

# “GOD IS SHAKING ME”: TELEVANGELISM, CONSERVATIVE EVANGELISM AND POLITICS IN 70S AMERICA

SEBASTIAN GALBO

On 3 August 1971, American television aired “Oral Roberts in Hawaii,” a program special featuring the esteemed titular American televangelist. A dozen American men and women sing the opening medley, bedizened in brightly-colored Aloha shirts, muumuu, shells and scented lei. The camera retreats, drawing the expanse of the Pacific Ocean and gently swaying palms into the frame while the group energetically sings a secular verse: “Sing me a song of the islands, where hearts are high when the moon is low, where rippling waters seems to say, ‘Al-ho-a’ [...] Bring me the fragrance of ginger, and strum your guitar as I dream away...” (Roberts 1971). While this performance may present itself as a tawdry rendition of Rodger and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific* or a humorous caricature of American tourists, it is, in fact, the foot-tapping prelude to a widely successful evangelical television program.

Like many of its ilk, Roberts’ evangelical program garnered millions of viewers, promulgated a set of moral values and admonished Americans to repent and live the ‘true’ Christian lifestyle. Locating the pulpit on the shores of Hawaii and donning native vogue may have been an effort to make Christian values more palatable for a growing secular - and liberal -society. The very act of doing so, however, raises one of the central concerns addressed in this paper; that is, the various modes and practices, both secular and religious, televangelist preachers employed in the design and production of their programs. In 1976, Newsweek dubbed the evangelical movement “the most significant and overlooked religious phenomenon of the 1970s” (quoted in Horsfield 8). Recognizing the wealth and dynamic political feuds within the broadcasting industry, a 1978 *Wall Street Journal* headline declared: “Religious Broadcasting Becomes Big Business” (Frankl 12). Although not all televangelist programs located their ministerial work in Hawaii or other ‘exotic’ venues, each adopted modern-

day teletechnologies to aid the dissemination of the Christian message.

In what follows, this paper examines how televangelism operated in a decade marked by prevailing American attitudes of suspicion inaugurated by the turmoil of social liberalism. The first section of this paper outlines the resurgence of televangelism and conservative evangelicalism against a backdrop of significant socio-political events of the 1970s. The second section of this paper grounds 70s televangelism on the theoretical literature of Jaques Derrida, particularly the notion of the “telegenic voice.” By expounding Derrida’s seminal perspective on religious programming, we can use this lens to examine how contemporary media (television) has shaped American religious experience.

The third section analyzes the various ways conservative (tele) evangelism impacted the American political theatre. Against the backdrop of tumultuous social change, evangelicals played a significant role in challenging social liberalism, especially gay liberation and cultural feminism. Drawing on Derrida scholar Michael Naas’ notion of the telegenic voice, this paper argues that conservative (tele)evangelism often resorted to discourses of nationalism and citizenship when broadcasting and reinforcing its political viewpoints. In doing so, the *telegenic voice* articulates the political viewpoints of conservative (tele)evangelicalism during the 70s. The fourth section is speculative; its intention is to shift the discussion from the collective American evangelical experience onto the experience of self. Historians claim that the success of conservative (tele)evangelicalism was that it provided a refuge for Americans disenchanted with the ‘American Dream’ and lost in the confusion of modernity; however, this paper argues that its success is also indebted to the legitimization of personal experience that was otherwise lost in the anonymity of secular modernity. Seen from this perspective, there is a stark contrast in the self-help literature of the decade and the emotional testimony captured in the evangelical ‘born-again’ narrative.

