



God's Right Hand: How Jerry Falwell Made God a Republican and Baptized the American Right.

Winters, Michael Sean (author).

Feb. 2012. 464p. HarperOne, hardcover, \$28.99 ([9780061970672](#)). 322.

[REVIEW](#). First published [November 15, 2011 \(Booklist\)](#).

This is the story of a sincere man. Jerry Falwell believed in biblical fundamentalism so completely that he couldn't understand that his vision was opaque to many others, Christians as well as unbelievers. In this engaging, well-balanced sociological rather than personal biography, an excellent journalist emphasizes the two major efforts of Falwell's public career: to build a church in Lynchburg, Virginia, that would exemplify Christian community and evangelism, and to defend traditional morality in America by means of politics. He succeeded at both endeavors. Falwell crafted the archetypal megachurch, providing for education, preschool to graduate school, and many humanitarian services (a facility for recovering alcoholics was the first such "frill" he set up) as well as worship. Far more famously, he booted conservative evangelicalism out of its self-chosen isolation since the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial and into the heart of the Republican Party. The only truly ill effect of his efforts, Winters maintains, was that, to achieve his political goals, he reduced Christianity to ethics, thereby contributing to the drift of Americans in general away from a Christianity shorn of its salvific, metaphysical power. What may most impress many is that, for all his fulmination, Falwell truly distinguished sin and sinner: two of his sharpest adversaries, Ted Kennedy and Larry Flynt, became his lifelong friends.

— *Ray Olson*