

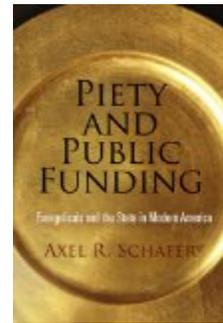


Axel R. Schäfer. *Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 311 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-4411-3.

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Conservative Evangelicals and the Cold War State

Prior to Mitt Romney winning the Republican presidential nomination in 2012, conservative evangelical groups gave their endorsement to former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum. These groups believed that Santorum was the ideal candidate, because of his opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage—a record that included Santorum’s support for a constitutional amendment outlawing gay marriages—as well his call for reducing the size of the federal government through cutting taxes and repealing the Affordable Health Care Act. This was despite Santorum’s history of increasing the defense budget and spending more on Medicare and public education as a senator. On these “big-government” policies, evangelicals were largely silent.[1]

With *Piety and Public Funding*, Keene University historian Axel R. Schäfer has done a remarkable job historicizing such tensions between evangelical conservatives’ demand for smaller government and their efforts to use federal power to enlarge America’s military and prohibit private behaviors they deem immoral. The origins of evangelicals’ cognitive dissonance toward the federal state, Schäfer argues, reside within the Cold War. Schäfer posits that the antistatist rhetoric of the religious Right belies the deep-seated historical connections between the evangelical movement and the state during the Cold War. While reluctant to admit their reliance on the federal government, evangelical groups have a dirty secret that Schäfer exposes: for decades they have benefited from the fiscal tentacles of the national security state

(and the welfare state) to expand their missionary campaigns, enhance their organizational networks at home, and lobby for “morality” based politics (p. 174). Throughout the postwar years, evangelicals sought funds from federal programs designed to defeat Communism abroad and help the poor at home, allowing them to broaden their influence in the United States and in the world, while also making America culturally conservative after the 1970s. Support, rather than dissociation, from the federal government, Schäfer convincingly argues, was the key to evangelicals’ ascendancy. The Cold War state kept evangelicalism relevant in a liberal age as the reason for “the broader cultural resonance of the New Right was not relentless opposition to ‘big government’ but the ability to calibrate effectively between an antistatist rhetoric and support for the basic structures of state building” (p. 17).

Approaching his topic thematically, Schäfer begins his study by deftly combing the expansion of the federal government from the 1930s into the 1990s. Schäfer illustrates how the Cold War gave birth to the “subsidiarist” state, as the federal government began to distribute monies to religious organizations following World War II to deploy the “spiritual firepower of the Christian Church,” in J. Edgar Hoover’s words, against “all the Soviet man-made missiles” (pp. 1, 26). Through such legislation as the G.I. Bill and the 1958 National Defense Education Act, religious hospitals and colleges were funded, religious charities were provided with government re-

sources for social services, and grants were made available to groups like the Faith Based Initiative and Catholic Charities. Such funds placed few restrictions on the autonomy of religious organizations, as aid, such as federal block grant programs, “reigned in the ability of government to limit religious instruction, curtail employment discrimination on the basis of religious belief, and hamper discrimination in admission among sectarian agencies receiving public funds” (p. 44). Schäfer shows how the subsidiarist connections between the federal government and evangelicals led to their “rediscovery of the state” (p. 60). Schäfer uses this curious phrase to articulate the ways in which evangelicals reconciled their pre-war “separationism” from American culture with their newfound engagement with the “domestic economy crucial for maintaining America’s new role as ‘defender of the Free World’” (pp. 62, 72). Government investment in national defense during the Cold War gave jobs to evangelicals in the Sunbelt and Northwest, enabling economic growth in regions that were the heart of the evangelical movement. Cold War foreign policy was the harbinger of an individualist culture that submerged government intervention within the “politics of growth,” and made evangelicals more amenable to state power (p. 77). Here Schäfer accentuates the limits of liberalism in the Cold War, a recent theme in scholarship on the American state.[2] He mines the work of historians who have noted the gendered and racialized assumptions that underpinned the Cold War state and provided momentum to conservatives. Citing Elaine Tyler May’s *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988), Schäfer suggests that evangelicals ably exploited “the defense of American political, economy, and security interests to the affirmation of traditional gender roles, core social norms, and consumer culture” to advance their agenda (p. 83).