### **Televangelism and the Resurgence of Conservative Evangelicalism**

The resurgence of conservative evangelicalism, or what would eventually

be called the New Christian Right (NCR), was undergirded by a series of tumultuous socio-political changes during the 70s. The establishment of the NCR was heavily influenced by the ideologies of 19th-century evangelicalism, which was typically “characterized by racism, a hostility to Native Americans, an imperialist mentality, superpatriotism, a pro-militarist stance, and a deep suspicion of “foreign” ideologies such as Catholicism and socialism” (Peck 81). For evangelicals, a spate of Supreme Court rulings and shifting lifestyle habits presented a pernicious threat to evangelical values. Heather Hendershot’s *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (2004) acknowledges the impact of Supreme Court rulings in 1962 and 1963, which proscribed school prayer and Bible reading. Concurrently, “the defeat in Vietnam, Watergate, rising rates of drug use, teenage pregnancy and divorce, the growth of the pornography industry, and an increase in sex and violence on television” plunged America into moral peril (Hendershot 82). Janice Peck’s study, *The God’s of Televangelism* (1993), also points to political events, such as “the Cold War, McCarthyism, and Eisenhower’s election,” as catalysts to the rise of conservative evangelicalism (81). In 1973, evangelicals watched in horror as abortion was legalized. Against this backdrop of social and legal reforms, evangelicals interpreted social change as an acute symptom of modernity, and developed a deep and unshakable conviction that America epitomized the biblical city of Sodom.

America thus witnessed “the reflowering of evangelical activism,” which would represent and institutionalize a Christian counterpoint to the confusion of modernity (81). While conservative evangelicals combated social liberalism, they also labored to distinguish themselves from the liberal Protestantism that prevailed during the 1960s. Liberal Protestantism promoted both political activism and “provoked deep reassessments of religious faith and practice for many members of mainline denominations” (81). Conservative Protestants kept this kind of grass roots participation at a distance, arguing that liberal Protestantism made too many concessions to the social liberals of the 1960s. Additionally, many conservative evangelicals felt that liberal Protestantism obfuscated the line dividing its Christian doctrine from the popular trends of New Age philosophies and spiritualism. As a result, “conservative evangelicalism was strategically positioned to fill the vacuum created by the faltering of

liberal Christianity” (92). Rather than renegotiate their own doctrine to accommodate this growing liberal worldview, these conservatives advanced an aggressive model of Christianity that would challenge social liberalism and ground its viewpoints on American nationalism.

Incorporating broadcasting technologies, teleministry gained considerable momentum from the early-fifties through the mid-sixties. Communications historian, Peter G. Horsfield’s *Religious Television: The American Experience* (1984), astutely observes that the candidacy and election of a “self-proclaimed “born-again” Southern evangelical as American president [Jimmy Carter]” was the galvanizing event that “brought the phenomenon [televangelism] to public attention” (Horsfield 13). Historians agree that the pivotal election year of 1976 led to its “most visible manifestation”: evangelical television (13). Hendershot also comments on the significance of the Carter nomination: “Carter was an avowed born-again, but to the disappointment of his conservative Christian supporters, he turned out to be something of a liberal in sheep’s clothing” (Henderson 27). Despite this disappointment, “just having a born-again in the White House [...] helped to get evangelicals onto the popular culture map” (27). Conservative evangelicals agreed to promote Carter’s status as a ‘born-again’ rather than focusing on Carter’s weak conservative character. Many Americans were surprised to find that these evangelist broadcasters wielded large budgets, exercised technological prowess, possessed sophisticated fundraising strategies and presided over enormous congregations. Horsfield points out that “the fact that the growth of evangelist broadcasting had occurred largely unnoticed led many to believe that the broadcasters had in fact been operating in secret and were intent on some kind of social or political duplicity” (13). Post-Watergate attitudes of suspicion led many Americans to scrutinize the ‘machinations’ of these powerful broadcasters, and this element of suspicion seemed to be justified after the following election year when a coterie of evangelicals launched an alliance with “new right” politicians, such as Moral Majority. The significance of organizing such a coalition was to combat the “moral and political” ideologies that threatened Christian values (14). As a result, the merging of conservative evangelicalism and American politics led suspicious onlookers to fear the rise of a technocratic theocracy ruled by evangelical broadcasters and fundamentalist politicians.

