violence resembles the Jesus of Richard Horsley. And Lohfink’s high estimation of Jesus’ symbolic behaviors, including building community at table and through healing, brushes the edges of John Dominic Crossan’s work. Significantly, Lohfink shares his refusal to separate historiography from theology with Dale Allison, who has offered a brilliant critique of Jesus scholarship.

The book ends, as not all Jesus books do, with a reflection on Jesus’ basic claim regarding himself and with the church’s most basic confession concerning him: “Jesus, true human and true God.” Lohfink is frustratingly indirect on these points. He all but says that Jesus possessed an awareness of his divine identity: he understood his own acts as works of God, yet they were “accomplished by his own power.” Even his proclamation of God’s reign implied a christological claim. But this is a sensitive subject: why doesn’t Lohfink come out and say whether Jesus possessed a divine self-consciousness? And why doesn’t he say definitively that the church’s confession of Jesus emerged from Jesus’ own person? Instead, he writes: “Jesus found others who saw what was happening through him and who he was.”

Perhaps I am small-minded to want Lohfink to say clearly and directly how he imagines Jesus to have understood himself. I suspect that Lohfink would trace his own elusiveness back to Jesus, who knew better than to spell out such things for his followers.
Americans,” a community of twenty-something evangelicals alienated from the churches of their youth, which seemed content to abide, if not outright baptize, the military campaign in Southeast Asia. The inaugural issue of the group’s eponymous magazine decried the “American captivity of the church,” which had “resulted in the disastrous equation of the American way of life with the Christian way of life.”

Swartz introduces us to a variety of lesser-known figures as well, including John Alexander, a white, Goldwater-supporting Baptist turned devoted civil rights activist, and Sharon Gallagher, a California-raised fundamentalist whose powerful encounter with the ideal of beloved community led her to cofound an evangelical commune known as the Christian World Liberation Front.

Shifting seamlessly back and forth from the lives of such leading individuals to the wider relational and institutional networks within which they moved, Swartz persuasively shows that by the mid-1970s, though the evangelical left was undoubtedly a minority movement, it boasted surprisingly broad-based roots. It even packed an electoral punch, or so it seemed in 1976, when a groundswell of evangelical support helped a born-again Democrat by the name of Jimmy Carter to win the White House. At that moment there seemed no reason to question evangelicalism’s compatibility with progressive causes and candidates.

So what happened? How was the evangelical left so quickly outmuscled by the Christian right? Swartz offers two answers. The first has to do with dynamics internal to the movement. The signers of the Chicago Declaration had always been a fractious bunch, divided—much like the larger New Left—along lines of race, gender and theology. After the Thanksgiving workshop, these cleavages proved decisive, as black and white, female and male, Anabaptist and Reformed evangelicals went separate institutional ways. This centrifugal trajectory undermined the movement’s cohesion and diminished its clout.

Swartz argues that even if the evangelical left had managed to hang together, it would have faced an uphill battle by the 1980s. This is because a second source of decline lay in the changing political landscape. The evangelical left followed some Catholics in championing a “consistent pro-life ethic,” which combined support for the War on Poverty with opposition to militarism, nuclear proliferation, the death penalty and, crucially, abortion rights. As Democratic support for Roe v. Wade calcified, many within the movement—already alienated by Republicans’ positions on the issues—found themselves increasingly “without a political home.”

Moral Minority infuses a welcome dose of suspense into the story of how American evangelicalism became a cornerstone of a resurgent modern conservatism. While historians have busied themselves in recent years searching for the origins of the Christian right in the 1930s, ’40s and ’50s, Swartz demonstrates that as late as the 1970s, evangelicals’ political allegiances remained fluid. He is careful—and right—to avoid giving the impression that born-again believers stood then at a fork in the road, as likely to veer left as right. But in calling attention to the contingencies, most notably those surrounding the vexed politics of abortion, he underscores that even on the eve of the Reagan revolution some alternative routes were possible.

They still are. If one stands on this side of the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition and the values voter craze, it can be easy to forget that evangelical need not imply conservative, but history offers countless reminders of this fact. While evangelical faith has often served to legitimize unjust systems and structures, it has also ignited concerted resistance to the same. When Swartz writes that the connections between progressive politics and evangelicalism “were—and are—startlingly substantial,” he invokes the witness not just of the evangelical left but also of abolitionists, women’s suffragists and trade unionists.

What comes next is another matter. With the Christian right seemingly back...
on its heels following the reelection of President Barack Obama, will the evangelicals of today find a more promising way forward? Will a rising generation embrace the gospel’s clarion call for a justice that defies party platforms, or will a new crop of believers recapitulate their parents’ wanderings in the political wilderness? In his conclusion Swartz sorts through the muddled signs of the times and musters the best answer of a historian: only time will tell.

From Willow Creek to Sacred Heart: Rekindling My Love for Catholicism
By Chris Haw
Ave Maria Press, 256 pp., $15.95 paperback

My first thought upon learning that Chris Haw had written a memoir about his journey to Catholicism was, Oh no—not another one.

Back when I was moving toward Rome myself, I read a lot of conversion memoirs. Some were classics like John Henry Newman’s Apologia Pro Vita Sua and Thomas Merton’s Seven Storey Mountain. Others were contemporary apologies by fundamentalist Protestants who felt compelled to set their former coreligionists straight. Many were written by men (not women) who, like G. K. Chesterton, knew exactly what was wrong with the world. Many combined a romantic and ahistorical view of the glories of Rome with a craving for absolute authority. I did not want to read another book of that genre.

But after a few minutes with From Willow Creek to Sacred Heart, I could tell that Haw is no fundamentalist. He worries about military spending and environmental pollution. He is involved with urban community development. He is coauthor, with Shane Claiborne, of Jesus for President: Politics for Ordinary Radicals. An ordinary radical and social activist writing about his newfound love of Catholicism? This might be worth reading.

Here’s a bird’s-eye view of Haw’s story: his mother, who taught religious education classes in her Catholic parish, took him to mass every Sunday until he was partway through middle school, when it occurred to her that the parish’s youth group was pretty lame. She had heard that there was a fantastic youth program at a nondenominational megachurch a short drive away:

With legions of staff and volunteers, Willow’s youth branch of the church . . . could entertain teens, teach them, summer camp them, mentor them, and exhaust them until they fell over in giddy excitement. Their youth ministry was replete with its own separate services, “relevant” songs, speeches, ...