

## Born Again

### How has Evangelical Protestantism changed since World War II?

#### I. Modern and “Born Again”

- A. Modernists believed that fundamentals would die out, cf. Scopes Trial
  - 1. Fundamentalism did not wane as much as pass from public view
  - 2. then immerse with more open attitude toward modernity
  - 3. self perception of rigidity, strictness but actually quite adaptable
- B. Fluid definition as 1/3 of Americans say they are “Born Again” but as high as 48%

#### II. Geographic Mobility creates national evangelical culture

- A. Initially regional in South and Midwest
- B. follows migrants to California in 20s/30s
  - 1. Great Depression “Oakies” and “Arkies”
  - 2. from marginal to important voter block
  - 3. impact of “sunny” California on theology and lifestyle
    - a. highest percentage Alabama but largest number is CA
    - b. movement eastward to Colorado, cheaper and available land
    - c. importance in Prop 8
    - d. Colorado Springs as “Vatican” of Evangelicals
- C. beginning in 1970 more education and mobility
  - 1. now same as general culture
  - 2. “mainstream” middle-class
  - 3. in the world but not of it

#### III. Creation of a “Christian” identity

- A. Recap: separate culture, anti-modern world’s entertainment
  - 1. self-title: Christian but many others call themselves Christians but do not have this identity
- B. **Jesus Movement**, “Jesus Freaks” of 60s and 70s
  - 1. search for higher experiences, more than “corporation man”

- a. Christian Hippies—youth movement
  - b. looking for something real, more intense, not fake
  - c. importance of individualism
  - d. contra “Parent Protestants”
2. motivating conversion through ideas that connect with youth
    - a. Baby boom generation as key demographic group
  3. Christianity is not a denomination practiced on Sunday but a whole life style
    - a. God has a blueprint for my life (Jerry Falwell)
  4. Intense use of popular culture—books, art, jewelry, music, media
    - a. You are what you: read, buy, wear, listen to
    - a) Christians do not have to reject modern culture—can make movies, wear makeup, have stuff, have big houses and drive big cars

**C. Identity politics:**

1. 60s/70s importance of minority cultures
  - a. Black Pride, Red Power, Gay Rights, Women’s movement
  - b. “Christian” becomes more than a denomination but a specific identity
2. both alarmed by values, multicultural 60s and inspired by it
  - a. Christians as persecuted minority in secular nation, an embattled subculture
  - b. oppressed by “dominate” culture: media, public schools, government, denominations

**D. Non-denominational churches**

1. historical denominations no longer important
  - a. name place churches: “Willow Grove Church”
  - b. Bible name: “New Vineyard Church”
  - c. Stress on like-minded, community
  - d. [www.therockSanDiego.com](http://www.therockSanDiego.com)

- i. Miles McPherson, 50 year old former NFL football player; sex-drugs conversion 1984; Youthwork, MDiv 1991
    - ii. Church built 2000 by 2007 12,000 people per weekend
    - iii. The “Do Something” church
- 2. theology and history of little interest to church-goers
  - a. Bible as interpretive guide
  - b. Community in a mobile society
  - c. matching social and cultural needs
  - d. Churches adapting to people not other way around
- 3. service-oriented churches, mega churches
  - a. large, gym-like, not “traditional”, high tech
  - b. Americans like to do things
  - c. schools, youth groups, men’s prayer groups, fitness activities
  - d. missionary activities
- 4. Prosperity gospel
  - a. Life in Christ brings benefits in this life
  - b. Rightful inheritance
  - c. Controversial among many Protestants

#### IV. Direct involvement with politics

##### A. Intro

- 1. Recap: Premillennial isolationism
  - a. why engage in politics if world is ending or doomed?
  - b. fundamentally world is evil
- 2. Political engagement that put them “on the map” for non-evangelicals

##### B. Historical changes

- 1. Communism
  - a. Godlessness of Russia/China versus God fearing US
    - i. 1954 adding “under God” to pledge
    - ii. Not only evangelicals but also other Protestants and especially Catholics

2. Civil Rights movement
    - a. Previously, religion private not discussed—cf. JFK
    - b. religious vision as basis for social change
    - c. traditionally liberal but 20<sup>th</sup> century conservative
    - d. other groups less focused on “evils”
- C. Election of southern Democrat, **Jimmy Carter**, 1976
1. active layman in Baptist church, used term “Born-Again” Christian
    - a. general ignorance of media of time
  2. evangelical but not politically conservative
    - a. intimate relationship with Jesus in 1967
    - b. calling evangelicals to work for better world within politics
    - c. political outsider, humble man—carried his own luggage, mended his clothes on the presidential plane, walked for inauguration, called for Americans to be frugal, be stewards of the earth, reject pride—God judges America
    - d. aligned with southern African Americans from MLK legacy
    - e. Democratic candidate elected—pro ERA, more concerned with ecology than with abortion,
- D. Establishing the “**Christian Right**”
1. “New” evangelicals: religion has a role in politics, but not Carter’s kind
  2. reject of Carter by conservative evangelists who were developing a different political agenda—telling people to engage with social issues of the day
  3. Conservative worries
    - a. Supreme Court decisions on prayer in school (1965)
    - b. Upheavels of social relations: in race, gender, age
    - c. Equal Rights Amendment, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” Passed in 1972 by both houses, needed to be ratified by state, fails
      - i. Eagle Forum 1972

