



# Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want

*Christian Smith*

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In recent decades Protestant evangelicalism has become a conspicuous and--to many Americans, worrisome--part of this country's cultural and political landscape. But just how unified is the supposed constituency of the Christian Coalition? And who exactly are the people the Christian Right claims to represent? In the most extensive study of American evangelicals ever conducted, Christian Smith explores the beliefs, values, commitments, and goals of the ordinary men and women who make up this often misunderstood religious group. The result is a much-needed contribution to the discussion of issues surrounding fundamental American freedoms and the basic identity of the United States as a pluralistic nation.

Based on data from a three-year national study, including more than 200 in-depth interviews of evangelicals around the country, *Christian America?* assesses the common stereotype of evangelicals as intolerant, right-wing, religious zealots seeking to impose a Christian moral order through political force. What Smith finds instead are people vastly more diverse and ambivalent than this stereotype suggests. On issues such as religion in education, "family values," Christian political activism, and tolerance of other religions and moralities, evangelicals are highly disparate and conflicted. As the voices of interviewees make clear, the labels "conservative" and "liberal" are too simplistic for understanding their approaches to public life and political action.

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