such as those in the Issue Centric network which exist solely to communicate an idea or set of ideas. The exception to this the rule can be found in the websites of Archbishop Wilton Gregory, who is the head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. His websites are highly interconnected (found in green at the lower central quadrant of the map) and include the most central node in the network, Vatican.ca. This presumed amillennial Catholic section of the network is more closely related to each other and to other intermediate nodes within the network. These intermediate nodes bridge Catholic websites to non-Catholic websites and offer an important glimpse into the mechanisms which connect the relatively isolated members within the network together. The websites foryourmarriage.org and

²⁸ A majority of the figures listed here are premillennialist. However, some have no stated eschatological position and Archbishop Wilton Gregory the office position of the Catholic Church is amillennialism. The group is analyzed as a whole because of the shared tradition of premillennialism which exists within African American communities. See Chapter 1 for further elaboration.

the governmental websites house.gov, senate.gov, and whitehouse.gov, are the intermediates between the relatively isolated nodes within the network. It is important to note that there are three completely isolated segments within the network; the websites of the American Methodist Episcopal Church, the websites of Creflo Dollar, and the websites of Mary Tumpkin (who is not a starting point) are completely isolated from the rest of the network; that is they receive no hyperlinks from and send no hyperlinks to the rest of the network. This may indicate some sort of ideological or structural divide.

Table 5
Presence of Premillennialist Politics In Primary and Secondary Links in the Social Networks of Influential Black Spiritual Leaders

Links	Anti-Secularization	Anti-Globalization	Anti-Government Regulation	Pro-Israel	Anti-Environmentalism
ndvh.org National Domestic Violence Hotline	-	-	-	-	-
justiceforimmigrants.org The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform	-	Pro	pro	-	-
house.gov United States House of Representatives	-	-	-	-	-
Whitehouse.gov White House	-	-	-	-	-
senate.gov United States Senate	-	-	-	-	-
aflcio.org American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations	-	X	-	-	-
loveisrespect.org National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline	-	-	-	-	-
interfaithalliance.org Interfaith Alliance	-	-	-	-	-

There are eight political websites in the network. Only one of these websites, aflcio.org, the website of American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, supports a premillennial policy; anti-globalization. The website discusses the danger of trade agreements such as NAFTA because they result in the loss of American jobs. Moreover, one of the websites listed justiceforimmigrants.org, supported by the Catholic Church, offers pro-globalization and

government regulation positions in so far as it supports the removal of restrictions and change in policy which serve to isolate and marginalize undocumented individuals. Importantly, the overall political orientation of this network points to the left where the two previous networks point to the right of the political spectrum. This fact belies the theological unity which exists between the starting points of these three networks. Race may mediate the political outcomes within the shared theological tradition of premillennialism by providing an alternate frame for the theology deemphasizing and emphasizing different aspects of the theology and consequently altering the subsequent worldview and political orientation produced.²⁹

Discussion

Analysis of both the Christian Right and the Issue Centric networks show evidence of a strong relationship between premillennialism and preference for anti-globalization, anti-government regulation, anti-secularization and pro-Israel policies, with slightly less support for anti-environmentalism within these groups. However, the Beliefnet network shows virtually no support for the policy positions of premillennialism. These findings suggests that premillennialism does have important policy implication which may be bounded by issues of race.

In the CR network frc.org, a political website, was the most central within the network. Political websites within this network are clustered around a particular region. This suggests relative isolation of the political websites within the Christian Right network. Access to political websites from non-political websites is largely mediated through family.org, the website of James Dobson. Family.org is the link which bridges two isolated segments of the network. Through family.org isolated websites can find their shortest path to the political websites within

²⁹ See Chapter 2 for further detail.

the network by moving through three or four hyperlinks. This suggests an important role for family.org. While not the most central website in the network it functions as a gatekeeper mediating access to political content for a majority of the websites.

