

The Rise and Fall of the American Christian Empire?
Study Guide Week Three: The Rise of the Religious Right
Pastor Dixon – April 2024

Overview

Famed American pollster George Gallup, Jr., proclaimed 1976 "the Year of the Evangelical." Both major candidates for President (the incumbent Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter) identified as "born again" Christians, along with 34% of Americans. A little more than a generation prior, at the tail end of World War II, there were barely one million Americans represented by the newly-founded National Association of Evangelicals compared with more than 25 million members of the more liberal mainstream Federal Council of Churches, and the fundamentalist organization (American Council of Christian Churches) had only a few thousand members. What happened in those thirty intervening years? From Billy Graham's revival career to Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, evangelicals exercised an enormous influence on American society, culture, and identity in the latter half of the twentieth century. And yet it can be hard for many Christians to talk about evangelicalism with confidence and clarity; it is so pervasive as to be unrecognizable, like water to a fish.

Key Quotes

"The idea that religion and politics don't mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country." -Jerry Falwell (1976)

"I shudder to think where the country would be right now if the religious right had not evolved." -Jerry Falwell (1987)

"Only when Christ comes again will the little white children of Alabama walk hand in hand with little black children." -Billy Graham (1963)

For Further Reflection:

- How does your faith shape your political involvement (or vice versa!), if at all?
- What difference, if any, is there between loving and serving your neighbor and converting your neighbor?

For Further Study:

Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (1988)

Kristin Kobes du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (2020)