Elizabeth Fones-Wolf is a professor of history at West Virginia University. Her most recent book, coauthored with Ken Fones-Wolf, is Struggle for the Soul of the South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie, *which won the 2016 David Montgomery Award.*

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The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America. *By Frances FitzGerald*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017. 740 pp. Photographs, glossary, notes, index. Cloth, $35.00. ISBN: 978-1-4391-3133-6.
doi:10.1017/S0007680517001222

Reviewed by Peter J. Wosh

Frances FitzGerald, the Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist and historian who has produced important works on topics ranging from the Vietnam War to secondary-school history books, first turned her attention to evangelicalism in the late 1970s. Her prescient *New Yorker* pieces on Jerry Falwell and the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, examined the marriage of fundamentalism and conservative politics at the dawn of the Reagan era. In the process, she chronicled the dynamic vitality of evangelical life for an audience of secular urban sophisticates who typically trivialized conservative religion as a retrograde force associated with a more primitive American past. *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* broadens FitzGerald's chronological scope and interpretive breadth, charting the twists and turns of this religious tradition from colonial times through the present. If less comprehensive than its title suggests, this book offers a gracefully written and even-handed overview that will especially appeal to academics unfamiliar with recent religious historical scholarship.

FitzGerald seeks to explain an important historical transformation. During the early nineteenth century, evangelical Protestants dominated American political life. They also remained at the forefront of such progressive movements as antislaveryism, health care, temperance, public education, and even feminism. By the early twentieth century, however, Protestant denominations had fractured over theological and social issues. Evangelicalism became identified with a socially conservative Christianity and its leaders largely retreated from the public square. Evangelicals built their own institutional networks, frequently separating from their modernist opponents. They preached a narrower message that privileged personal salvation over political engagement and social justice. When the Christian right aggressively reemerged as a political force in the mid-1970s, a new generation of religious empire

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007680517001222 Published online by Cambridge University Press

builders reacted against the social transformations of the 1960s by establishing a power base within the Republican Party. Conservative politicians found that attacking abortion, homosexuality, and feminism especially energized the evangelical electorate. By the dawn of the new millennium, "the Christian right had become a function of Republican politics" and Christian activists granted George W. Bush approximately 80 percent of their votes (p. 535). Though conservative evangelicals constituted a much smaller slice of the religious American electorate, their political allegiances appeared more unified and monolithic than ever before. Still, the book concludes on an oddly optimistic note. FitzGerald maintains that younger evangelicals, inspired by such social justice advocates as Jim Wallis and Ron Sider, recently have pushed their coreligionists to address such issues as environmentalism, economic inequality, and racial reconciliation.

FitzGerald breaks no new archival ground here, relying heavily on previous insider histories by such scholars as George Marsden, Mark Noll, Joel Carpenter, James Davison Hunter, Nancy Ammerman, Vinson Synan, William Martin, and Barry Hankins. In addition to tying together secondary histories, she meticulously analyzes the careers and public rhetoric of such prominent evangelical celebrities as Falwell, Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, James Dobson, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, and Ralph Reed. Lesser-known figures also get their due. Rousas Rushdoony and Francis Schaeffer, two influential Christian intellectuals who, respectively, called for restoring biblical law and eradicating secular humanism, receive extensive treatment. Richard Land, who played a major role in tilting the Southern Baptist Convention toward the right and syncing its political stances with the George W. Bush administration, emerges as an especially significant figure. FitzGerald proves particularly adept at tracing the ideological conflicts and controversies that played out in such organizations as the National Association of Evangelicals and the Southern Baptist Convention, which typically resulted in schisms, separations, and the silencing of more progressive voices. She also carefully charts the institutionalization of the independent ministries that defined conservative evangelical politics in the late twentieth century, including Focus on the Family, the Moral Majority, and the Christian Coalition. *The Evangelicals* successfully introduces readers to the theological discussions, political debates, and policy disagreements that have divided the Protestant polity over the past century.

Several disappointing authorial choices limit the book's usefulness. First, a serious chronological imbalance exists. The first two hundred years of evangelicalism in the United States occupy approximately 150 pages, with FitzGerald's interpretation relying largely on dated historical

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works written between the 1950s and the 1970s. By contrast, she spends nearly 500 pages on the post–World War II period, with George W. Bush's presidency alone receiving over 100 pages of description and analysis. Basically, the earlier period provides a somewhat superficial prologue to her primary interest in explaining the persistence and power of conservative evangelicalism in postmodern American life. A richer historical context would have better informed her more contemporary analysis. Second, her reliance on such colorful and extremist leaders as Falwell and Robertson largely ignores rank-and-file churchgoers. Although we learn quite a bit about the theological and ideological issues that motivated the evangelical elite, this study skews too heavily toward well-heeled white male ministers. FitzGerald never explains how their messages translated from the pulpit to the pew and why they resonated with devout Christians. She offers only sketchy demographic information concerning the denominations and traditions under discussion and fails to explain why evangelicalism provided such a life-changing experience for ordinary people.

Perhaps most disappointing for a book titled *The Evangelicals*, FitzGerald "purposely omits the history of African-American churches because theirs is a different story" (p. 3). In fact, white Christian churches cannot be understood except in dialogue with their African American brothers and sisters. The slavery controversy, biracial Pentecostal congregations, and the civil rights movement all testify to this fact. Randall Balmer has argued persuasively that a desire to reinstitute segregation in the South really fueled religious-right activism in the 1970s, with other issues merely providing a more socially acceptable and convenient cover. An almost exclusive focus on the words of white evangelical leaders masks this issue. Finally, readers of this journal should note that the book says little about the business of religion, the economic influences that often drive denominational and ministerial politics, or the ways in which Christian business owners incorporate religious values into secular enterprises. Given these limitations, FitzGerald's book offers solid insights but remains frustratingly incomplete.

Peter J. Wosh recently retired as clinical professor of history and director of the program in Archives and Public History at New York University. His books include Spreading the Word: The Bible Business in Nineteenth-Century America *(1994) and* Covenant House: Journey of a Faith-Based Charity *(2005).*

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