Schäfer then moves into a discussion of the role of national security and American foreign policy in changing evangelicals’ impressions of the state. Schäfer has an expansive understanding of the national security state and its importance to evangelicalism that not only includes missile factories and government bureaucracies, but also the immaterial ideologies of anti-Communism and anti-Catholicism, and how they interacted in shaping evangelicals’ worldview. In today’s political climate, conservatives are quick to disparage foreign aid as a handout to undeserving nations, but Schäfer shows how evangelicals utilized various foreign aid programs during the Korean and Vietnam wars to decry godless Communism and promote the “American way of life” to foreign pop-

ulations (p. 121). Once “missionary impulses and Cold War defense interests” were fused for the purposes of national security, evangelicals were able to proselytize at home and abroad with the tacit permission and financial backing of the secular state (p. 105). The welfare state (and specifically the Great Society) was also a boon to religious organizations since the federal government entrusted the implementation of social programs to private religious charities. With right-wing evangelicals able to insinuate themselves into the contours of the federal state by the 1980s, they purged the last vestiges of the antistatist religious Left within the movement. The Christian Right’s continued affiliations with Republican administrations during the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush years thus cemented the triumph of “big-government conservatism” that, while vilifying the liberal state, did not question the institutional or ideological construction of Cold War public policy” (p. 214).

One cannot say enough marvelous things about *Piety and Public Funding*. Schäfer makes an overwhelmingly persuasive argument that evangelicals worked within the Cold War state rather than against it. His research and analysis is impeccable and the book succeeds in providing a counterpoint to the misleading antigovernment proclamations so dominant within the conservative movement. His archival work on the papers of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)—which provide the majority of his primary evidence—is extensive and exhaustive. The papers of the NAE, as Schäfer notes, are an underutilized resource that historians of the religious Right should continue to examine. In addition, Schäfer makes a much-needed contribution to the study of American evangelicalism and U.S. foreign policy. The literature on the Christian Right and the Cold War is noticeably lacking, and Schäfer’s work fills an important gap in a nascent and growing subfield.[3]

While there is much to be praised in this fascinating work, Schäfer could have better contextualized his use of the term “evangelical.” An individual who self-identified or was described as “evangelical” meant something different in the 1950s than in the 1980s, both internally within conservative Christian circles and among the broader public. At times, however, Schäfer applies the term too casually and without qualification. The word “evangelical” is a term loaded with connotations, and a more precise definition of its usage and application during the postwar era could have dealt with this problem. And while Schäfer excels at exploding the myths and contradictions within the evangelical movement toward the federal government—and how these contradictions

shaped evangelical conservatives' political strategy—he overlooks the influence of conservatives on the state itself. In mobilizing against domestic and foreign policies that they disliked, from superpower détente to abortion, evangelical conservatives were able to reconfigure the role and design of the state in American culture, as substantiated by presidential campaigns since the 1980s. The relationship between evangelicals and the Cold War state is even more reciprocal than Schäfer portrays it to be. Historians may also take pause at Schäfer's interpretation of New Deal liberalism and the New Deal state. Schäfer is on firm evidentiary ground in reproaching postwar liberalism for its failure to provide an adequate social safety net for the poor and needy rather than relying on private entities for welfare relief. But such conclusions may implicitly minimize the accomplishments of liberalism during the postwar period.[4] Lastly, one puts down Schäfer's book still wondering why the fiction of evangelicals' antistatism lingers within the movement while the reality of its federalism remains unrecognized among non-evangelical Americans. Schäfer reveals how the discourse of antistatism serves a critical purpose within the conservative movement, but just why it has been so successful in recent decades in convincing the American electorate that "big government" is their enemy is still a mystery, especially after considering that 96 percent of Americans receive some federal assistance during their lifetimes.[5]

These minor criticisms aside, Schäfer's book is a paradigm-shifting work on the rise of the evangelical movement and the evolution of American politics and foreign policy since 1945. It is sure to inform future monographs on the "conservative turn" in contemporary history and the achievements and limits of the New Right. It is a must-read for historians of American conservatism, religion, and Cold War public policy, and all scholars interested in the "intermestic" dimensions of Cold War foreign policy.[6] After finishing *Piety and Public Funding*, one only hopes evangelicals would read Schäfer's magnificent book as well.

Notes

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[1]. "Evangelicals, Seeking Unity, Back Santorum for Nomination," *New York Times*, January 14, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/15/us/politics/conservative-religious-leaders-seeking-unity-vote-to-back-rick-santorum.html?~pagewanted=all>; and "Meet Santorum, Big Spending Bush Republican," *The Nation*, January 4, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/blog/165452/meet-rick-santorum-big-spending-bush-republican>.

[2]. Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, "The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74 (Fall 2008): 3-32; Lily Geismer, "Don't Blame Us: Grassroots Liberalism in Massachusetts, 1960-1990" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010); and Molly Michelmoré, *Tax and Spend: The Welfare State, Tax Politics, and the Limits of American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[3]. See also Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2012); and Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[4]. Michael Kazin, "A Liberal Nation in Spite of Itself," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74 (Fall 2008): 38-41.

[5]. Suzanne Mettler and John Sides, "We Are the 96 Percent," *New York Times*, September 24, 2012, <http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/24/we-are-the-96-percent/>. See also Suzanne Mettler, *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[6]. The term "intermestic" is borrowed from Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 10.



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