Gaining this momentum, conservative evangelicalism worked to preserve and propagate its Christian politics by expanding the evangelical press, building Christian educational institutions and organizing Christian lobbying coalitions. Peck understands these evangelical entities as instrumental in developing “its ideological and material resources in opposition to the dominant currents and structures of modern society” (83). Peck articulates that “economic and industrial development, black civil rights struggles, and the universalization of television have eroded many boundaries that had separated orthodox Protestants from “the world”” (83). Much of this success, however, is indebted to the efficiency and growth of televisual ministry. During the 1960s and early 1970s, televangelism underwent an important transition following the FCC’s decision to revise its broadcasting regulations, which resulted in three major reforms.

First, the FCC stated that “there was no difference, in terms of serving the public interest, between sustaining-time and paid-time religious programming” (98). In other words, stations were no longer responsible for reserving airtime for free religious programming. Second, stations were permitted to feature commercial advertising during “noncommercial” religious programming, therefore attracting wealthy investors and maximizing profit. Lastly, and most crucially, the FCC removed religious programming from the aegis of the Fairness Doctrine, which served to maintain a fair representation of competing political ideas and viewpoints (98). Broadcasters therefore were free to promote particular social or political viewpoints without the responsibility of balancing them with contending perspectives.

With these new revisions, televangelists became fierce competitors in the marketplace, buying blocks of airtime from independent stations. Horsfield’s statistics illustrates how this revised body of legislation impacted religious broadcasting budgetarily. He notes that the Christian Television Mission’s budget increased from \$90,076 in 1969 to \$125,081 in 1971; the Christian Evangelizer’s Association nearly doubled its budget from \$571,000 in 1970 to \$1,117,000 in 1971 (Horsfield 99). By 1977, 92% of all religious television was paid-time programming (Horsfield 27). As a result of this fiscal support, the number of these programs grew from 38 in 1970 to 72 in 1978, and evangelical

programming airtime increased from 53-percent in 1959 to 92-percent in 1977 (9). Mail-in fundraising tactics, such as ‘prayer requests,’ often triggered a deluge of mail; Horsfield reports that Oral Robert’s ministry yielded 20,000 pieces of mail each day (28). As it has been suggested, the FCC’s rulings deregulated religious broadcasting, positioning the televangelist enterprise in the ambit of a wider American audience and competitive marketplace.

### Theorizing Televangelism

Because television functions as the central tool of the televangelist enterprise in voicing the Christian message, it is beneficial to turn to Jacques Derrida’s thoughts on televangelism. In his seminal study of Derrida and televangelism, critic Michael Naas’ *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media* (2012), explores Derrida’s understanding of televangelism. Naas suggests that Derrida’s fascination with televangelism is both cultural and epistemological, rooted in the “elementary faith that Derrida claims to be the basis of all media, that is, capitalizing on the “I believe” or the “I believe you” or the “Believe me as one believes in a miracle” at the origin of every form of communication and every social bond” (Naas 139). Derrida articulates that there is a “capitalization upon the testimonial faith that is the condition of all teletechnology that leads to the production of miracles on the plasma screen,” but “only through a high degree of technological knowledge, not to mention tremendous investments of capital” (139). This strain of thought demonstrates that Derrida is not only cognizant of the size of the televangelist enterprise, but, most importantly, its power to produce, induce and reinforce belief. Derrida points out that while religions have a “universal vocation,” “Christianity’s particular brand of universality [...] has gained such prominence and legitimacy on the world stage and [...] has marked international discourse, law, and institutions to such a degree” (133). It is precisely how this universalization of Christianity is sustained that propels Derrida’s argument forward.

