

Lecture 8

Born Again

What was the conservative response to changing Protestantism?

I. Introduction:

- A. Tradition with a twist
 - 1. response to modern changes
 - 2. not merely reactionary, creative and innovative
 - 3. and often more “modern” than modernists
- B. Note on Terminology
 - 1. Evangelical—various meanings of the word at different times
 - 2. **Evangelical church** (not Catholics): relating to “good news” of the gospels, stress on the biblical message rather than the sacramental. The term originates in the Greek word *evangelion*, meaning “the good news,” or, more commonly, the “gospel.” During the Reformation, Martin Luther adapted the term, dubbing his breakaway movement the *evangelische kirche*, or “evangelical church”—a name still generally applied to the Lutheran Church in Germany, and American Lutheran church (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America).
 - 3. **Evangelical Protestantism** (not high church Episcopalians): those Protestant churches that stress the “good news” of the Bible as developed in the revival based Protestant denominations of 18th and 19th century America.
 - a. Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists
 - b. “mainstream” Protestants (up until early 20th century)
 - 4. Rejection of modernists movements, modernists moving away
 - a. **Evangelicals**, Evangelicalism (not liberal Protestants). Protestants that have conservative theological beliefs that stress the importance of the Bible and moral righteousness.
 - i. “Evangelicals,” “Born Again Christians,” “Christians”
 - ii. non-denominational
 - 5. **Fundamentalism** (fundamentalists)—conservative movement *within* evangelical Protestantism
 - a. expressed in pamphlet *The Fundamentals* (1912)
 - b. conflicts among Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists
 - 6. Individual ministers gather believers in separate congregations
 - a. tensions high as groups divide
 - b. some denominations more evident Southern Baptists
 - c. nondenominational churches—no connections to national organizations or past history
 - i. name place churches: “Willow Grove Church”
 - ii. Bible name: “New Vineyard Church”
 - iii. Stress on like-minded, community

- II. Core beliefs--pre and post World War II differences—harsher before
 - A. goal is personal salvation and eternal life in heaven
 - B. strict and literal belief in the authority of the Bible
 - 1. if not literal than very serious
 - 2. modern importance of “facts” (as opposed to allegory popular in Middle Ages)
 - 3. science is in harmony with biblical narrative, creationism
 - 4. **Scopes Trial** (1926)
 - 5. supernaturalism
 - a. Virgin birth, reality of devil, angels, heaven and hell (from *The Fundamentals*)
 - 6. God directs everything in life
 - a. morality, natural order, roles of men and women
 - C. separation from modern culture, change is problematic
 - 1. established missionaries, schools, bible colleges, radio stations
 - a. no dancing, drinking, movies, short skirts, make-up
 - b. rigid roles for men and women
 - c. own sub-cultures
 - d. poor and working class, not well educated
 - 2. not concerned with government, other-worldly, “spiritual”
 - a. regulate individual not society
 - b. would have voted Democratic
 - D. Variations
 - 1. Christ will return soon to set up his Kingdom on earth
 - a. separates fundamentalists from evangelicals
 - 2. Gifts of the Holy Spirit --Pentecostalism

“Seven weeks had gone by since Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the Day of Pentecost had now arrived. As the believers met together that day, suddenly there was a sound like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them and it filled the house where they were meeting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on their heads. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other tongues, for the Holy Spirit gave them the ability.” Acts 2: 1-4

From a Los Angeles Newspaper (Sept. 1906):

Disgraceful intermingling of the races, they cry and make howling noises all day and into the night. They run, jump, shake all over, shout to the top of their voice, spin around in circles, fall out on the sawdust blanketed floor jerking, kicking and rolling all over it. Some of them pass out and do not move for hours as though they were dead. These people appear to be mad, mentally deranged or under a spell. They claim to be filled with the spirit. They have a one-eyed, illiterate, Negro as their preacher who stays on his knees much of the time with his head hidden between the wooden milk crates. He doesn’t talk very much but at times he can be heard shouting “Repent,” and he’s supposed to be running the thing. . . They repeatedly sing the same son, “The Comforter Has come.”

- a. **Glossolalia** (speaking in tongues) and interpreting
- b. Faith healing (and the belief that faith can sustain health)

- c. prophecy
 - d. importance of the supernatural in everyday life
 - e. miracles, healings, visions, demons and angels
- 3. initially multi-racial then segregate into denominations
 - a. Church of God in Christ
 - b. Assemblies of God
 - c. Large number of non-denominational churches
- 4. The vitality of worship
 - a. Contemporary music
 - b. theatrical preaching
- 5. conservative life style:
 - a. no movies, drinking, makeup, modest dress, pious life, anti-worldly education
 - b. Changes in 1970s
- E. spiritual empowering of lower and working class, African Americans

III. 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
- B. Initially regional in South and Midwest
 - 1. follows migrants to California in 20s/30s
 - 2. beginning in 1970 more education and mobility
 - 3. now same as general culture
- C. Moral Majority
 - 1. rise with election of Carter (see readings)
 - 2. Civil Rights movement—religion can be used to change policy
- D. Jesus Movement, “Jesus Freaks” of 60s and 70s
 - 1. search for higher experiences, more than “corporation man”
 - a. looking for something real, more intense, not fake
 - b. importance of individualism
 - 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, media
 - a) Christians not have to reject modern culture—can make movies, wear makeup, have stuff, have big houses and drive big cars
 - 5. Identity politics: Black, Chicano, “Christian”
 - a. Christians as persecuted minority in secular nation
 - b. oppressed by “dominate” culture: media, public schools, government, denominations
- E. Quiet feminists
 - 1. patriarchal authority: women’s submissiveness to their husbands, being silent in church, no authority over men -- loosening
 - a. women are not second class citizen

2. conditional patriarchy—you might be pastor but we are the church
 - a. feminist movement giving women power over how they are treated, they too can change churches
 3. Family values
 - a. “antis”: abortion, homosexual marriage, no prayer in school
 - i. Identity issues but not daily struggle
 - b. But avoid issues that directly effect member women’s daily lives
 - c. no condemning on birth control, number in family, divorce, women’s clothing, women working outside the home
 - d. women getting education, dropped “no brain” stuff
 - e. organizing political activities (as before)
 4. women and faith
 - a. women recognizing important women in Bible and Christian history
 - b. women forming prayer groups, studying in seminaries (if not ordained),
 - c. having voice in church affairs—asserting themselves
 - d. appearing in Christian movies and books (cf. Left Behind)
 5. domestic life shared with men
 - a. acceptance of changing gender roles
 - b. man’s helper not servant or doormat, boys not free from domestic work
 - c. insisting men be good fathers, not merely work
 - d. Marabel Morgan—sex is good and women deserve a good life
 6. push to re-establish men in female-dominate congregational life
 - a. men as heads of committees
 - b. women happy to let men take over some of the work
- F. Church life
2. historical denominations no longer as important
 3. many different types and styles
 - a) biblical literalists do not produce consensus on worship
 - b) from no instrumental music and only words of psalms to electric guitars and praise music
 4. theology and history of little interest to church-goers
 - a) Bible as interpretive guide
 - b) matching social and cultural needs
 - c) Churches adapting to people not other way around
 5. focus on good preaching, singing everyone can do with modern instruments
 6. plain churches that look like basketball gymnasiums
 7. service-oriented churches
 - a) schools, youth groups, men’s prayer groups, fitness activities

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

- 5) Over-stated political importance, still communal and spiritual functions for most Americans who are not, as a whole, interested in politics