David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Pp. 376. Hardcover, $47.50 USD.

Over the past few years a considerable number of highly regarded, well-written historical studies of American evangelicalism have been published. These studies have often been at the intersection of evangelicalism and politics, business, and culture. We find similar themes in recent studies of Wal-Mart and a Billy Graham biography. These delightful books have done much to bring evangelicalism into a serious place in twentieth-century American historiography well beyond stereotypes framed by the 1925 Scopes Trial.

With David Swartz's book, *Moral Minority*, the evangelical historiographical juggernaut continues in a significant way. Unlike the vast majority of writing about evangelicals, this book enjoins us to recognize and take seriously evangelicals on the political left. As significant as political conservatism is to American evangelical history, there were political liberals reading their Bibles, wondering when Jesus would return, and challenging themselves to live biblically faithful lives as they voted Democrat.

Beginning with the 1920s, a decade of some disaster for evangelicals, and keeping to the political periphery until the 1960s, Swartz traces the increasingly politically active and social justice oriented evangelical left through the 1970s, where it fractured and lost effectiveness at political coalition building, unlike the religious right. Within this story Swartz weaves the Anabaptist and Mennonite experiences into a larger religious and political history. Swartz pays particular attention to the influence of John Howard Yoder and his seminal work, *The Politics of Jesus*, published in 1972, the work of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and most significantly the impact of Ron Sider in a chapter devoted to his "politics of simple living."(153) Sider, in fact, forms the heart of Swartz's thesis, as he is quoted, in the context of the "Chicago Declaration," "we called for social and political action, [and] we got eight years of Ronald Reagan." (9) As Swartz succinctly states, that is the purpose of the book.

Tracing the rise of the evangelical left from Carl Henry and his call to conjoin evangelicalism with social concern and conscience in the 1940s, through the global concerns articulated by Samuel Escobar, drawing attention to "structural inequality" (154) in the

1960s, then MCC and Senator Mark Hatfield in the 1970s, to Richard Mouw's Reformed critique of society, the Mennonites and Anabaptists are simply part of the larger story. Early "quiet in the land" sentiment and idealism had largely dissipated by the 1970s as they eagerly joined others on the evangelical left to help craft the "Chicago Declaration" with men like Ron Sider, Art Gish, John Howard Yoder, Dale Brown and Myron Augsburger as guiding lights. Through the influence of, especially in Swartz's telling, Sider and MCC, Anabaptists not only joined in, but also often led, critiques of excess and conspicuous consumption to herald a simple lifestyle through such books as *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977) and the *More-with-Less Cookbook* (1976).

Swartz's treatment of both the larger subject of his book, and the Mennonite-Anabaptist sections and chapters are exemplary for both narrative force and compelling argument. He is evenhanded and establishes convincingly the place of Anabaptism in the post-1960s evangelical left without overstating their influence.

The evangelical left emerges slowly and splinters quickly as Swartz provides neither hagiography nor lament. In fact the failure to sustain any unified left-of-centre political presence, by the end of the book, becomes almost irrelevant, as the number of evangelicals on the left involved in politics had only grown as the twenty-first century began. It was a success, certainly, in its own right. This book is excellent historical scholarship presented in fine prose, which not only broadens the historiography of American evangelicalism and politics, but challenges the reader to consider our contemporary world too, while cautioning us on the futility of thinking of evangelicals and political commitments as fossilized categories.

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