

those curious of whether this theological giant has something to say to our troubled age should not, however, be deterred. There are riches here.

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***Faith in Freedom: Propaganda, Presidential Politics, and the Making of an American Religion.* By Andrew R. Polk. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021. x + 255 pp. \$49.95 cloth.**

The past twenty years have seen a growing literature on American civil religion and the origins of the religious right in post-war America. Historian Andrew R. Polk argues persuasively that scholars have overlooked how some of the religious nationalism subsequently championed by Christian conservatives was the product of secular government and business elites during the Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower administrations. In *Faith in Freedom: Propaganda, Presidential Politics, and the Making of American Religion*, Polk explains how these three administrations used military public relations and private advertising firms to construct a civil religion that served their political purposes. Polk contends that traditional religious leaders were not the “primary architects” of what became the “faith in freedom” theme; rather, it was the product of an elite directed propaganda campaign (5).

Polk’s illuminating study begins on the eve of U.S. entry into WWII and with early presidential attempts to build bridges to religious leaders. The Roosevelt administration hoped that Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic leaders might endorse and disseminate its portrait of the Nazi regime as anti-religious. Unfortunately, these early efforts became embroiled in controversy when the liberal Protestant establishment objected to Franklin Roosevelt reaching out to the Vatican. Frustrated by this resistance, Roosevelt searched for other avenues to shape how a religious citizenry viewed American foreign policy. His strongest allies in this campaign proved to be the Office of War Information (OWI) and the War Advertising Council (WAC – later, the Ad Council). These agencies not only cultivated crucial public support for the war effort but they helped articulate and promote Roosevelt’s particular religiously-based interpretation of the conflict. Meanwhile, leaders of religious bodies such as the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), forerunner of the National Council of Churches (NCC), occasionally dissented from the “conflation of national and religious identities” (39). While the president naively assumed that the FCC represented all Protestants, his advisors soon learned that Fundamentalist and Evangelical Protestants were critical of the more theologically liberal FCC. Perhaps Roosevelt’s clearest statement of his religious perspective on the war came in an address observing Religious Education Week in 1943. The country needed, he explained, to be “an arsenal of spiritual values” and not only an arsenal of arms and ammunition (59). Due to the exigencies of warfare, the military chaplaincy system served to promote a more generic national faith, as chaplains often conducted ecumenical and even interfaith worship services for American troops.

Learning from his predecessor's fraught experience, Harry Truman declined to seek out the FCC as an ally and grew more distant from mainline Protestant leaders. In a letter to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. in spring 1946, Truman spoke of "the fundamental unity of Christianity and freedom" that American history illustrated (76). His suspicions regarding the FCC were confirmed when they opposed the proposed introduction of universal military training. The Ad Council moved into the vacuum left by increasingly sidelined religious organizations like the FCC. The Council ran a popular "United America" public relations campaign between 1946 and 1952 that stressed the linkage between religious freedom and free market capitalism. "By tying. . . religious freedom, and the Soviet threat, to the free market, the Ad Council successfully promoted the interests of its corporate backers," Polk explains (109).

Polk acknowledges the shallowness of Dwight Eisenhower's form of religious patriotism, but he stresses its pragmatic purpose to support his administration's Cold War policies. The Eisenhower administration moved from Truman's emphasis on religious unity to a newer Cold War-inspired focus on national security. Eisenhower chose to work with the American Legion, an organization that helped mediate between governmental and ecclesiastical bodies. The Legion's most notable effort here was the "Back to God" program broadcast on radio and television beginning in 1953. The following year, the program featured popular participants Norman Vincent Peale and Bishop Fulton Sheen. Probably the new organization that was most attractive to Eisenhower was the Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order (FRASCO). FRASCO's 1954 national conference chose the "Spiritual Foundations of American democracy" as its central theme (145). This emphasis nicely complemented the administration's focus on the political utility of religious belief. In his account, Polk provides invaluable context for Congress' insertion of "under God" into the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" onto the nation's paper currency in the mid-1950s.

