

Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelism, by Molly Worthen. Oxford University Press, 2014. 352 pp., \$27.95 ISBN-13: 9780199896462.

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Apostles of Reason presents a thoughtful and wide-ranging exploration of the ongoing tension within White American evangelism as to whether reason, the head and the public square or revelation, the heart and private piety hold greater authority. Worthen side-steps the wide spectrum of theologies and politics in the evangelical world, pointing instead to a common historical heritage in the revivals and moral crusades of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the basis for penetrating the contemporary evangelical mind.

Worthen traces the patterns post World War II intellectual history of a number of “Bible-believing” conservative Protestant groups including Anabaptists, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the Mennonite Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, Pentecostals and Wesleyans. Challenges in the struggle around authority in these groups are articulated by three questions: how to 1) know Jesus and assure salvation in a modern context 2) repair the fracture between spiritual and rational knowledge and 3) resolve the tension between personal belief and the secular public sphere.

Worthen divides her enquiry into the broad range and diversity of positions on these questions into three parts. In “Knights Inerrant,” the first of the three parts into which the eleven chapters of the monograph are divided, Worthen posits an evangelical intellectualism rich with inquiry and debate, arguing a strong belief in the power of ideas . . . just that those ideas, however conflicting among themselves, were as a whole inconsistent with mainstream post-war America still so influenced by the Enlightenment empiricism and the ideals of the French Revolution. The next part, “To Evangelize the World,” discusses the articulation of Bible Colleges with the mid-twentieth century formation of departments of Religious Studies in Universities, as well as the impact and influence of modern media as an effective vehicle for evangelization during this same period. A final part titled “Let Them Have Dominion” outlines numerous debates and splits within American evangelicals through the 1960s to 1980s in the context of the changing role of women, biblical inerrancy, and the survival of religion in a secularized America.

Apostles of Reason achieves its aim of providing a portrait of evangelical

life which reveals the complexity of that world and the variety of ways those within it have and continue to navigate modern American culture. In a context of persistent, and increasing, pluralism in Western democracies, this work renews the challenge on all sides to listen and really hear the other.