

Extended-family values fuel Christian right, author says

James Ault's new film and book explore political clout of fundamentalism

BY ANN BYLE

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GRAND RAPIDS — James Ault knows the conservative

Now, almost 20 years later, his companion volume to the film, still used in seminaries, has been released. "Spirit and Flesh: Life in a Fundamentalist Baptist Church" (Knopf, \$27.95) records Ault's observations of the time he spent at Shawmut River Baptist Church in Massachusetts, also the subject of the film.

"Once the film was out, and I saw the reaction to it and

"I knew I had to finish the book."

He said his goal for both was to address misinterpretations of Christian fundamentalism. Even now, liberal intelligentsia are perplexed by the fast-growing, deep-rooted conservatism that helped elect Ronald Reagan, George Bush and now George W. Bush to the presidency, he said.

Ault said extended-family

conservative population.

When those extended-family ties are severed, people look for them again in fundamentalist churches, which grow and then express their political clout in the voting booths, he said.

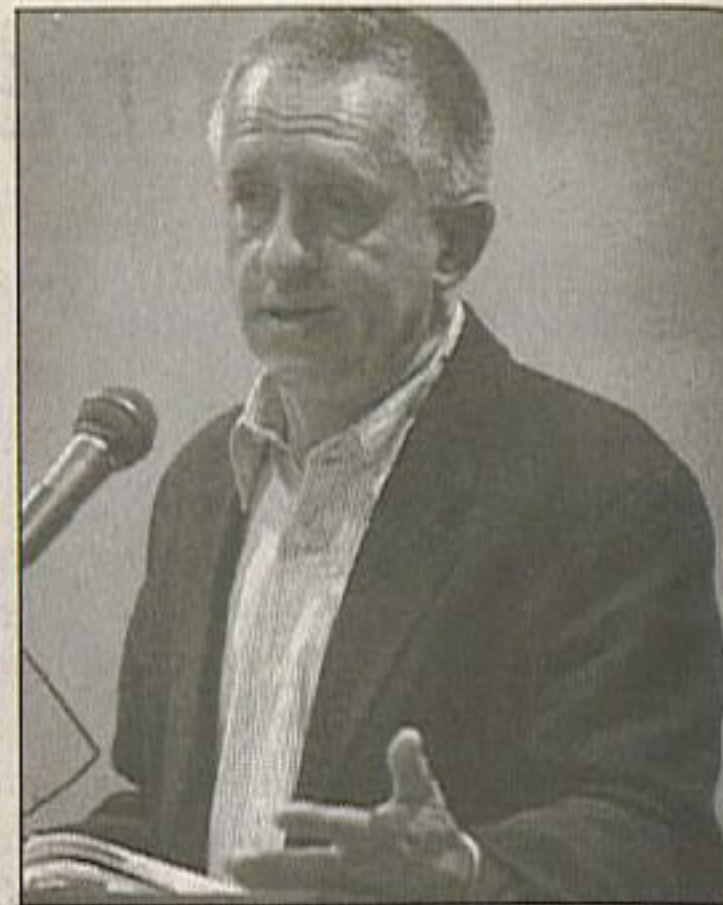
"This is uncommon in New-Left academia," he said.

"It doesn't act like an extended family. It's all a puzzle to liberals."

to speak to their needs and their interests, which are embedded in their stances on issues such as abortion and gay marriage," he said.

Ault, who said he began his study as a member of that liberal intelligentsia, learned some surprising things.

"I learned that God is there and that He loves me," he said. "I came back to faith myself. The church made manifest the



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