

Christians Need to Rise Up and Fight Before It's Too Late

Evangelicalism historically has always been embroiled in political and social movements in the West. Because of the effective reach church leaders have in reaching the masses in past history, politicians take particular interest in the church during political campaigns. Donald Trump's new found interest in evangelicalism, then, makes historical sense. Winning over evangelicals could translate into votes. In fact, in the post-Nixon era evangelicals were very useful tools in the growth of the GOP as some Christian leaders unintentionally sold out the mission of the church to win a "culture war."

In the wake of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, evangelical figures like Harold O. J. Brown, Francis Schaeffer, and C. Everett Koop, joined forces in the mid-1970s to call evangelicals to fight against the proliferation of abortion. Matthew Miller does a wonderful job of explaining how these men woke evangelicals up to an issue that Catholics were already fighting against.

In 1975, Brown and Koop launched The Christian Action Council which became the first major evangelical lobbying organization on Capitol Hill. In 1976, Francis Schaeffer's film and lecture tour, *How Shall We Then Live*, served to awaken many evangelicals to the decline of Western culture on issues like abortion, materialism, secularism, the influence of evolution in public schools, the increasing coercion of government power and so on.

Under the leadership of Brown, Schaeffer, and Koop, evangelicals officially launched their first offensive in the

culture war as the pro-life movement recruited more crusaders. In the years that followed, the second generation of evangelical culture warriors were deployed. Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, D. James Kennedy, James Dobson and so on, established a solid pro-life movement. These leaders would be key figures in the formation of the Moral Majority movement of the 1980s which enlisted Christians in the culture war about traditional family values, abortion, prayer in schools, among others.

Because of well-publicized evangelical disappointment with the theology and politics of President Jimmy Carter, the Republican Party tapped leaders of the Moral Majority to form an alliance with the GOP to restore American values with the nomination of Ronald Reagan as the 40th president of the United States. As a result, evangelical leaders were given unprecedented access to the halls of political power in the White House and Congress.

By the end of the Reagan era, however, the Moral Majority began to dissolve but by then it was clear that being an evangelical in America's suburbs was synonymous with being a Republican. In the leadership vacuum, culture war crusading became a spiritual discipline and Republican politicians gained more and more influence in America's evangelical expression.

In the 1990s, with no conservative in the White House, and with the moral failings of Republican politicians, many evangelicals went from aligning themselves with politicians to media personalities in the conservative movement. On July 10th, 1990, Pat Robertson interviewed Rush Limbaugh expanding his voice into new Christian spaces. Limbaugh lamented that "we in the midst of the culture war" and there were seen conservative pundits began to take the lead in ways that made it likely that many evangelicals could more easily quote from Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck than they could from their own pastor's Sunday sermons.

Why does this matter? First, the mix of faith and politics is hemorrhaging evangelicals of young people. According to a Barna Study, 50 percent of millennials found their own faith “too involved in politics.” Young Christians want something else to identify their faith with rather than it being a platform for the Republican party or any political ideology.

Second, America in 2016 is very post-Christian and pluralistic which means that evangelicals are now the moral minority. As the moral minority, it calls into question whether or not cozying up to the Republican Party, or any party, is the most effective way to champion the causes of public virtue, justice and morality in American life. Perhaps the most effective influence is to expand beyond politics to the local spheres where we interact with the friends, co-workers and neighbors who are the very people Christians are called to love.

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