



Beyond the Ballot

*Evangelicals in the Political Arena
Post-1970s*

Fear and anger began to rise in the 1960s.

- The Cold War, atomic weapons, and WWII.
- The sexual revolution, feminism, and gay rights
- Removal of prayer from public schools (1963)
- Legalization of abortion (1973)
- Impeachment of President Nixon (1974)

Feeling of urgency to do *something*.

- Graham had called America to repentance throughout the 50s and 60s.
- Moral landslide only continued.

From Saving Souls to Saving America

“I would find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and begin doing anything else—including fighting Communism, or participating in civil-rights reforms”

— Jerry Falwell.

“I’m not political in thinking but spiritual—except that I hope Bible-believing people will be placed in positions of political responsibility”

— Pat Robertson.

From Saving Souls to Saving America

Calls to Repentance → Calls for Activism

- Falwell had a growing radio ministry that aired his sermons. Robertson's *700 Club* was one of the first television ministries.
- The sharp moral landslide of America changed them as it had changed conservative Christians throughout the nation.

From Saving Souls to Saving America

- Pat Robertson
 - After the Watergate Scandal, evangelicals felt more than ever that they needed to be involved in politics.
 - Robertson invited Jimmy Carter to his show. No endorsement, but he expected Carter to fill cabinets positions with Christians.
 - Carter was elected but didn't help.
 - Robertson felt betrayed and became politically active.

From Saving Souls to Saving America

- Jerry Falwell
 - Moral landslide of the nation pushed Falwell to announce an “I Love America” tour.
 - Traveled the nation, used his radio audiences to gather a crowd. Urged them to “bear the burden of revival” and save America.
 - Falwell credited Francis Schaeffer for the turn to activism. The pulpit → patriotic tour (1976) → *Moral Majority* (1979).
 - Schaeffer was one of the few alarmed by *Roe v. Wade* (1972). His documentaries alarmed evangelicals, namely Jerry Falwell.

From Saving Souls to Saving America

Schaeffer's philosophy of co-belligerency

- Christians should unite with non-Christians as allies against a shared enemy.
- Laid the groundwork for what became the Christian Right.
- Theological distinctions had been diminishing by the 1950s. Southern Baptists began to attend events with Pentecostals and Methodists present.
- Moral imperatives had been growing in importance.

“God used pagans to do his work in the Old Testament, so why don’t you use pagans to do your work now?”

— Francis Schaeffer to Jerry Falwell.

“The new political philosophy must be defined by us in moral terms, packaged in non-religious language, and propagated throughout the country by our new coalition.”

— Paul Weyrich, Heritage Foundation.

Married to the Republican Party

The “new coalition” that Weyrich envisioned emerged

- New organizations: Moral Majority, Christian Roundtable, Christian Embassy, Christian Voice.

Moral Majority (1979) founded by Falwell.

- Stated Goal: To organize Christians to fight national sins through politics.
- Supported Ronald Reagan (1980, '84). Though Carter was an evangelical, Reagan made evangelicals feel important. He seemed to take them seriously.

Married to the Republican Party

“[Reagan] ultimately did nothing in terms of our long-term agendas, and especially the issue of human life.”

— Ed Dobson, Moral Majority.

- Robertson and Falwell *loyally* supported Reagan.
- Weyrich explained they received nothing in return except “meaningless access” to the President.
- Moral Majority faded in the late-1980s
- Pat Robertson was so angry at the Republican Party he ran for President (1988).

Married to the Republican Party

The Christian Coalition (1989) founded by Robertson

- Idea was that America can be reclaimed if enough Christians vote. Voter guides, voter drives, etc.
- Directed by Ralph Reed. Severed evangelicalism from all biblical language. Built a “pro-family” coalition.
- Flush with money. Helped elect numerous Republicans.
- The culture wars of the 90s were being lost. America wasn't being reclaimed in any sense.

The Disillusioned and the Determined

Weyrich declared the Right a failure in the late 90s.

“There is virtually nothing to show for an 18-year commitment [to the Republican Party].”

— Gary Bauer, Family Research Council.

Cal Thomas, former VP of the Moral Majority

- Evangelicals “had confused political power with God’s power.”
- The Right had succeeded only in alienating unbelievers.

The Disillusioned and the Determined

James Dobson, Focus on the Family

- New strategy in the late 90s
 - No compromise. An unyielding hardliner who excoriated *Republicans* by name.
 - If Republicans are going to take our money, they owe us.
- Bullying tactics, threatening.
We put you here, and we'll take you out!
- Quoted Scripture, mentioned "God" though kept it vague.

The Disillusioned and the Determined

Initial Success of Dobson's strategy

- President Bush filled vacancies with evangelicals.
- Bush created the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, Reinstated Mexico-City Policy, NDOP, etc.

Failed long-term results

- Political victories, but American culture still sliding.
- Backlash, and rise of an evangelical left (ex: Jim Wallis)

The Disillusioned and the Determined

“We tried to defend the unborn child, the dignity of the family, but it was a holding action... We are awash in evil, and the battle is still to be waged. We are right now in the most discouraging period of that long conflict. Humanly speaking, we can say we have lost all those battles.”

— James Dobson, retirement speech, 2009.

From the Wilderness to the Promised Land

Despair enveloped the Christian Right

- Cal Thomas had rejected the Right in 1998. Masses more rejected it in 2008.
- Christian Right organizations suffered financially. Less money, less activism, less excitement, less hope.
- Christian Left emerged. Some had been with the Right, but believed abortion wasn't the only issue in the Bible.

From the Wilderness to the Promised Land

The Right became energized in 2015

- Coalesced around an unlikely candidate, Donald Trump.
- Conservative evangelicals voted for Trump (81%).
A higher percentage than Bush or Reagan ever received.
- Franklin Graham, Jerry Falwell, Jr., Pat Robertson, and countless pastors publicly endorsed Trump.
- Conservative evangelicals have identified themselves not primarily with Christ but with another political leader.

From the Wilderness to the Promised Land

“Evangelicals have finally found their dream president.”

— Jerry Falwell, Jr.

“[I believe this] says something about the current quality of evangelical dreams.”

— Michael Gerson, advisor to President Bush.