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Wayward Christian Soldiers: Against the Political Captivity of the Gospel

Charles Marsh
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"I fear that the Gospel has been humiliated in our time," Marsh writes.

In this critique of the American evangelical movement, the author argues that the "self-serving and pious chatter" of Christians has compromised the evangelical mission. Instead of proclaiming the love of God to the world, evangelicals have proclaimed American ambitions to the world. And instead of dedicating themselves to being "a peculiar people" who "stand for God in the quiet work of justice and mercy," the politicized, success-oriented evangelicals of today have not been able to resist "the narcosis of faith-based ambition." Marsh asks Christians to free the word of God from the "partisan gulags" and rejoin the global community of believers from all nations, classes, and races. He warns that although Christians should seek the "simple truth" of the gospel, they must also use their God-given critical faculties to seek the truth of the world.

Marsh's elegant proposal develops and updates his January 2006 *New York Times* editorial of the same title. A Harvard Divinity School graduate, professor of religion at the University of Virginia, and committed evangelical, Marsh, in his fifth book, writes with authority and passion. He cites the Old and New Testaments as well as theologians and saints, and he is an astute observer of American political and religious culture. He is especially critical of the "compromises and equivocations" of the evangelical rise to prominence on the shirttails of the Bush administration. He notes the Christian allegiance to Bush, whom Marsh calls a "serial converter." "The content of Bush's faith," he adds, "comes straight from peppy worship centers, from smiling preachers in sports arenas, from the thought-free Christian book chains … ."

Marsh documents Christians' overwhelming support, from pulpits to pews and with no regard for the opposition from Christians around the globe, for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. He compares this unseemly and unjustified holy war fever, tempered somewhat since the mid-term election reversals of 2006, to the mood in Germany during World War II. He often cites the German theologian-martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who believed the church in his country had become so compromised in its support of Hitler, war, and genocide that it could barely function, inside or outside of Germany. Bonhoeffer advocated simplicity: "to fix one's eyes solely on the simple truth of God at a time when all concepts are being confused, distorted, and turned upside-down," he wrote. As in Bonhoeffer's Germany, Marsh acknowledges the current humiliation of the Gospel in the United States. "The church cannot preach salvation to the nations while showing contempt for the nations," he observes. Like Bonhoeffer, Marsh suggests that Christians live in truth, and that "the truth of the world is found in God."
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