

## 1 **American Christianity Today**

### 2 **The Impact of Secularism**

- Secularism has resulted not so much in the decrease of religious belief in America as in a greater polarization between those who are indifferent toward religion and those who make it the center of their lives.

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- Mainline churches continue to decline in membership and influence.
  - They have been hurt by conflict between their modernist and evangelical elements over issues such as homosexuality and the ordination of women.
  - Their largely tolerant attitude toward secularism gives increasingly secular Americans few reasons to join them or remain in them.

### 4 **Evangelicals have become the most visible American Christians.**

- Evangelicals offer a firm spiritual foundation to Americans disillusioned with the emptiness of secularism.
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- Evangelicals have been criticized for often giving people what they want rather than proclaiming the true gospel.
  - Church services sometimes appear more entertaining than worshipful.
  - The prosperity gospel is a teaching among some evangelicals that God will always bless His followers in every way.

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- Over the last thirty-five years, evangelicals, with other conservative religious people, have become known for aggressively promoting traditional morality.
  - This was stimulated especially by the Supreme Court's legalization of abortion in 1973.
  - Efforts have been focused particularly on abortion and homosexuality.
  - Evangelicals have forged strong ties to the Republican Party.
  - A message of morality sometimes appears to replace the message of Jesus.

### 7 **The emergent church movement has arisen out of dissatisfaction with both modernism and evangelicalism.**

- The emergent movement may be described as a Christian adaptation of postmodernism.
  - In reaction to modernists' seeking truth through reason, postmodernists emphasize that truth cannot be reliably known.
  - Postmodernists emphasize the importance of relationships and multiple perspectives, none of which may be said to be *absolutely* correct.

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- Emergents generally hold to traditional Christian doctrines and moral values, but are often unwilling to take a firm stand on some of them.
- Emergents emphasize loving relationships with God and with others.
- While not necessarily disagreeing with evangelical moral values, emergents tend to place more emphasis on such issues as helping the needy.

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- Controversy has embroiled the emergent movement, as some have emphasized the need to be firmly founded on Biblical truth in opposition to those who are unwilling to make absolute statements of belief.