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David R. Swartz

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David R. Swartz : Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism (Politics and Culture in Modern America) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism (Politics and Culture in Modern America):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great overview of how evangelicalism got to where we are now!By

Karl N. Goodman This book filled in a lot of gaps for me. I really appreciated the coverage of Jim Wallis and Sojourners as well as the chapter on the Carter presidency. 2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Quite wordy By Elizabeth DI finally gave up and skipped some of the biographical writing just to get to the point. I did find an answer to my question, "Can I be a Christian and a Democrat too." Interesting history. 15 of 15 people found the following review helpful. The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Evangelical Left By Marty Troyer (The Peace Pastor) The right story told at the right time can make all the difference. Knowing this, great storytellers take as much care in selecting the right story as they do in crafting its telling. David Swartz, author and historian at Asbury University, has done just that in his newly released book, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*. This is a story many of us didn't know we wanted and needed to read, a story many didn't know existed. It's a story "chronicling the rise, decline, and legacy of the evangelical left." But it's so much more than that. It's the story of what it looks like to merge progressive politics with deep personal piety; the story of "holistic concern for both evangelism and social action;" the story of a full 1/3 of evangelicals who do not find their voice in the religious right; the story of an awakening to social concern and the presence of social evil; it's the story of evangelical politics which very much could have taken a profoundly progressive shape; it's the story of a deeply diverse evangelicalism unwilling to fit neatly into caricatures; and it's the story of what it might look like to love both God and neighbor with equal abandon. This is a good story. The bulk of the book seeks to sort from whence such a progressivism comes, weaving individual and organizational narratives into the whole, with chapters on Carl Henry and Neo-Evangelical Social Engagement, John Alexander and Racial Justice, Jim Wallis and Vietnam, Mark Hatfield and Electoral Politics, Sharon Gallagher and Spiritual Community, Samuel Escobar and the Global perspective, Richard Mouw and Evangelical Politics, and Ron Sider and Economics. Each chapter, itself a story, is fantastic. His chapter on John Alexander and Racial Justice was particularly helpful for me in Houston, as I've tried to navigate our own entrenched racialized landscape. Indicative of the larger story, this chapter develops a slow-coming shift from defining racism in strictly personal terms to a broader socialized definition. In addressing racism in the US and in evangelical churches, they found that "converting souls by itself could not sufficiently level the terrain." It was time to start "tackling racism on a structural level." Like all good stories, *Moral Minority* allows you to see yourself in its pages. After all, the Houston church today continues to dialogue (or debate!) on incredibly similar lines. This is our story, unfolding (again) before our eyes. And in doing so, it becomes deeply meaningful. Swartz, in what was for me quite helpful, concludes that "Evangelicalism is not inherently conservative, nor universally fixed to individual solutions to social problems." He goes on to inspire hope that we may find "fundamentally unstable" the current evangelical alliance with all things politically conservative. All of this leaves me craving a new question, What if the church were more known to be for Houston than it was known for what it was against? Perhaps we still can be.

In 1973, nearly a decade before the height of the Moral Majority, a group of progressive activists assembled in a Chicago YMCA to strategize about how to move the nation in a more evangelical direction through political action. When they emerged, the *Washington Post* predicted that the new evangelical left could "shake both political and religious life in America." The following decades proved the *Post* both right and wrong: evangelical participation in the political sphere was intensifying, but in the end it was the religious right, not the left, that built a viable movement and mobilized electorally. How did the evangelical right gain a moral monopoly and why were evangelical progressives, who had shown such promise, left behind? In *Moral Minority*, the first comprehensive history of the evangelical left, David R. Swartz sets out to answer these questions, charting the rise, decline, and political legacy of this forgotten movement. Though vibrant in the late nineteenth century, progressive evangelicals were in eclipse following religious controversies of the early twentieth century, only to reemerge in the 1960s and 1970s. They stood for antiwar, civil rights, and anticonsumer principles, even as they stressed doctrinal and sexual fidelity. Politically progressive and theologically conservative, the evangelical left was also remarkably diverse, encompassing groups such as Sojourners, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Evangelicals for Social Action, and the Association for Public Justice. Swartz chronicles the efforts of evangelical progressives who expanded the concept of morality from the personal to the social and showed the way organizationally and through political activism to what would become the much larger and more influential evangelical right. By the 1980s, although they had witnessed the election of Jimmy Carter, the nation's first born-again president, progressive evangelicals found themselves in the political wilderness, riven by identity politics and alienated by a skeptical Democratic Party and a hostile religious right. In the twenty-first century, evangelicals of nearly all political and denominational persuasions view social engagement as a fundamental responsibility of the faithful. This most dramatic of transformations is an important legacy of the evangelical left.

"David Swartz has written a book of colorfully portrayed characters and credible storyline that strikes an elegant balance between politics, theology, social history and biographical narratives." *American Society of Church History* "Moral Minority is a vivid topography of a little-understood corner of evangelical thought." *New York Times* "In this superbly written study, David Swartz offers an excitingly fresh and compelling look at evangelical activists who forged a different ideological path in the age of Nixon and Reagan, one that veered left, away from the

rightward trends of their day. Blending big-picture perspective with the colorful insight of biography, Swartz vividly describes his subjects' gospel of social justice and their struggles to win their church over to this progressive faith. In doing so, he forcefully reminds us that modern evangelicalism is neither monolithic nor static in its political persuasions and quest for impact. As both good history and timely observation, this is an important book."Darren Dochuk, author of *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*"In this remarkably rigorous, richly contextualized, and generally exhaustive exploration of the evangelical Left, David R. Swartz returns readers to a time when theologically conservative Protestantism was 'politically up for grabs.'"Journal of American History"Swartz restores the evangelical left to its important place in the annals of post-sixties American evangelicalism. A striking work of research, recovery, and analysis, *Moral Minority* will stand as an essential contribution to the new history of American evangelicalism."Steven P. Miller, author of *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*About the AuthorDavid R. Swartz teaches history at Asbury University.