

with an interest in Hollywood and film censorship. Its only weakness is that one does wish to hear a bit more about how Catholic and Jewish forces viewed and interacted with

their Protestant counterparts as they also sought to guide the direction of the American film industry. Scholars in film studies, religious studies, law, and American cultural studies will

all find this book a truly rich and rewarding work of revision.

Paul C. Gutjahr  
Indiana University  
Bloomington, Indiana



*Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism.* By David R. Swartz. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 384 pp. \$47.50.)

In this well researched and lucidly written history of politically progressive evangelical Christians from the 1960s to the 1980s, David R. Swartz offers a pioneering counterbalance to the plentiful studies of the Religious Right produced in recent decades. Analyzing “the rise, decline, and legacy of the evangelical left,” Swartz describes how a coalition of progressive leaders formed in the early 1970s, believing their movement was poised to shape the future of evangelicals’ political engagement. The opening eight chapters offer biographical vignettes of representative figures. These range from recognizable leaders such as Sojourners’ Jim

Wallis and Evangelicals for Social Action’s Ron Sider, to lesser-known yet influential individuals, such as *The Other Side* editor John Alexander, Sharon Gallagher of the Christian World Liberation Front, and Peruvian theologian Samuel Escobar. Through these vignettes, Swartz traces an array of religious concerns and social issues that galvanized the rise of the evangelical left: a theological rejection of cultural separatism and apolitical conservatism; support for the civil rights movement; disillusionment with the Vietnam War; and the growing influence and participation within evangelical circles of Latin American, Dutch Reformed, and Anabaptist Christians.

In 1973, these and other sympathetic leaders came together as a “united progressive front” and issued the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern as a manifesto for evangelical progressivism. Yet this coalition proved too fragile, Swartz argues in the book’s final chapters, and its fracture undermined the potential impact of the evangelical left. Conflicting priorities and strategies associated with “identity politics” led African-American, female, Anabaptist, and Reformed participants to channel their energies into separate initiatives. At the same time, progressive evangelicals failed to find a home in either the increasingly secularized Democratic Party or the politically conservative Republican Party. As the

evangelical left found itself left behind in electoral politics and obscured by the Religious Right, Swartz concludes, its promise faded in the 1980s.

And yet, the legacy of the evangelical left was not one of failure, a fact that the author acknowledges even as the nature of his narrative may leave that impression. In the epilogue, Swartz highlights how evangelicals across the political spectrum followed the evangelical left in beginning to address social problems. Most importantly, he notes the revitalization and increased influence of the progressive evangelical movement in the first decade of the twenty-first century. But by ending his history with the evangelical left’s nadir in the late 1980s, Swartz minimizes the movement’s ongoing persistence in offering an alternative to the Religious Right’s political agendas. Nevertheless, this book convincingly demonstrates that “evangelicalism is not inherently conservative, nor universally fixed to individual solutions to social problems.” Swartz has provided more than enough evidence, for both academic and popular audiences, to dispel such popular perceptions. Ultimately, *Moral Minority* is required reading for all those interested in understanding the complex, contested nature of evangelicals’ political engagement over the past half century.

Brantley W. Gasaway  
Bucknell University  
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania