

PRINT EDITION



Full contents Subscribe
Enlarge current cover
Past issues/regional covers

NEWS ANALYSIS

POLITICS THIS WEEK

BUSINESS THIS WEEK

OPINION

Leaders
Letters to the editor
Blogs
Columns
Gallery

WORLD

United States
The Americas
Asia
Middle East & Africa
Europe
Britain
International

Country Briefings

Cities Guide

SPECIAL REPORTS

BUSINESS

Management
Business Education

FINANCE & ECONOMICS

Economics Focus
Economics A-Z

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Technology Quarterly

BOOKS & ARTS

Style Guide

PEOPLE

Obituary

MARKETS & DATA

Weekly Indicators
Currencies
Rankings
Big Mac Index
Chart Gallery

DIVERSIONS

Correspondent's Diary

RESEARCH TOOLS

AUDIO

DELIVERY OPTIONS

E-mail Newsletters
Audio edition
Mobile Edition
RSS Feeds
Screensaver

CLASSIFIED ADS

The Economist Group

Economist Intelligence Unit

The
Economist

Great minds
like a think.

Get 6
Free
Trial
Issues

Books & Arts

Get article background

Printable page

E-mail this

Bookmark

Related Items

From *The Economist*

The troubles of America's conservatives
Aug 9th 2007

Country briefing

United States

More articles about...

Religion

Websites

Click to buy from Amazon.com:
"The Passion of the Christ"
(Amazon.co.uk); "The Chronicles
of Narnia" (Amazon.co.uk).

Michael Lindsay describes his book.

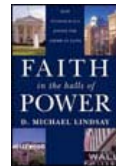
Book details

**Faith in the Halls of Power:
How Evangelicals Joined the
American Elite**

By D. Michael Lindsay

*Oxford University
Press*; 352 pages;
\$24.95 and £14.99

Buy it at
Amazon.com
Amazon.co.uk



Evangelicals in America

The bond between God and power

Aug 23rd 2007

From *The Economist* print edition

Once looked down upon, American Evangelicals have now risen triumphantly to the heights

Eyevine



ON PALM SUNDAY 2002 George Bush and his entourage were flying home from El Salvador. Not wishing to miss church, they decided to improvise. Before long 40 worshippers were crammed into Air Force One's conference room. Condoleezza Rice, then National Security Adviser, led the worship, Karen Hughes, then Mr Bush's counsellor, gave the lesson and the service ended with everybody singing "Amazing Grace" and hugging each other.

In the first half of the 20th century, H.L. Mencken, a freethinker, dismissed Evangelicals as backwoods bigots and Richard Niebuhr, a theologian, said that theirs was a "religion of the dispossessed" (or, as one sociologist put it, of the "disadvantaged ranks of the stratification system"). Even as late as the 1990s there was a widespread perception that Evangelicals were poor, uneducated and easily led.

How did these supposedly ignorant buffoons arrive at the heart of the American power structure? Michael Lindsay, a sociologist at Rice University, who has interviewed 360 Evangelicals who have made it into the American elite, including two former presidents, answers this question with a rare degree of skill and learning. The past 30 years have seen a revolution. Evangelicals have almost drawn level with other religious groups in terms of wealth and education. And they have penetrated almost every area of the American establishment. Look at the top of many a professional tree and you can find an arboreal gathering of born-again Christians.

The role of Evangelicals in the Bush administration is particularly notable. But any European who thinks that they will simply disappear back into their caves when Mr Bush retires is in for a disappointment. Billy Graham has been a spiritual adviser to every president since Dwight Eisenhower. Bill Clinton cultivated Evangelical leaders, such as Bill Hybels, the founder of the Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois. He also mentioned Jesus more frequently in his public utterances than Mr Bush has, at least so far (5.1 times a year compared with 4.7). Over on Capitol Hill politicians of all parties attend prayer breakfasts and Bible classes.

Evangelicals have become much more visible in the boardroom as the South prospered and people became more willing to mingle work and faith. Prominent business figures such as John Tyson, a chicken magnate, and Wayne Huizinga, a serial entrepreneur, now talk openly about their faith. Evangelical businessmen form




Advertisement

Economist Conferences
The World In
Intelligent Life
CFO
Roll Call
European Voice
EuroFinance Conferences
Economist Diaries and
Business Gifts

EIU [onlinestore](#) »

Advertisement



The Economist

Great minds
like a think.

"One of the few journals
I read regularly."
Henry Kissinger

Name

Email

Address 1

Address 2

City

St Zip/Postal

United States

[Get 6 Free Trial Issues](#) »

Please enter my subscription to *The Economist*. If I decide to continue my trial subscription, I'll receive 18 additional issues (24 in all) for \$49.90 in the US and 16 additional issues (22 in all) for C\$67.50 plus GST in Canada. If I decide *The Economist* is not for me, I'll write "cancel" on the bill, return it and owe nothing. Email address is used for subscription purposes.

networks such as the Business Leadership and Spirituality Network. And a growing number of businesses are trying to incorporate Evangelical principles into the operation of their businesses. Chick-fil-A, a fast-food chain, refuses to open on Sundays and holds devotional services at its corporate headquarters every Monday. And Interstate Batteries, a Texan company, helps its employees to go on missions.

Evangelicals are even invading America's two greatest bastions of secularism—Hollywood and academia. Mel Gibson forced Hollywood to wake up to the power of the Evangelical dollar with his formidably successful "The Passion of the Christ". Phil Anschutz, an Evangelical billionaire in Denver, finances Walden Media, which had huge success with two films: "The Chronicles of Narnia" and "Amazing Grace". Evangelical colleges, such as Regent University and Biola, support state-of-the-art film studios. Act One, a Los Angeles programme, trains Christian screenwriters and executives (even if the notion of a Christian Hollywood executive seems a contradiction in terms).

Evangelicals have been purged from the ivory tower more thoroughly than any other religious group (and have often made up for the fact by denigrating the life of the mind). But even there, they are now on the march. Evangelical colleges have been expanding rapidly—they increased their enrolment by 60% between 1990 and 2002, a time when the general university population was static—and are trying to improve their academic profiles. Evangelical high-flyers have been making it into the Ivy League: in a recent year a quarter of Princeton's students were attending Evangelical meetings. The Pew Foundation has invested money in a cadre of first-rate Evangelical academics, and other patrons have created scholarships for Evangelical students. Mark Noll, one of America's finest historians, is also a proud Evangelical.

Mr Lindsay demonstrates that the arrival of the Evangelicals is changing both the American elite and the Evangelical movement itself. It is bringing the elite much closer to ordinary Americans (Peter Berger, another sociologist, once joked that, if Indians are the most religious people on the planet and Swedes the least religious, then America is a land of Indians governed by Swedes). But it is also creating new divisions within the Evangelical movement between a cosmopolitan establishment and the populist masses.

"Faith in the Halls of Power" is not a perfect book. Mr Lindsay's prose style suggests that he spends too much time reading his fellow sociologists. His failure to discuss the American armed services is bizarre given the number of Evangelicals there. But he has nonetheless written an impressive and admirably fair-minded book: anybody who wants to understand the nexus between God and power in modern America should start here.

[Back to top](#) »



Economist Conferences



**Fourth
China
Branding
Roundtable**

**Winning
moves
for a
changing
game**

Sep 18th-19th
2007
Beijing

Classified ads

Jobs
CIMA Professors
CIMA, the Chartered
Institute of
Management
Accountants, is
currently looking for
to facilita....

**Business /
Consumer**
Announcement:
Submissions for the
2007 round of the
Global Development
Awards and Medals
Competition
....

Tenders
Joint Invitation for
Expression of Interest
MINISTRY OF
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OF
GEORGIA TBILISI
CITY

Property
Waterfront Villa for
Yacht & Golf lovers
Island of Mallorca
SW, Spain Direct
sale of a luxurious
waterfront

Jobs
Accounting &
Finance
Professionals
International
Monetary Fund
Accounting &
Finance
Professionals The
Fi....

**Business /
Consumer**
UNIDO Technology
Foresight Summit
2007
United Nations
Industrial
Development
Organization
(UNIDO)....

Sponsors' feature

[About sponsorship](#) »



Economist Conferences



**Fourth
China
Branding
Roundtable**

Sep 18th-19th 2007
Beijing

[About Economist.com](#) | [About The Economist](#) | [Media Directory](#) | [Staff Books](#) | [Advertising info](#) | [Career opportunities](#) | [Contact us](#)

Copyright © The Economist Newspaper Limited 2007. All rights reserved. [Advertising Info](#) | [Legal disclaimer](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Help](#)