Polk argues that, although he cultivated a close relationship with Eisenhower, Billy Graham was not the chief architect of "evangelicals' fervent religious patriotism" (156). While the now renamed NCC increasingly dissented from an uncritical approach to Americanism and religious faith, Graham picked up what the Eisenhower and previous administrations had developed and ran with it. The Southern Baptist revivalist focused almost exclusively on personal sins and avoided larger social concerns. Like Eisenhower, Graham feared that public criticism of the country's shameful racial record would weaken the nation as it faced the Communist threat. This led Graham and the evangelical publication he helped found, *Christianity Today*, to criticize what they labeled as "extremists" on both sides of the civil rights struggle. Polk emphasizes in his conclusion that these politicized religious ideas predated and helped set the stage for the ideological polarization and culture wars of the 1970s and 1980s. They resurfaced in, among other places, the faith and freedom rhetoric of George W. Bush in the wake of 9/11.

*Faith and Freedom* is a thoughtful and absorbing study of an important and timely subject. Polk's writing is clear and accessible. The book might have benefitted from more direct engagement with the extensive secondary literature such as Elesha Coffman's *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* and George Marsden's *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief*. In addition, more attention could perhaps be paid to Sun Oil president J. Howard Pew's pivotal role connecting corporate America and evangelicals.

Nevertheless, Polk has contributed significantly via this fine volume to our understanding of the roots of religious nationalism.

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***Reading Evangelicals: How Christian Fiction Shaped a Culture and a Faith.* By Daniel Silliman. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021. ix + 276 pp. \$27.99 cloth.**

What is an evangelical? This question has animated the field of American religious history for at least four decades but returned to the forefront of both scholarly and public conversation after Donald Trump's success among white evangelical voters in the 2016 presidential election, despite the candidate's scant church attendance and apparent lack of biblical knowledge. Daniel Silliman, a historian trained in American Studies and the current news editor for *Christianity Today*, argues that despite the breadth of texts invested in defining "evangelicalism," scholarship has overwhelmingly focused on "belief-based definitions" (6). Within the field, scholars debate whether theological beliefs or political beliefs take precedent. Yet, Silliman is deeply unhappy with both approaches. The theological argument initiates a process of scholarly gerrymandering that is both static and ahistorical. The political argument has an inevitability to it that not only discounts the presence of progressive evangelicals but fails to acknowledge that politics does not take up all the space in adherents' lives. For Silliman, singular narrow religious identities cannot encompass the scope of evangelicalism and do not show the processes by which evangelicals form as a group. In contrast to belief-based definitions, Silliman argues "evangelicalism is better conceived as an imagined community, a rolling conversation organized by real structures and institutions in the world that make that conversation possible" (218). In *Reading Evangelicals*, Silliman encourages scholars to look at "the ongoing conversation that is represented by Christian bookstores" as one critical space to locate this community (9).

Evangelical publishing is by no means new. In the late nineteenth century, it operated predominantly along denominational lines. However, Silliman points out that the fundamentalist-modernist controversy produced a "new transdenominational print culture" (18). In the following decades, several important evangelical publishing houses such as Eerdmans and Zondervan emerged that shed their denominational constraints. Evangelical publishing swelled in the postwar period and increasingly evangelical publishers started to market their materials to the lay population. By the 1970s, evangelical bookstores were one of the fastest growing segments of the publishing market.

*Reading Evangelicals* traces the history of evangelicalism over four decades through five bestselling evangelical novels that each mark a distinct shift in the history of evangelical publishing. Janette Oke's *Love Comes Softly* (1979) inspired a generation of evangelical romance fiction. Frank Peretti's *This Present Darkness* (1986), an evangelical horror novel deeply influenced by theologian Francis Schaeffer's concept of clashing worldviews, encouraged evangelicals to engage in the broader culture. Silliman treats Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins's *Left Behind* (1995) less as an explicitly political