Broader Evangelicalism and the rise of Left-Wing Political Religion

Scholars in recent years have argued that it is more accurate to discuss the Christian Right as one part of the larger evangelical movement in the US, more specifically, its political manifestation. Evangelicalism is just as slippery a term as the Christian Right, but there are some generally agreed upon aspects of American evangelicalism.

Theologically, there are a number of defining characteristics of evangelicals

1. They consider themselves to be ‘born-again’ as part of a spiritual regeneration caused by an intense experience of the Holy Spirit. Often leading some to describe them as ‘born-again’ Christians.
2. Evangelicals tend to place an emphasis on the authoritative and inerrant nature of the Bible, leading some to also refer to them as ‘fundamentalist’ Christians.
3. They also emphasise a personal experience of Christ, focusing on the central role of his sacrifice on the cross and resulting salvation.
4. Evangelicals usually have a fervent desire to share the faith with others, or to ‘evangelise’.

The Charismatic Revival of the 1960s and 1970s in the US led many Christians to change their worship styles to include ‘gifts of the spirit’. Evangelicals came into contact with what is known as Pentecostal styles of worship, which include emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which can manifest itself in the often controversial practice of glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. Faith healing is also a popular practice in some evangelical churches.

• Have a look at these videos:

Report on Tongues, ABC: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9Ep0WHAslY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9Ep0WHAslY)

Example of Faith Healing from The Light of the World Pentecostal Church in Texas: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FDjNSoO6Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FDjNSoO6Y)

1) Provide a brief description of speaking in tongues and the theological basis for this practice.
2) Provide a brief description for faith healing.
3) Why do these practices appeal to people?
4) What else do you notice in these videos that correspond with some of the other themes from these activities?

Evangelicalism and the Christian Right have become so intertwined in the last forty years that often, when people use the term evangelical, it is synonymous with conservative. Due to the high profile nature of the Christian Right in the US it is often
easy to assume that all political Christianity is automatically conservative. Although in many cases this is true, there are also a number of evangelicals with liberal views who have risen to prominence in recent years, and who have become known as the Evangelical Left. This similarly unstructured group aimed to become involved in political discourse and especially with the Democratic Party, in order to offer a Christian political alternative to the Christian Right.

New leaders of the wider evangelical movement have emerged such as Rick Warren, leader of the Saddleback Mega-Church in California, who although not necessarily considered left-wing, has had a close relationship with Barack Obama for the past ten years. It is part of a larger move away from the assumption that Christian political adherence is a forgone conclusion, and a monopoly taken by the Republican Party.

Accounts of American evangelicalism in the last fifteen years often highlight the ‘emerging’ church of post-modernist and politically moderate evangelicals, who have come to terms with the fact that the ‘post-Christian’ West is no longer the epicentre of World Christianity. If this trend continues there is the possibility for a larger shift in how American Christians will view their long-term political aims and organisation.

- Read the following articles:


1) Is it correct to say that all political Christianity in the US is conservative?
2) Why are we seeing these changes in American Christian political allegiance?
3) If Christianity is decreasing in the West and growing in the Global South, how will this affect the Christian Right in the US?
4) How does Christian growth in other areas of the world affect a political Christian movement in the US?