



# We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics

*By Neil J. Young*

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The story of the birth of the Religious Right is a familiar one. In the 1970s, mainly in response to *Roe v. Wade*, evangelicals and conservative Catholics put aside their longstanding historical prejudices and theological differences and joined forces to form a potent political movement that swept across the country. In this provocative book, Neil J. Young argues that almost none of this is true. Young offers an alternative history of the Religious Right that upends these widely-believed myths.

Theology, not politics, defined the Religious Right. The rise of secularism, pluralism, and cultural relativism, Young argues, transformed the relations of America's religious denominations. The interfaith collaborations among liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were met by a conservative Christian counterforce, which came together in a loosely bound, politically-minded coalition known as the Religious Right. This right-wing religious movement was made up of Mormons, conservative Catholics, and evangelicals, all of whom were united--paradoxically--by their contempt for the ecumenical approach they saw the liberal denominations taking. Led by the likes of Jerry Falwell, they deemed themselves the "pro-family" movement, and entered full-throated into political debates about abortion, school prayer, the Equal Rights Amendment, gay rights, and tax exemptions for religious schools. They would go on to form a critical new base for the Republican Party.

Examining the religious history of interfaith dialogue among conservative evangelicals, Catholics, and Mormons, Young argues that the formation of the Religious Right was not some brilliant political strategy hatched on the eve of a history-altering election but rather the latest iteration of a religious debate that had gone on for decades. This path breaking book will reshape our understanding of the most important religious and political movement of the last 30 years.

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## **We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics By Neil J. Young Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"A bracing and innovative retelling of the rise and fall of the Religious Right in the United States *We Gather Together* stands out for the scope of its story, its depth of research, and the incorporation of Catholics and Latter-day Saints into a historiography that has generally been too narrowly focused on theologically and socially conservative Protestants. Young's book is truly unprecedented and groundbreaking."-- *Church History*

"[T]his is an important book for understanding the influence and factious nature of the Religious Right and our current socio-religious condition."--*American Catholic Studies*

"[T]his is a significant reinterpretation of the rise and frailty of the Religious Right that deserves the attention of religious, political, and cultural historians. It also helps explain the present moment, implicitly reminding us that Trump's 'Make America Great Again' motto streamlines Pat Robertson's clunky 1988 slogan, 'Restore the Greatness of America Through Moral Strength.'"--*The Catholic Historical Review*

"There's much to say in praise of Young's book His handling of such a wide array of issues and events is both elegant and seamless. *We Gather Together* is important also for those of us concerned about the future of religious liberty in America. Through his fair, thorough, and clear historical thinking, Young reminds us religious liberty has undergone more than one articulation in American history. And as significant as religious liberty is, it will likely continue to evolve over time."--*The Gospel Coalition*

"With painstaking research and a firm grasp of the historiography, Young reveals the fractious and divided nature of the Religious Right. [A]n engaging bit of writing, and an illuminating effort at explaining the religious dynamics buried within the last half century of American religious life."--*American Historical Review*

"Young not only weaves a strong and convincing narrative, but many of the personalities and events come alive. *We Gather Together* is a very fine read for those seeking to add great depth and many dimensions to their perspective of the religious right and how it shapes today's political stage."--*The East Hampton Star*

"Young has taken on a complicated topic and this is the treatment it deserves. His work is particularly notable for its inclusion of Mormon history and beliefs...The book will also be a useful resource for anyone

seeking to understand the contemporary Religious Right. Its past informs its present and its future, too."--*Church & State*

"Gripping and informative... I highly recommend the book to those who look at our political bedfellows and wonder how we came to this point in history."--*By Common Consent*

"[*We Gather Together*] takes theology seriously...Young's prose is clean and often eloquent."--*Juvenile Instructor*

"*We Gather Together* is a path-breaking book that weaves the political biographies of two familiar Religious Right combatants (conservative Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism) with that of an oft-overlooked third (Mormonism) into one compelling tale of growing power. As Neil Young expertly shows, this 'gathering together' was a decades-long process, and never a sure or stable thing. But despite all the theological wrangling and factious name-calling, this coalition of anxious activists emerged as a remarkably united, ecumenical front. Not only is this book a stellar work of history, but it helps explain many of our current political battles."--Darren Dochuk, Associate Professor of History, University of Notre Dame

"This is an important book. Neil Young has dug deep into the familiar narrative of the rise of the Religious Right to show that the collaboration of evangelicals, Catholics, and Mormons was not the smooth and inevitable story of political expediency that many have assumed it was. With subtlety and empathy, Young takes us through the theological and cultural debates that divided each of these communities and compelled many in their ranks to resist political pressure to join forces in the culture wars--and he helps us understand the complex alliance that finally emerged."--Molly Worthen, author of *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*

"While organizers of the Religious Right claimed to lead a natural and united 'moral majority' of conservative believers, Neil J. Young demonstrates that their coalition was much more diverse and delicate than previously understood. Impressively researched and deftly argued, this brilliant book shows how an uneasy alliance of evangelicals, Catholics, and Mormons--an alliance marked by competition as much as cooperation--nevertheless transformed religion and politics in modern America."--Kevin M. Kruse, author of *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*

"A solid piece of scholarship, an engaging bit of writing, and an illuminating effort at explaining the religious dynamics buried within the last half century of American religious life." -*American Historical Review*

"An original, compelling, thorough, and smart story of the rise and evolution of the religious Right." -*Journal of American History*

"An important book for understanding the influence and factious nature of the Religious Right and our current socio-religious condition." -*American Catholic Studies*

"American religious historians should gladly welcome how Young has mapped the uneasy ties that bind together the religious right's multiple factions. His inclusion of Mormons in the narrative of the rise of the religious right is an important contribution. Young's book is highly recommended for upper-division undergraduate and graduate courses in contemporary American religious history as well as religion and politics." -*Horizons*

"Young's book is a welcome addition that should expand the ongoing debate over the modern Religious Right going forward."--*Journal of Church and State*

#### About the Author

**Neil J. Young** is a historian and independent scholar in New York City. He previously taught at Princeton University. Young holds a B.A. from Duke University and a Ph.D. in U.S. history from Columbia University. His articles have appeared in *American Quarterly*, the *Journal of Policy History*, the *New York Times*, *Slate*, *Huffington Post*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*.

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