

Lydia Bean *The politics of evangelical identity: Local churches and partisan divides in the US and Canada* (Princeton UP, 2014) (see my review [here](#))

Lydia Bean researched this brilliant ethnographic study for her Harvard sociology doctorate. She shows how the Religious Right plays out at the grassroots level, within congregations, as a religious nationalist identity movement.

John Fea *Believe me: the evangelical road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2018)

John Fea is Professor of History at Messiah University, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. He addresses the historical and political roots of the Religious Right. He describes it in a short interview with the Vox journalist Tara Isabella Burton [here](#).

Frances Fitzgerald *The Evangelicals: the struggle to shape America* (NY, Simon & Schuster, 2017)

Frances Fitzgerald is a leading American journalist. This Pulitzer prize-winning history, based on years of detailed research, is essential reading to understand the roots of modern US evangelicalism and its political and cultural impact.

D. G. Hart *From Billy Graham to Sarah Palin: Evangelicals and the Betrayal of American Conservatism* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2011) (see my review [here](#))

Darryl Hart is Distinguished Associate Professor of History at Hillsdale College, Michigan. He is a leading Presbyterian church historian, a leading expert on H. L. Mencken and himself a witty and entertaining writer. As the title suggests, the book is a critique of the Religious Right from the viewpoint of conservative Christianity, against which the evangelical Right (and Left) are radical insurgencies promoting high spending and an imperialistic stance internationally. A good source on the Weyrich-Falwell deal which gave birth to the Religious right in the 1970s.

Chris Hedges *American Fascists: the Christian right and the war on America* (London, Cape, 2007)

Chris Hedges is an American journalist and academic. This is, as the title suggests, highly partisan even by the usual standards of this list. Even so it is a well-informed exploration of the links between the key Religious Right ideas and fascism.

Jerome L. Himmelstein *To the Right: the transformation of American conservatism* (University of California Press, 1989) available on-line [here](#)

Jerome Himmelstein is Professor of Sociology at Amherst College, Massachusetts. This outstanding study covers the formation of the conservative political movement known as the 'New Right' and its development of the 'Religious Right' to take control of the Republican Party.

Kristin Kobes du Mez *Jesus and John Wayne: How white evangelicals corrupted a faith and fractured a nation* (NY, Liveright, 2020)

Kristin Kobes du Mez is Professor of History at Calvin University, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a specialist in gender studies. She considers one key strand in the Religious Right: its promotion and support of heavily defined gender roles and a religious culture that harnesses and satisfies masculine physical drive.

Mark Lilla *The once and future liberal: After identity politics* (NY, Harper, 2017)

Mark Lilla is professor of Humanities at Columbia university, NY. He explains the failure of modern 'liberalism' to address the challenges of the Right. Liberalism has been taken over by

¹ Why do I use the term 'Religious Right'? See note at end.

‘identity politics’ which sees society as fractured into cultural minorities whose interests are to be separately identified and catered for. The Democratic Party, captive to ‘liberal’ identity politics, fails to offer a narrative to Catholics and evangelicals.

(I am grateful to Dr Dave Landrum, head of Advocacy for Evangelical Alliance UK, for recommending this book during an ongoing conversation about liberalism and post-liberalism).

Michael McVicar *Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American religious conservatism* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2015)

Michael McVicar is Associate Professor of Religion at Florida State University. He has studied the life and work of Roussas John Rushdoony with access to the archive of his private papers. The result is a balanced, and not unsympathetic, portrait of the brilliant and driven figure often considered the intellectual father of the Religious Right. Moulded by his experience as a Presbyterian missionary on a native American reservation, Rushdoony was appalled by the state’s treatment and education of the ‘Indians’. His relentless pressure on his first wife, mother of five children, drove her to breakdown and confinement in an institution, before they divorced. Rushdoony was a major figure in the homeschooling movement (keeping the state out of childrearing) and wrote an immense body of theocratic political theory holding that all law is religious, the modern state is satanic and Christians are to establish congregational government applying Old Testament law including the death penalty for a wide range of offences including promoting false religion. This will be the ‘reconstruction’ of society under the ‘dominion’ of patriarchal families. Rushdoony built a network of passionate followers and was briefly in the team advising Ronald Reagan in the White House. Rushdoony expected the USA to collapse into violence and told his followers to prepare to rebuild society afterwards; but was then appalled when some of his closest and most influential followers, including his son in law Gary North, stored arms in churches in readiness for revolution. His attempts to exercise control within mainstream evangelicalism were resisted by the likes of Billy Graham, and he was considered a ‘crackpot’ by Carl Henry, the editor of Graham’s publication *Christianity Today*. Rushdoony’s role in today’s Right may recall the famous words of Keynes: ‘Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.’ He is however still a present and celebrated figure on the Religious Right: The UK’s Christian Concern cites Rushdoony over 200 times in a lengthy ‘manifesto’ published in 2017. See my review (with notes) of this Manifesto [here](#)

