

*FAITH IN THE HALLS OF POWER: HOW EVANGELICALS JOINED THE AMERICAN ELITE.* By D. Michael Lindsay. Oxford University Press 2007. Pp. 332. \$24.95. ISBN: 0-195-32666-0.

As a student of religion and politics, I have read many volumes purporting to explain the phenomenon of the religious right, evangelicals, and/or fundamentalists in America. Lindsay is familiar with the literature as well, describing the mass as sometimes “thoughtful and scholarly,” but often “sloppy and hysterical.” (16) In offering this judgment of the work that has been done, Lindsay suggests his goal in *Faith in the Halls of Power* was to offer a corrective to the genre. He has done so by writing a book on evangelical elites featuring exhaustive research based on interviews with his subjects. *Faith* is the single finest account of the goals, ambitions, challenges, and complexities of evangelical elites I have ever read.

In reviewing the book, one might begin by discussing the interviews that serve as the source material for Lindsay’s many trenchant observations. He met with nearly four hundred evangelical elites around the nation wherever he could catch them. (xiv) The size of Lindsay’s task is a little intimidating. He alludes to a huge travel effort supplemented even by his in-laws’ frequent flier miles and apologizes to his wife for time away from home over a period of years. (xvi) Looking at his list in the back of the book, though, one can see that he picked his targets very shrewdly. For example, how many scholars studying evangelicals would know that Mariam Bell of Prison Fellowship (234) is an essential person to talk to about Christian political activity? Lindsay somehow does and he is right! Ms. Bell doesn’t have a high profile, but those with knowledge of the evangelical political scene know her and have probably collaborated with her at some point. Evangelical insiders can go through Lindsay’s list repeatedly recognizing familiar names that go well beyond the usual suspects.

The book is also impressive for its attention to the work of evangelicals in politics, business, the academy, and parachurch organizations. Lindsay faithfully describes the theological convictions of the elites he studies. Whereas many books have mistaken the cultural ambitions of evangelicals for some kind of soft-edged *jihad* or cut-rate inquisitionism, Lindsay more accurately locates the current evangelical thirst for cultural renewal with a broader desire to “seek the peace of the

city" even though the city may be ruled by "Babylonian pagans." (141) Evangelical elites have a strong reform agenda, but it does not exist purely to advance the cultural power of believers. It is the same sense of reform that moved some older evangelicals to crusade against slavery, protest abuses of native Americans, or seek to contain alcoholism. It is a passion for a better, more just world originating in a love for Christ.

While Lindsay paints a sympathetic picture of the evangelical elites he profiles in the book, he also uncovers some disturbing trouble spots which indirectly serve to critique a culture that is flying high in many ways. The first, and mildest, of the issues under which Lindsay draws a line is the participation of women among the community's elite. Despite the increase in the number of women with the kind of career seniority and success suitable to qualify for membership in the informal club, Lindsay finds that women who have made it often still feel secondary to the main action. (9) Though Lindsay recognizes the slow progress of evangelical women in gaining leadership authority in the movement, he predicts that the evangelical elites will have increasing room for females in the top ranks of parachurch organizations which are becoming the preferred institutional mode for big picture projects and activism. (225-226)

While the preference for parachurch activity has tremendous positive effects such as creating extra room for participation by women, bringing members of various denominations together into unified ventures, and providing focus on single issues or related bodies of issues, there is a significant downside to the increasing popularity of parachurch work. Lindsay finds that powerful and connected persons in the evangelical world are beginning to connect more deeply with their friends in the parachurch ministries than with their local churches. The problem with this increasing lack of connection with the local church is that church participation is the activity that brings Christians from different places in life together. (204) Through the local church, the wealthy evangelical is more likely to be exposed to the lives of less well-heeled brethren and to offer personal help. He is also able to experience and provide the kind of fellowship that is described in the New Testament in which the poor man receives the place of honor. Lindsay's point is that evangelical elites have a tendency to gravitate toward their own kind and that, while they are understandable, such tendencies may reflect a sub-Christian ethic of religious participation.

In a related criticism, Lindsay discusses the wealth and lifestyles of many evangelical elites, particularly in the corporate sector. Thirty years ago, Francis Schaeffer decried the addiction of Americans.

including American Christians, to their personal peace and affluence which replaced entering into the sufferings of others and making sacrificial gifts. Lindsay doesn't preach that sermon, but the message is implied. On the basis of these interviews, the picture that emerges is one of evangelicals enjoying the good life, perhaps well-deserved, and not thinking carefully enough about how that wealth could best be employed by a Christian person. Though Lindsay encountered a number of evangelical elites paying attention to stewardship of their wealth—driving a Saturn rather than a Saab, for example—he found more who tended to enjoy luxury in an unreflective fashion. (192)

What Michael Lindsay has achieved with *Faith in the Halls of Power* is a portrayal of evangelical elites that is simultaneously accurate, sympathetic, and critical. The research and care evident in the writing of this book provide the reader with a unique opportunity to understand the people who are staples of American journalism and academic research, yet are often treated without proper understanding. This book should become a standard text for journalists and academics. Every story, article, and essay informed by Lindsay's work will be more edifying to the reader as a result.

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