

Review of *The Kingdom, The Power, and The Glory: American Evangelicalism in an Age of Extremism*

The Kingdom, The Power, and The Glory: American Evangelicalism in an Age of Extremism.
By Tim Alberta. Kindle Edition (Harper, 2023).

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One of the biggest temptations for the Evangelical Church in America has always been her relation to politics and power. Having in mind the nature of the politics (and the politicians), many evangelicals felt little uneasy to participate in that somewhat unholy alliance (not to mention the tax-exempt laws that prohibit the churches from openly participating in the political realm). All that, however, has fully changed with the coming of one Donald J Trump at the political stage. After taking over the Republican party – which was explored in some detail in the previous book by Alberta – Mr. Trump now took over the Evangelical Church, which brought to one of the greatest polarizations in the history of the Evangelical Church in America. In this book, Tim Alberta, a staff writer for the Atlantic, tries to give an answer as to what has happened to the Evangelical Church.

Alberta is not a disinterested party here. He is a born-again evangelical Christian and “the son of an evangelical minister, raised in a conservative church in a conservative community” in a relatively affluent suburb of Detroit. That can be seen in his style of writing that has clearly been informed by Christianity and, sometimes, might be a little bit confusing for people who are not part of the church and fully accustomed to that jargon. The impetus for writing this book was the profound change – a Dr Jekyll to Mr. Hyde change – Alberta noticed in the Evangelical Church with the advent of Mr. Trump. When his father, the senior pastor of the Cornerstone Church, died of a heart attack, many of the congregants did not come to Alberta to console him and be with him in his grieving, but to complain and chastise him about his depiction of Mr. Trump and the Republican party, some of them even accusing him of being part of, or at least sympathetic to, the “deep state” and a traitor. And that wasn’t an isolated incident. It

was clear that the Evangelical Church – at least a good part of it – finally succumbed to the temptation that had its roots with the Moral Majority of yesteryear (described by Alberta in the first chapter) and replaced the spiritual for the political, and Alberta used his journalistic skills – very successfully, in our view – to discover what has happened to the Church that he was, and still is, a part of.

The book is not a scholarly monograph full with notes and extensive bibliography. It is more like a long newspaper article, or series of related articles and interviews divided into three parts, the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory. What we see here is a depressing story of the fall of the Evangelical Church, mixed with few stories about people who are fighting, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, against the theology and culture of the new evangelical church that became almost a wholly owned subsidiary of Donald J Trump and his movement.

From chapter to chapter, leading us into different places and churches in America, we see a similar story. Churches almost unrecognizable, pastors stressed to the point of either getting sick or even leaving the ministry, and churchgoers who now think that Jesus' dictum to "turn the other cheek" is a liberal stupidity not worthy of their church. The picture painted by Alberta was so bleak, that it often made me experience profound sadness and, sometimes, anger. From chapter to chapter, from place to place, we see similar phenomena unfolding. Churches with pastors who try to keep their flock biblically and morally grounded are losing members while churches with pastors who were openly political and pro Trump, preaching not about Christ but about the stolen election, against the Covid mandates and vaccines, against the immigrants, against the LGBTQ community and, mostly, against the "illegitimate" president Biden and the Democrats who were now seen as the main enemy of (their kind of) Christianity and of America were becoming bigger and more powerful. Unfortunately, these new churches became magnets for grifters – either mid-level political operatives from the Trump administration or theologians who now became cultural warriors and Trump defenders even though many of them were highly critical of the former president's lifestyle and morality. They, however, defended their hypocrisy to Alberta claiming that the Christianity has been under attack and they had to fight back. That is the main criticism that Alberta has for this new evangelical movement. They do not care about the Gospel anymore. The evangelical church in America became a place where people came not to listen to the Gospel and be trained for discipleship but to listen to political diatribes full of grievances and conspiracy theories of stolen elections and wicked Democrats who are controlled by the Devil and want to destroy the white conservative Christian (Alberta's term for the new evangelical) via government mandated COVID closures, lax immigration politics or insistence on diversity and support for the LGBTQ community.

At the end, we can say that the book offers a narrative of an embattled evangelical church. A story that offers either a dualist agonistics or a certain dialectic. In other words, the evangelical movement as we know it will either be totally replaced by the new MAGA movement, will shrink, become more radical and full of Christian

nationalists, or it will turn into a synthesis of the two, somewhat like the so-called state churches in Europe.

There are some rays of hope for the church, and we see the stories of pastors who took the harder path of excluding politics from their pulpits even though many of their members left for the preachers who will give them the daily dose of grievances and political conspiracies. Some of them had to leave their churches and become part of new ones, built on biblical principles. There are still a good number of pastors who decided that the only way to save the Church is by preaching the biblical Gospel and not fall for the cultural and political issues of the day. They are still here and they are part of the resistance that, Alberta hopes, will steer the evangelicals back from the path of self-destruction and hatred of the Other towards the one of biblical morality and discipleship. In any case, this book is an excellent description of the issues and problems of the Evangelical Church and, besides its length, or, in spite of it, should be read by everyone interested not only in evangelical Christianity, but the future (and past) of religion and politics in America.

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