

AMERICAN PROPHETS BY JACK JENKINS
SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3: WHEN GOD CHOOSES A LEADER
The Religious Right, Christian Nationalism, and Donald Trump

(December 2015, Russell Moore, head of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention (CBC), the largest Protestant Christian denomination in the U.S. who had outed himself as a stalwart opponent of then Republican candidate, Donald Trump was watching the businessman's appearance at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA. "Liberty president, Jerry Falwell, Jr., was invoking holy scripture while introducing 'The Donald,' 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'" (Moore's response) 'Absolutely unbelievable...Trading in the gospel of Jesus Christ for political power is not liberty but slavery.' "To outsiders, that line sounded strange coming from Moore, the political face of the Religious Right, (which) locates its most loyal supporters among particularly *white* evangelical Protestants who have spent decades fusing faith and politics in their tenacious pursuit of a conservative legislative agenda. Moore published multiple editorials in the NY Times and the Washington Post pleading with his fellow evangelicals to 'count the cost of following Donald Trump' arguing that 'to back Mr. Trump these voters must repudiate everything they believe.'"

"Trump spoke directly to the evangelical quest for power and influence...to secure a robust, reliable voting bloc, even if that bloc didn't necessarily embody the values it professed. It was a smart political play on Trump's part...but the short-term gain for Trump may have important long-term side effects for evangelicalism itself; it may have fractured part of the GOP's evangelical base by creating a vacuum of moral authority for anyone who didn't resonate with Trump's nationalistic politics, giving the modern Religious Left the opportunity of a generation.

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT TRUMP-STYLE

"Trump remixed and set to repeat two older religious trends in his campaign: Christian nationalism and the prosperity gospel":

- "In the early 20th century it was liberal Christianity that was ascendant in American politics. The Social Gospel movement described the unsavory aspects of the Industrial Revolution...child labor, a destitute working class, and more-as forms of "social sin" instead of personal moral failings. ...(It) is credited with helping fuel the labor movement, the broader progressive movement, and the passage of the New Deal."
- "A coalition of business leaders (fielded) their own God squad, known as the Spiritual Mobilization movement (preaching) a combination of nationalist fervor, faith, and a strong belief that money can be a spiritual good. By the late 1940s, Spiritual Mobilization, led by Congregationalist minister, **Rev. James W. Fifiel Jr.** (boasted) more than 17,000 member ministers preaching opposition to the New Deal, the Social Gospel, and liberalism in general."
- In the 50s when the 'Red Scare' took hold, the Spiritualization pastors wedded their extreme message of Christian libertarianism with a form of Christian nationalism, convening Freedom Under God Rallies across the country to champion the idea that America is a Christian nation.
- (Also in the 50s **Fifiel** was retiring and wanted Norman Vincent Peale, to take his place.) "Peale's book, the *Power of Positive Thinking* is often cited as a catalyst for the modern prosperity gospel movement. Peale turned Fifiel down because he could make more money at his church and on his book tours. Trump grew up attending Peale's church. One line often repeated at Trump rallies comes straight from the Spiritual Mobilization movement's workbooks: 'In America we don't worship government, we worship God.'"
- (Spiritual Mobilization) "rose alongside the more political Religious Right in the 70s and 80s televangelists .Creflo Dollar and Jim Bakker mixed conservative Christian theology with self-help tactics and an insistence that 'money is evidence of faithfulness and God's favor (especially when that money is given to the pastor).'"
- (The prosperity gospel) "reached a crescendo around the year 2000 with the rise of Joel Osteen, who grew Lakewood Church in Houston, TX into the largest single church in the U.S."
- "Trump's vocal faith-rooted supporters and advisers in the early stages of his campaign were...leaders of the prosperity gospel movement...not members of the Religious Right' (who then viewed the prosperity gospel movement) "to be a scandalous amalgamation of God and mammon. However) "Trump and the prosperity pastors stumping for him have kept Conservative Christians in the fold through a **new form of Christian nationalism predicated on the belief that America was established as a Christian nation and that its heritage must be preserved at all costs.**
- "Pastor Paula White (a prosperity gospel preacher) said on Jim Bakker's show in 2017, "Trump is authentically, whether people like it or not...raised up by God. Resisting Trump is akin to 'fighting against the hand of God...early European settlers founded American colonies as Christian mission fields and that Christians have a responsibility to 'take back our school systems, take back our families, take back our homes, (and) take back our nation.'"

