

The cost of buying in

By [Martin E. Marty](#)

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In Review



Age of Fracture

by Daniel T. Rodgers

Belknap

Back when I was co-directing a six-year study of militant religious fundamentalisms around the world, critics used to ask me to define "modernity" and "modernization." To many, mass media were the best symbols of the "modern." Yet as we studied fundamentalists in a score of nations we were struck that in every case they were more at home with the use of such media than were the "modernists" with whom they were at war. So modernists and moderates yielded air space to them.

One could make a similar case about capitalism, not God's ancient way of organizing economies but an invention of early modernity, credit for which might go to John Calvin or Adam Smith.

Light thrown on the paradoxes of modernity shines in Daniel T. Rodgers's *Age of Fracture*, as quoted in Robert Westbrook's review [in Bookforum](#) (not available online). Here are some lines that scored:

Rodgers is particularly acute in showing the dilemmas that have tripped up conservatives in their odd, Janus-faced quest to recover continuity, tradition, and a scheme of absolute values while also celebrating a capitalist marketplace allied with the destabilization, counterhistoricism and relativism of their opponents.

Exactly. Now, applied:

The conservative Protestant protagonists of the culture wars have found themselves caught up precisely in the culture they feared: sacralizing, refashioning, fusing, and appropriating the transient fads and products of "postmodernity" even as they tried to ward them off.

Exactly, again. To illustrate:

There were sex manuals and sexual enhancement videos for Christian married couples. There were theme parks and fashion products to let conservative evangelical Americans participate in the whirling market of consumer goods.

Thanks, Rodgers and Westbrook, for writing most of my post for me. From here on I'll use my own words.

Many but not all dimensions of megachurch production embody all this. Sneers by "contemporaries" at "traditional" music, architecture, liturgy and culture have accompanied this kind of talk by this kind of conservative evangelical ever since they stopped demonizing rock music and its accoutrements and started adopting them (with some Jesus thrown in). And much emerging-church rhetoric --though certainly not all of it--explicitly rejects anything born before yesterday.

To give Protestant conservatism its due: many of these experiments were sincere efforts to reach people who, at home only in postmodern and pop cultures, were deserting Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, with "the young" leading the flight. Should such evangelicals not have tried to communicate with them and attract their loyalties, however fleeting? Instead of offering Christian rock as an alternative, should they have abandoned the kids to the secular kind? One can hear the apostle Paul pounding his "By no means!"

What thoughtful youth leaders, musicians, pastors and planners can take from Rodgers's observations is this caution: as you buy into everything he sees you buying into, do know that you will pay a price. How high the price and what the details of the "contemporary" are to be, conscientious Christians must calculate and judge.

To say more might mark me as a fuddy-duddy traditionalist, and being named that is a higher price than I and my kind would want or need to pay.