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### May 26, 2013: How Hippies Became Evangelical Conservatives

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Title: How Hippies Became Evangelical Conservatives

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5/26/2013 – – T.M. Luhrmann has become a thoughtful student Of American Evangelicals. His book, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*, reveals a great sympathy and an ability to translate beliefs that may seem alien to a larger audience.

In the April issue of Harper's magazine, Luhrmann describes a part of that story in an article entitled, *Blinded by the Right? How hippie Christians begat evangelical conservatives*. In the article, Luhrmann tells the story of middle-aged Evangelicals who earlier in life had been hippies, in the 1960s/1970s.

The question is, how did such a seemingly radical transformation come about, from wild free-spirited left-wing consciousness to hard conservative right and deeply religious commitment?

Well, for one thing, these were people who had rejected conventional living. So, when they became disillusioned with hippie life, that it was not so romantic and that people, particularly women, saw that they were being used, some began to look for another way of life: one that would be just as unconventional but would not involve lying and drug use and using people. For some, evangelical Christianity fit the bill.

For another, these were not people of sophisticated theological thinking. They were not by nature skeptics. They had already devoted themselves to love. And what is evangelical Christianity, what is Christianity at its heart, if not that?

Luhrmann does not believe that people like this just stumbled into right-wing politics. He does not believe that they were manipulated. Abortion plays a big part in Luhrmann's article. Abortion, and its legalization, caused Francis Schaeffer to lead Evangelicals into public, political life. (Luhrmann does not explain so well how abortion might lead a person to be so judgmental of homosexuals, for example).

Another way to tell the story, says Luhrmann, is that these Christian hippies never really did change the politics. They always distrusted government and big institutions and they still do.

But, finally, Luhrmann believes the heart of the matter is Jesus. In Jesus, evangelical Christians have a personal, the most personal, relationship. Jesus is alive. He is your best friend, only better.

This understanding of God, according to Luhrmann, has important social and political consequences. It means that God has a plan for us, that we must strive to improve ourselves to be worthy of God, and that all this is possible. From this perspective, says Luhrmann, Democrats are whiny and too dependent on government handouts and too tolerant of human weakness. In other words, we are all addicted and God will make us stronger. To say that this is an alien understanding for most people on the left, is an understatement.

There is a lesson in Luhrmann's article not just about how to do politics differently to be more

attractive to a certain kind of voter, but more importantly perhaps to think differently and feel differently about the human condition itself.