- “Christian nationalism...was a crucial part of how conservative Christian leaders rallied so-called values voters to the polls in the 80s and 90s and in recent decades. Christian nationalism was especially *in vogue* in the Bush era (leading to the belief) “that Christians have a God-given right to rule the United States. (These) beliefs remain popular among many everyday evangelicals and leaders and leaders of the Religious Right-and have achieved a new life under Trump...‘America will say Merry Christmas again as opposed to the more inclusive Happy Holidays’”
- (In 2016) “Russell Moore and a small cadre of the evangelical elite were no fans of Clinton, but they still saw Trump as a man devoid of personal integrity, if not personal faith...but (they) and other ‘Never Trumpers’ failed to convert their fellow conservative faithful to their cause. Come election day, Trump cleaned up among white evangelicals. (Some see this as an expression of) the slow-motion moral collapse of politicized conservative Christianity..(that deems) **adherence to Christian nationalism and victory in the culture wars to be more important than theological consistency.** Trump and his religious backers became even more brazen in their use of Christian nationalist language after his election... (signing) executive orders that chipped away at laws that prohibit churches from endorsing political candidates.”

THE NEW EVANGELICAL BASE

“Trump managed to rally a supposedly values-conscious religious base around: building a wall along the US-Mexico border, separating migrant families, or banning Muslims from entering the country...Christian (Nationalism (united) these religious groups; it functions primarily as an identity that largely exists *outside* of a specific religious moral code...unmoored from traditional Christian ideals and morality, and also inclined toward authoritarian figures...adherents to Christian nationalism are more likely to believe that police treat African Americans the same as whites...that police shoot black people more because blacks are more violent than whites.”

“A significant number of white Catholics relate to Christian nationalism. (Steve Bannon is a Catholic who insisted in 2014, that Catholics should protect the Judeo-Christian West in its struggle against Islam.) Catholics are heavily represented in Rust Belt states such as Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania.”

FROM RESPECTABLE RETICENCE...

“Going all-in on Christian nationalism also shifted the tectonic plates of political evangelism, exposing fissures in a right-wing religious coalition that had sat undisturbed for decades...the small diaspora of Trump-averse evangelicals expanded rapidly after the 2016 election, but the spectrum of spiritual discontent was broad...(but they declined to challenge the president publicly) (However it has turned off) a younger generation (of evangelicals) that really does want to talk about what is happening at the (US-Mexico) border.

TO RIGHTEOUS RESISTANCE

“The GOP relies on the loyal voting habits of conservative white Christians. But Democrats...benefit from the support of voters with no religious affiliation - ‘nones’...(who) now make up more than a quarter of the Democratic party (most of whom) still concede they believe in a higher power. (‘Nones’) don’t like the positions churches take on social/political issues. (They) support same-sex marriage and abortion rights. It’s hard to ignore the possibility that **their flight from faith is at least partly a rejection of the Religious Right.** White evangelicals made up 26% of Americans 65+ in 2016; (They) only represented 8% of Americans age 18-29. Nones constituted 38% of 18-29 (and) only 12% of those 65+.

“Three quarters of the Democratic Party who remain religious and often take cues from Religious Left leaders who, like the ‘Nones’ typically embrace LGBTQ identities and relationships, are at least tolerant of abortion, and reject Christian nationalism. (Democrats are also) racially diverse...Nonwhite faith voters may be crucial for Democrats hoping to flip red states...States with higher religious attendance leaned Republican, but nonwhite populations in those same states skewed highly religious and deeply Democratic.”

“It was African American voters-many spurred to the polls by their churches who played a key role in electing the first Democratic senator in Alabama since 1992.”

“Falwell’s seemingly unconditional support for Trump is one of several things that make younger self-identified evangelicals uncomfortable to the point where many are ‘definitely attracted to leaders of the Religious Left.’”

“The combination of ‘Nones’ and a newly revitalized Religious Left is already countering Trump’s religious coalition...To truly appreciate the nascent spiritual power that has risen to counter the new Religious Right, one must look to Rev. William Barber II.”