4. **Moral Majority, Inc** Organization founded 1979
  - a. Rejection of Baptist separation of church and state
  - b. In 1976 **Jerry Falwell** from Baptist church in Virginia, traveling and promoting his message, establishing chapters—"I Love America" rallies
  - c. Politically savvy: fund raising, letter writing, voter registration and education
  - d. Roe v. Wade, 1973—anti-abortion
    - i. Catholic issue until 1970s when Christian Right become involved
  - e. Issues: Anti-gay rights, anti pornography, suggestive rock music, sex and violence on TV
  - f. Pro-strong military, school prayer, Creationism taught in schools

#### E. Presidential politics and the religious right

1. Election of Ronald Reagan, 1980
  - a. Not church-goer (divorced, remarried), but politically astute
    - i. Raised by Protestant mother who sent to Sunday school and attended Eureka College, Disciples of Christ; father was RC but alcoholic
    - ii. Attended Bel Air Presbyterian church
  - b. By 1979 knew he shared with evangelicals a vision of America—God-ordained greatness, optimistic, hopeful, pro-family, anti-abortion, pro-Israel, anti-communism
  - c. Regan Republicans—southern evangelicals, Midwestern Protestants who used to be Democrats
2. Election of George W. Bush
  - a. Family genteel Protestants, Episcopalians
  - b. Conversion experience connected with alcoholism
  - c. Iowa debate: Jesus was his favorite philosopher
  - d. Billy Graham endorses for president in 2000

- e. Won White House with 83% of evangelical vote, without Catholic vote which had never been done
  - f. Conviction of right with no shades of grey—his religion supports his politics and his personality
3. VP Candidate Sarah Palin
- a. As infant baptized Catholic but family converts
  - b. Wasilla Assembly of God Church until 2002 (Pentecostal)
  - c. Wasilla Bible Church (nondenominational)
  - d. “Bible believing Christian”
  - e. model for many Evangelical women: pretty and feisty
- F. The “new evangelicals”
1. Youth vote: different issues from Baby Boom parents
  2. Retreat from direct involvement with party politics
    - a. Things didn’t change
  3. Distracted from cultivating relationship with Jesus
    - a. Evangelicals now do not want to be defined as the Republican Party at prayer
    - b. Faith loses independence when it is too closely aligned with one political party
  4. Concern about other issues:
    - a. National Association of Evangelicals position paper “For the Health of the Nation”
    - b. Seven areas: not only to safeguard the sanctity of life and to nurture families but also to seek justice for the poor, protect human rights, work for peace, and preserve God’s creation
    - c. Worldwide: move to eliminate poverty, disease, illiteracy
      - i. Always there but overshadowed by right to life agenda
  5. Influence of younger evangelical leaders (Rick Warren, Tony Campolo) replacing older ones
    - a. Government should not be used to influence private morality
    - b. Rejection of angry intolerance of the religious right

## V. Realigning of the roles of women

### A. Recap: patriarchal authority:

1. women's submissiveness to their husbands,
  - a. being silent in church, no authority over men
2. **conditional patriarchy**—you might be pastor but we are the church

### B. **Christian Feminism**

1. feminist movement of the early 1970s
  - a. impact on all religions even if religious people did not like to admit
  - b. discovering women's activities within religion history
  - c. giving women recognition for what they do
  - d. recognizing the importance of wives of pastors
  - e. women as preachers,
  - f. women forming prayer groups, studying in seminaries (if not ordained)
2. importance of women in grassroots social movements
  - a. "foot soldiers" who write letters, organize protests, arrange for voter registration
  - b. Still not well-known leaders (Phyllis Schaffly, for instance is Catholic)
3. softening of criticism of women's roles outside home
  - a. no condemning on birth control, number in family, divorce, women's clothing, women working outside the home
  - b. women getting education, dropped "no brain" stuff
  - c. acceptance of changing gender roles
    - i. man's helper not servant or doormat, boys not free from domestic work
  - d. insisting men be good fathers, not merely work
  - e. push to re-establish men in female-dominate congregational life
4. sex is good and women deserve a good life
  - a. Marabel Morgan, *Total Woman* (1973)

## **Conclusion**

- 1) Major changes in conservative Protestantism from more rigid before WWII to more socially open and culturally flexible
- 2) Community in a mobile society—not separating from culture
- 3) Adaptation of “liberal” movements such as women’s rights
- 4) More visibility as political forces, especially with evangelical Pres. Bush
  - a. Importance of South with various religions—Carter, Clinton, Bush
  - b. Criticism by “new evangelicals”
- 5) Importance of youth for defining religious style