At the core of Derrida’s analysis of televangelism is a suspicion of the power and hegemony activated by American teleministers. For Derrida, Christian teleministry resembles a panoptic power that

centralizes a dominant (Christian) ideology around which all opposing (non-Christian) discourses and viewpoints are controlled and regulated. Similarly, Peck articulates the hegemonic power exercised through televangelism:

Religious rhetoric persuades through authoritative proclamation rather than by rational argument. Listeners are moved by religious rhetoric when they feel the terms of their belief system have been faithfully represented by speakers who hold the necessary authority to deliver divine messages (Peck 199).

As such, the central “power of television is vocal [...] the recording of the voice is one of the most important phenomena on the twentieth century” (Naas 142). While recording the voice was a defining hallmark of technological progress, Naas points out that Derrida routinely speaks of “the televisual hegemony of the Christian religion,” or the enforced universalization of its message (Derrida quoted in Naas 34). Naas illustrates Derrida’s concern, remarking that Christianity is “the most widely disseminated, most dramatic, spectacular, and arguably the most successful televisual representations of religion in the United States” (134). In what he has termed the *telegenic voice*, Naas summarizes Derrida’s understanding of the hegemonic Christian ‘voice’ of televangelism as a media phenomenon that claims both political and religious ‘truth’ while actively quashing contending non-Christian voices.

### **Politics and the National Pulpit**

The 70s was a momentous decade in American religious history for two reasons. First, it registered the energetic resurgence of evangelical broadcasting; by the mid-sixties, religious broadcasting had lost its zeal and maintained only a small portion of airtime. Second, there was an emerging dialogue between evangelism and conservative American politics. Evangelical discourse figured prominently among the competing and divisive political voices of 70s America, particularly in the debates of cultural feminism and gay liberation. The resurgence of conservative (tele) evangelicalism was, in part, a reaction to the dynamism and instability of moral and cultural values of the 70s. While televangelism used biblical logic and argumentation as a lens to study culture and politics, 70s

liberals worked by “interrogation and questions: why should we accept conventions, norms and values? Furthermore, what stops us from creating new values, new desires, or new images of what it is to be and think?” (Colebrook 5). In light of Naas’ notion of the *telegenic voice*, this section analyzes how (tele)evangelicalism impacted the American political theatre and adopted rhetoric of nationalism and citizenship to ground its politico-religious viewpoints.

With President Carter in the White House, televangelists confronted social liberalism in 70s America by organizing powerful political coalitions with the Christian Right. Peck writes: “The success of any modern social movement depends on building a coalition around clearly identified issues. A movement must also have a clearly identifiable opposition if it is to create enjoyment in the moral arena” (Peck 87). In forging a strong political coalition, teleministers gained traction as they set out to expunge what they saw as the moral perils of American society.

Three significant conservative religious programs that gained momentum during the 70s were Anita Bryant Ministries and her infamous Save Our Children campaign (1977), Pat Roberson’s 700-Club (founded in 1966, but reached national syndication in 1974) and the establishment of Rev. Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority (1979). Known as the beautiful runner-up in the 1959 Miss America pageant and spokeswoman of Florida orange juice, Anita Bryant spearheaded a virulent anti-gay crusade in Dale County, Florida. In 1977, Bryant attended a revival at Miami’s Northside Baptist Church where she listened to an incensed preacher denounce the recently-ratified Dale County anti-discrimination ordinance for gay residents, claiming he would “burn down [his] church before [he] would let homosexuals teach in its school” (Beirich 1). Stirred by the preacher’s words, Bryant launched a national campaign called Save Our Children, which sought to overturn the pro-gay ordinance. To the dismay of gay residents, Bryant’s bitter crusade garnered over 64,000 petitioned signatures in less than six weeks, ultimately repealing the ordinance with a 70% vote.