Sarah Posner *Unholy: Why white evangelicals worship at the altar of Donald Trump* (NY, Random House, 2020)

Sarah Posner is an American journalist. The planned title of this book was *Alt-bloc: The Religious Right's Unlikely Union with the Alt-Right, and How It is Changing American Politics*. As this original title suggests, this book investigates and reveals the points of connection between the Religious Right and the extremes of nationalism and fascism.

Mark A. Noll *God and Race in American Politics: A short history* (Princeton UP, 2008)

Mark Noll is now Research Professor of History at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada, following a long and highly distinguished career as a leading church and religious historian. This book is essential reading to understand the relationship between evangelical Christianity, slavery and the post-civil war struggles over black equality. Evangelicalism became the mass religion of the USA as its population grew six-fold after the Revolution (see also Fitzgerald on this period) and its people began to identify themselves as ‘American’ rather than citizens of the various states. But during this period it split north-south over slavery: northern evangelicals demanded that Christians free their slaves, the north complied and the south did not, the black slave population grew in line with whites but now concentrated in the south, the dispute moved

from being a heated debate over the meaning of the Bible to turn into civil war. After the war, the federal ‘radical’ Republican government initially promoted the power of freed slaves but then ‘liberal’ Republicans withdrew the Union Army from the south, leaving the ‘redeemed’ Democrat party in control as the south restored white rule and semi-slavery. How this played out, including how black Christians recalibrated and relaunched the struggle for freedom, is the American story of the last 150 years – evangelicalism is the foundation both of the American dream, and the American nightmare.

Roussas John Rushdoony *The Institutes of biblical law* (Philipsburg NJ, Craig press, 1973)

For more on Rushdoony, see Michael McVicar above. Rushdoony authored around fifty books, but much of this work is repetitive. This book, framed as a political and legal commentary on the Ten Commandments, is Rushdoony’s masterwork.

Francis A Schaeffer *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, Crossway, 1981)

Like Rushdoony, Schaeffer was a Presbyterian missionary and a Calvinist thinker. He is admired for his deeply caring work with vulnerable people damaged by the pressures of modern civilisation: he and his wife founded and ran the L’Abri retreat in the Swiss Alps. He became deeply troubled by the growing incidence of abortion after the Supreme Court legalised it in 1973. He saw this as foreshadowing a state-sponsored, secular-humanist death culture. With Catholic funding, he and his son Frankie (now a prominent critic of his father’s work) made a series of videos offering a comprehensive critique of this culture, promoting an alternative Christian interpretation of all Western art and civilisation. He was a leading advocate of the new Religious Right and its support of President Reagan, and of biblical law as the proper foundation of civil order. Schaeffer was a key influence on the young generation of the 1980s, frequently mentioned by Religious Right politicians in this context.

Footnote: Why do I use the term ‘religious right’?

The ‘Religious right’ is a movement defined by a doctrine that all law is religious in origin and so, if the determining law is not Christian, then the law will become anti-Christian. The role of the state is to promote and sustain Christian domination of society and culture, though in some accounts this may be accompanied by toleration of dissent (Rushdoony and Schaeffer disagreed on that point). The state has limited functions: among other things it should not interfere in the working of the free market. Christians must engage in ‘cultural war’ against rival claims to control of law, the state and social life. This movement is also called ‘Christian Right’ or ‘Christian conservative.’ It differs from ‘conservative’ Christian thought especially in rejecting separation of church and state and encouraging the identification of the gospel with a political cause. Since its central claim is that all law is based on religion, the term ‘Religious Right’ is more appropriate than ‘Christian Right’. It often identifies itself, and its favoured legal model, as ‘Judeo-Christian,’ reflecting the eminence of Old Testament law in Religious Right thought.

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