Bible-prophecy.com was the most central website in the Issue Centric Network. Bible-prophecy.com is a clearinghouse for information on prophecy and current affairs. Importantly, Bible-prophecy.com links to six (Family.org, frankcaw.com, frc.org, icr.org, khouse.org, and prophazine.com) political websites and receives a hyperlink from one (lamblion.com). Here, network members are much more involved (sending and receiving links) with each other than in the Christian Right and Beliefnet networks. This may have resulted from the type of websites present. Both the Christian Right and Beliefnet networks have starting point websites which are personality rather than issue driven and this property may affect linking decisions. Another important characteristic of the Issue Centric network is that political websites are more evenly distributed throughout the network. This reduces the number of steps required to reach political websites from any region in the network; allowing their online audiences easy access to premillennial political information. Here the most isolated websites within the network only need to move through two or three hyperlinks to access political content. Political websites within the Issue Centric network are also more likely to hold more of the policy positions implicit in premillennialism, only the website of the Institution for Creation Research holds no premillennial policies.

The Beliefnet network's most central member is Vatican.ca a non-premillennial and non-political website. While this network includes multiple political websites none of them advocate for an explicitly premillennial policy position. Premillennialism is not a central focus for this network. While there are centrally located and highly connected political websites only one

(aflcio.org) advocates for a premillennial policies³⁰. This is so in spite of the stated premillennial positions of several members of the group (e.g. the Potter's House Church pastured by T.D. Jakes affirms the "personal, premillennial, and imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ (Potter's-House cited October 6, 2008)" and Crefflo Dollar's church similarly expresses belief in the rapture, a key premillennial doctrine (Lugo et al. 2008)). There is a functional disconnect between the premillennial position of some network members and the political websites to which they link. A further difference between this network, the Issue Centric and CR network is seen in the type of political websites present. Governmental institutions are the preferred political hyperlinks in the Beliefnet network while in the Christian Right and Issue Centric networks interest group oriented political websites are preferred.

Network structure and website type are important to determining the political outcome of a given network. The political efficacy of premillennialism on the internet require that network members connect to websites which hold premillennial positions but also that these political websites are highly involved (with many links to and from) and evenly distributed throughout the network so that there are as few step as possible between non-political and political websites. In this respect the political efficacy of premillennialism within the Christian Right network (likely because of its personality driven websites) is diminished when compared to the Issue Centric network. Race may also impose limitations on the political outcome of premillennial doctrine. While premillennialism is affirmed by Beliefnet network members the political preferences associated with this belief are not express in the network. For Beliefnet network members, connecting their online audiences to government institutions and websites for personal development are more important than connecting them to the policy positions of

³⁰ However, support for anti-globalization here is likely not a result of premillennial considerations but rather fear of job loss.

premillennialism. Understanding the political potential of premillennialism on the internet is then dependent on understanding the structural and social limitations which may obstruct the path from theology to policy.

Attempting to capture political attitudes on the World Wide Web is a somewhat slippery endeavor. The internet is neither a static entity nor immune to exogenous shock. Rather, the internet as a medium is reflective of public opinion, more generally ebbing and flowing with changes in the public sentiment. Consequently, the attitudes exhibited are fluid, changing daily, in ways that may impact analysis.³¹ However, this artifact does point to an important methodological consideration when examining the internet as a political medium. It is likely that a time-series, rather than a snap-shot approach, may be preferable when examining the political attitudes of various groups as expressed in this medium. Future research will include a monthly analysis of the network produced by the starting points and average measures of premillennial policies will be taken.

Conclusion

Premillennialism is an important and popularly pervasive theological concept. This theological notion can be understood as political and has important implications for understanding conservative Christians in American politics. The notion of theology as the root source of political attitudes and behaviors has been an area greatly underexplored by political scientists. Much work must be done to understand how theology in general and premillennialism in particular could inspire political outcomes. Further normative questions surrounding the history of premillennialism, the structure of this doctrine, and a more detailed formulation of the

³¹ For example, approximately ten of the one hundred websites generated using the keyword search “Antichrist”, because of time at which the search was executed, discussed Britney Spears’ rehab breakdown where she called herself the Antichrist.

political logic of modern day premillennialism have yet to be undertaken. Ethnographic analysis of elites in mass media settings (television and radio) will also enrich our understanding of how this theology is framed as political.

Additionally, this area requires further empirical testing to ascertain the full impact of this theology on politics. This would include testing 1) Christian laity for eschatological knowledge and preference for the policies in keeping with premillennialism, 2) the salience of this theology in their decision-making through experimental social psychology and 3) undertaking a case study analysis among premillennial fiction readers. These are necessary steps to gaining a richer understanding of the politics of the rapture.

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