



Evangelical vs. Liberal

James K. Wellman

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The cultural conflict that increasingly divides American society is particularly evident within Protestant Christianity. Liberals and evangelicals clash in bitter competition for the future of their respective subcultures. In this book, James Wellman examines this conflict as it is played out in the American Northwest.

Drawing on an in-depth study of twenty-four of the area's fastest-growing evangelical churches and ten vital liberal Protestant congregations, Wellman captures the leading trends of each group and their interaction with the wider American culture. He finds a remarkable depth of disagreement between the two groups on almost every front.

Where evangelicals are willing to draw sharp lines on gay marriage and abortion, liberals complain about evangelical self-righteousness and disregard for personal freedoms. Liberals prefer the moral power of inclusiveness, while evangelicals frame their moral stances as part of a metaphysical struggle between good and evil. The entrepreneurial nature of evangelicalism translates into support of laissez-faire capitalism and democratic political advocacy. Liberals view both policies with varying degrees of apprehension. Such differences are significant on a national scale, with implications for the future of American Protestantism in particular and American culture in general.

Both groups act in good faith and with good intentions, and each maintains a moral core that furthers its own identity, ideology, ritual, mission, and politics. In some situations, they share similar attitudes despite having different beliefs. Attending church services and interviewing senior pastors, lay leaders and new members, Wellman is able to provide new insights into the convenient categories of "liberal" and "evangelical," the nature of the conflict, and the myriad ways both groups affect and are affected by American culture.

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