While Bryant was not recognized as a ‘trained’ televangelist, historians and critics alike tend to overlook her oratorical acumen and adoption of preaching tactics. Bryant was an enterprising and talented speaker; her activity in beauty pageants and music career made her

comfortable in front of large crowds. Like her male televangelist counterparts, Bryant's hard-line Christian message was articulated through the *telegenic voice*. Instrumental to the campaign's efforts to overturn the ordinance were Bryant's evangelist-inspired commercials that were broadcasted locally in Florida. One particular commercial juxtaposed the events of the Orange Bowl (a national American college football tournament) with the events from the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade. The commercial features a collage of live footage and photographs featuring public displays of homosexuality, such as transgender folk, cross-dressers, dancing lesbians and shirtless men. On a deeper level, Bryant's visual rhetoric arranges multimedia to juxtapose 'old' and 'new' American social values, which at once extols an America defined by collegiate athletics, patriotism, family leisure and national sport, and bemoans the moral corruption of gay liberal culture.

Seen from this perspective, evangelicals believed social liberalism was deteriorating Christian-American values. This sentiment of Christian nationalism is best reflected in the visible support of Jesse Holmes, the senator of North Carolina who remarked: "I have pledged my full support to her [Bryant...] She is fighting for decency and morality in America—and that makes her, in my book, an *all-American lady*" (Young 38 my emphasis). As an "all-American lady," Bryant's crusade mobilized a vicious misrepresentation of homosexuality that systematically subsumed pedophilia, child pornography, youth exploitation and perversion under the category 'homosexual.' Bryant forewarned her audience that "if homosexuals are allowed to change the law in their favor, why not prostitutes, thieves, or murderers?" (Kondracke 13). During another religious anti-gay crusade, Bryant often relied on the myth of homosexual proselytization, or the deliberate recruitment strategies Bryant and her proponents believed gays used: "Some of the stories I could tell you of child recruitment and child abuse by homosexuals would turn your stomach [...] Homosexuals cannot reproduce, so they must recruit" (4). Seen as "an assault on the nuclear family," gays (and feminists) were misrepresented as predators targeting vulnerable American youth (Peck 82). Additionally, Bryant routinely imbued biblical interpretation with humor to cement her political viewpoints: "If homosexuality were the normal way, God would have made Adam and Bruce" (Carroll 291). As

vociferous critics of social liberalism, evangelicals used broadcasting networks that worked to propagate their anti-gay sentiments and speak to millions of “decent” American citizens.

The crusade went national when Bryant’s campaign attracted the support of two prominent televangelists, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. At a rally in Miami in 1977, Falwell chimed in with Bryant’s anti-gay obloquy: “So-called gay folks [would] just as soon kill you as look at you” (Johnson 1). Reaching national syndication in 1974, Robertson’s 700 Club echoed a similar lamentation heard in Bryant’s anti-gay commercials. Peck points out that “programs such as the “700 Club” encourage political activism in terms of moral imperatives that derive from divine mandates” (Peck 87). Significantly, Robertson often lamented the dissolution of what historian Grant Wacker has termed the “Christian Civilization.” Wacker understands the resurgence of conservative evangelicalism to be rooted in the myth of the “Christian Civilization.” Wacker explains that the Christian Civilization ideal “is constructed on the belief that there exists a set of “moral absolutes” explicitly and transparently revealed in Scripture that should underpin society’s laws, institutions, and public policies” (Peck 82). Wacker clarifies that the Christian Civilization embodies an “explicit set of social and cultural commitments” that is “not so much a list of discrete ideals of a coherent world view, as a way of seeing reality” (Wacker 297). This is precisely what Naas articulates through his notion of the *telegenic voice*; that is, a dominant discourse that aims to universalize its political message, pushing resisting viewpoints into a realm of cultural unintelligibility and illegitimacy. Both Naas and Wacker’s terms are inextricably linked as the *telegenic voice* directly articulates, promotes and defends the principles of the Christian Civilization narrative.

