

Week Fourteen Handout

“Christian History in America: Visions, Realities, and Turning Points”

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Class 14: The Rise of the Religious Right and Review

Class 14 Goals

Understand the factors that led to the growth of the Religious Right in the 1970s and 1980s.
Evaluate the legacy of the renewed political engagement of Evangelicals and Fundamentalists.
Explore other trends in American Christian History from 1970 to the present.
Review major themes and ideas of the course.

Opening Questions

What issues or factors encouraged the Christian Right to emerge as a major force in modern American politics?
What lessons can the church learn from the experience of the Christian Right?

The Example of Francis Schaeffer

Early life: typical Fundamentalist – active Evangelism and Militant defense of the faith against theological liberalism.

Mid career: 1948 to 1970s ran a very effective outreach to college students *L'Abri* in Switzerland.

Encouraged engagement with art, music, ideas, Western philosophy.
Ministry of hospitality with his wife Edith had tremendous impact.

Schaeffer's Later Ministry

After returning the US in late 1970s Schaeffer reemerged as a fundamentalist and political activist.

Attempted to divide “true evangelicals” from liberals by insisting on Biblical inerrancy.
Began fighting to get Christians involved in anti-abortion politics and reaffirming America as a “Christian Nation.”

Feuded publicly with Mark Noll over the Christian origins of the nation.

According to his biographer “Powerfully seductive force tempt American evangelicals to interpret their faith through an American lens.”

Schaeffer's Legacy

“Being outside America freed Schaeffer to do his broadest work, for it was in Europe after the formation of *L'Abri* that he worried about neither where the Christian faith stood in relationship with American politics and patriotism nor about who was in and who was out of evangelicalism. Rather, he was liberated for the task of constructing a coherent Christian world view.”

The enduring lesson of his life is “to follow his example of how to bear witness to Christ within a particular time and place.”

How to Interpret a Changing America?

Growing Government programs in Great Society

New Commitment to Civil Rights

Vietnam

The Rise of the Counterculture

Watergate

Emerging Women’s Movement – the push for the ERA and the STOP ERA forces Phyllis

Schlaflly

Liberalization of attitudes and laws concerning sex and birth control.

The Year of the Evangelical

1976 – Jimmy Carter pledges to renew the country’s moral heritage and never lie to them.

Declared himself to be “Born Again”

Attracts the support of many southern Evangelicals and Fundamentalists

Traditional Baptist concern for “Separation of Church and State”, poor economic performance, and foreign policy challenges cause many evangelicals to abandon him.

Key Court Decisions

1960s – School Prayer, Bible Reading, Teaching Evolution

1971 *Green v. Connally* - Upheld an IRS ruling that stripped tax exempt status from non-profits that practiced racial discrimination.

The Ford and Carter administrations began applying this decision to Bob Jones University.

Many Christians interpreted this as an attack on their sub culture.

Paul Weyrich and others convinced Christians to mobilize against government interference

Motivation – Preserve the Evangelical sub-culture against the government? Preserve the practice of racial segregation in Christian higher education?

Roe v. Wade

1973 *Roe v. Wade* – Legalized abortion throughout the United States

Catholic Church was swift in condemnation.

Evangelicals split at first with much initial approval.

Francis Schaeffer and Jerry Falwell begin to mobilize Christian response in 1979

SBC Convention in 1971, 1974, 1976

“We call upon Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother.”

Christian Right Rhetoric

Jerry Falwell - "We are born into a war zone where the forces of God do battle with the forces of evil."

Beverly LaHaye - "If we are truly committed to Jesus Christ we have no other alternative but to wage warfare against those who would destroy our children, our families, our religious liberties."

Political Goals of the Religious Right

- Overtake *Roe v. Wade*

- Preserve the "traditional family"

- Block greater rights or recognition for homosexuals

 - Overtake liberalized divorce laws?

 - Why are the key moral concerns of the Christian Right issues that don't apply to straight white men?

- Support the goals of other parts of the conservative movement

 - Low taxes, strong defense, decreased government regulation of the economy.

 - (Cultural or Biblical?)

Political Successes

- Election of Ronald Reagan - 1980, 1984

- Increased influence in local governments - school boards etc.

- Increase of Religious voices in Congress and on the Supreme Court

- Election of George W. Bush - 2000, 2004

- Reinvigoration of religious voices in politics, from both the left and the right.

Legacies

- Failure to accomplish most important political goals.

- Distraction from the work of Evangelism, Missions, and work on behalf of the other significant causes.

- Damaged the public perception of Evangelicals.

- Creation of a younger generation that is suspicious of both politics and the church.

- Brought religion back into the public debate.

- Encouraged Democrats to be more open to religious constituencies.

Rise of "New Evangelicals"

- Embrace of a broader range of political issues

- Creation Care - Environmental Concerns

- Work on AIDS in Africa and Elsewhere

- Special Concern for Poverty

- Includes Rick Warren and many others.

Evangelicals for Social Action

- Key Leader Ron Sider

- Nine Key Principles - Can my Vote be Biblical - 1980

 - The Family is a divinely-willed institution.

Every human life is sacred.
Religious and political freedom are God-given, inalienable rights.
God and his obedient people have a very special concern for the poor.
God requires just economic patterns in society.
God requires Christians to be Peace Makers
The Creator requires stewardship of the earth's resources.
Sin is both personal and social.
Personal integrity is vital.

Other Contemporary Trends

Vast expansion of the public role of women in churches
Dramatic increase of Latino population and Latino churches.
Further embrace of new technologies to spread the Gospel.
Growth of further religious diversity in the United States
Evangelicals as "Embattled but Thriving"
Continued questions of how to remain faithful in the face of changing cultural norms.
Remaining faithful and compassionate in an era of diminishing economic expectations, declining American international power and influence, and growing environmental challenges.

For Table Discussion

What are the major "lessons" or themes that you have learned about in this course that can be applied in the world today?

Key Themes and Ideas

"I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"

---Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue*

Religion was an important motivating factor for many moving to the New World.

There has always been great religious diversity in America and it has only increased over time.

Religious freedom has been an important ideal and has helped ease tension among different religious groups.

Periodic Revivals

Revival has been an important tool in reawakening and revitalizing churches.

Revivals often have the greatest impact among the marginal, poor, and racial minorities.

Revivals have brought about lasting change in people's lives, the building of institutions, and societal changes.

Revivals have sometimes spawned new religious movements that drifted away from historical orthodoxy

Five Religious Ideas of the Revolution

(Shared by Deists and Evangelicals)

The Disestablishment of State Churches

The Doctrine of Equality by Creation

A belief in human sinfulness or corruptibility that mandated checks and balances to prevent tyranny

Republics are maintained by virtuous citizens

God or (Providence) works through nations to achieve His purposes

American Temptations

Seeing ourselves as the “new Israel.”

Confusion between the goals of the Kingdom of Heaven and the United States of America.

Blindness to the legal and economic claims of those who were seen as “other.”

Racism, slavery, and white supremacy.

Prosperity Gospel

Seeking political solutions to spiritual or cultural problems.

Seeking power to impose Christianity or Christian values.

American Contributions

Preserved vibrant Christianity through the transition to modernity.

Developed an enduring democracy with a diverse religious population.

Provided money and volunteers for world evangelization.

Incorporated the strengths from many different Christian traditions.

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