Televangelists thus sought to establish a national pulpit where the *telegenic voice* could urge Americans to preserve the Christian Civilization that was quickly deteriorating. While conservative evangelicals asserted that America should strive to emulate the principles of Christian Civilization, many social liberals of the decade felt that its narrative read more as a nostalgic threnody for an outmoded America. On the *700 Club*, Robertson expressed the core sentiment of the Christian Civilization ideal: “I think we should be a biblically-based nation. There has got to be some unifying ethic for society” (quoted in Horsfield 155). Although

the discourse of Christian Civilization imagined a very specific kind of America, it also advanced a narrow definition of American citizenship. Not only did conservative evangelicals envision and advocate for the grand restoration of Christian Civilization, they also inspired the evangelical interrogation of American citizenship. Televangelist Jerry Swaggart's program, *The Camp Meeting Hour* (a widely popular program launched during the 70s), preached: I have always thought that Christians should get involved in public life [...] The way you lead is from service. If we serve the people with knowledge and compassion and with care, that's the way we ought to take over leadership (Clarke 3).

As conservative evangelicalism aimed to reform society through a biblical lens, Falwell's program also admonished his faithful viewers to animate political leadership with Christian principles. Long after the 70s, Jerry Falwell continued to blend nationalist and religious rhetoric. In a comment to the *Washington Post* in 1997, the Falwell expressed: "If we do not act now, homosexuals will 'own' America! If you and I do not speak up now, this homosexual steamroller will literally crush all decent men, women, and children [...] and our nation will pay a terrible price!" (Falwell quoted in Johnson, my emphasis). Such views typified not only the nationalist rhetoric of televangelism, but also promoted a model of Christian citizenship that merged Christian values with political responsibility. This model of citizenship exhorted Americans to construct and maintain this Christian Civilization through political activism and awareness. Like many of his televangelist counterparts, Falwell routinely adopted and relied on a nationalist vocabulary to ground his political viewpoints, calling upon "America" and the "nation" to mobilize conservative Christian resistance.

One of the most visible institutions reiterating the discourses of the Christian Civilization was Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. Although Moral Majority flourished in the 1980s, the far-reaching influence of 1970s (tele)evangelicalism paved the way for its establishment. With the help of Paul Weyrich, founder of *Christian Voice* (1976), Falwell established a political organization that vehemently opposed homosexuality, abortion and anti-family attitudes in an effort to preserve the values of the Christian Civilization. Founded in 1979, Moral Majority emerged as a powerful think-tank institution that advocated for the union of personal (religious)

and political viewpoints, and articulated the epistemological and political foundations for a new American moral order. Social liberals and opponents of Moral Majority viewed Falwell as a pompous moralist whose religious cant condemned Americans who did not hold Christian values. Moral Majority, Hendershot argues, “made a huge political splash and was, [...] a daunting, frightening force of the political Right” (Hendershot 32). Falwell successfully mounted a political platform whereupon conservative evangelicals and politicians aimed to conform liberal social values to the ideals of Christian Civilization.

Another political entity that employed the *telegenic voice* to articulate both evangelical and nationalist sentiments was Falwell’s highly-patriotic “I Love America” rally. Much like his Moral Majority, these rallies epitomized televangelism’s nationalist-religious rhetoric. Resembling the ethos of nineteenth-century camp-revivals, Falwell’s campaign invited televangelists, such as Robertson, to lead crowds on the steps of state capitol buildings across the country, preaching to throngs of listeners to preserve Christian values in the face of modernity. In his influential evangelical manifesto, *Listen, America!* (1980), Falwell articulates that the political intention of the “I Love America” rallies was to “prompt politicians, citizens and non-Christians to consider establishing a national morality on the foundations of Scripture” (Falwell quoted in Swatos 515). The demonstrations were also intended, he remarks, “to rally together the people of this country who still believe in decency, the home, the family, morality, the free enterprise family” (515). Seen from this perspective, the rallies’ politico-moral logic aimed to fully restore the Christian Civilization tradition.

### **Televangelism, Testimony and the ‘Self-Help’ Genre**

While this paper has examined the larger political implications of the evangelical collective, it shifts focus onto the individual and its relationship to conservative (tele)evangelicalism. This section of the paper revisits several reasons advanced by religious historians for the success of conservative evangelicalism during the 1970s, and then proposes an explanation that has not yet been articulated.

Peck’s subchapter entitled, “Evangelism and the Problem of the

Self,” advances an interesting explanation for the success of conservative (tele)evangelism during the seventies. “Much of the persuasive power of the evangelical belief system,” Peck contends, “lies in its creative responses to the problem of self and its ability to make sense of the difficulties of modern life by incorporating these into a coherent symbolic system” (Peck 93). For Peck, evangelism offers a haven from the confusions of modernity. Continuing, he remarks that conservative evangelism “offers a cosmic framework that responds to profound questions about the relationship between society and individual existence at the time when such questions seem to have been increasingly urgent for people both inside and outside its boundaries” (93). Similarly, Wacker writes that conservative evangelicalism provided a solution to people’s “deep bewilderment about the reasons for the faltering of the American dream” (Wacker 306). Conservative evangelicals recognized the unreliability of American narratives of material success and focused on the spiritual treasures promised in Heaven. While Wacker and Peck agree that conservative evangelicalism offered a refuge from a decade marked by tumultuous socio-political change, both historians overlook the role ‘born-again’ testimony played in the success of the televangelist ministry.

Significantly, the evangelicals’ emphasis on personal spiritual testimony offered an alternative to the sudden swell of autobiographical print culture of the 70s. Peck points out that “the act of commitment plays a major formative role in determining belonging in social movements” (Peck 89). “Commitment arises,” he continues, “from “bridge-burning acts” such as being spiritually reborn” (89). The ‘born-again’ experience is not simply a tacit transition to the evangelical faith, but rather an emotional and visceral life-event that has brought one to the threshold of conversion. It is common for ‘born-again’ evangelicals to remember where and when they were when they had their born-again experience. It could have been before a risky surgery, a life-threatening accident or a period of heightened consciousness when they left compelled to change the moral and spiritual direction of their life. In the evangelical community, this life-affirming and empowering account of change experience is often narrated and re-narrated to others. In this sense, Peck cites the historical research of Gerlach and Hine’s *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* (1970) wherein they write that being “spiritually reborn” is

[...] a psycho-social state [...] generated by an act or an experience which separates a convert in some significant way from the established order (or his previous place in it), identifies him with a new set of values, and commits him to changed patterns of behavior. (Gerlach and Hine quoted in Peck 89)

Seen from this perspective, how did this born-again narrative - that is, emotive evangelical testimony - work against the prevailing values of social liberalism? Giving an account of oneself empowered the evangelical who may have formerly been lost in the confusion of modernity.

To illustrate this last point, Peck (as well as historian Sam Binkley in his *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption of the 70s*) explains that the decade saw a major proliferation of “self-help literature, counseling centers, encounter-style retreats, and lifestyle programming” (93). The evangelical conversion narrative countered the secular humanism of this self-help genre, therefore legitimizing and grounding this personal experience in religious meaning. The success of conservative (tele)evangelicalism was its carving out a space for spiritual transition, human conversion and heartfelt testimony during a decade when all meaning was radically questioned and doubted.

In conclusion, conservative (tele)evangelicalism during the 70s expressed its Christian ideologies through various institutions and programs, ranging from Pat Robertson’s televised *700 Club* to Jerry Falwell’s conservative think-tank, Moral Majority. It has been argued here that televangelists and evangelical politicians alike have drawn and relied on a nationalist vocabulary to cement their political viewpoints, which often informed discourses of citizenship and Christian models of responsibility. Additionally, evangelical ministers recognized the power of the *telegenic voice* in transmitting the narrative of the Christian Civilization, and its urgent message to all patriotic Christians to restore America’s moral order.

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