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Correcting the Strawmen

Why Most Evangelical Christians Are Political Conservatives

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Several years ago on ABC's *The View*, Star Parker and Michael Moore had an instructive exchange.[1] To justify state-regulated universal healthcare, Moore sought to marshal support from Jesus: Jesus claimed that if you care for the poorest among us, you do this to him. According to Moore, this rule proves that Jesus would be for universal healthcare. Star Parker's response was stunningly accurate: Jesus never intended such action to be forced on people by the state. Such acts were to be voluntary and from a freely given heart of compassion.

Subsequently, I published an opinion piece siding with Parker.[2] I claimed that Jesus would not be for government-mandated universal healthcare. The piece went viral on the internet and most people weighed in against me. In my view, this reaction signaled the fact that there is a lot of confusion about the biblical view of the state and its role in society, a view embraced by the vast majority of Evangelicals. And as Jonathan Haidt has demonstrated, over 90 percent of American college campuses are so one-sided in their faculty and staffs' commitment to secular leftism that they may rightly be accused of groupthink, indoctrination of students, and ignorance of opposing points of view.[3] Nowhere is this more evident than in the ubiquitous strawmen presented as accurate representations of traditional, especially evangelical, Christian reasons for adopting a conservative ethical and political view of the state, along with advocacy of limited government.

The purpose of this chapter is to correct this situation. I recognize that many who read this chapter are not Christians, and my primary purpose is not to persuade the reader that the conservative evangelical view is true or rational. Rather, my goal is more limited. I want to help the reader understand *why* Evangelicals adopt this view. However, my secondary purpose is to present arguments for the conservative evangelical position. Since I have limited space, I cannot develop all of the arguments

in a manner they deserve. But if I can provide the reader with the sorts of rational support for this viewpoint, then the contours of a case will at least provide a sense of its epistemic justification. I hope this clarification and a precis of its intellectual credentials will set fire to the strawmen and facilitate a more civil presentation of the evangelical view on college campuses. With this in mind, I shall present a brief clarification of what an Evangelical and a political conservative are, and proceed to offer two lines of reasoning as to why most Evangelicals are—and should be—ethical and political conservatives. But before I launch into these issues, I want to summarize my own journey from being utterly uninterested in politics to becoming a dissident philosopher against secularized political groupthink—along with its cancel-culture for opposing viewpoints—all around us.

MY JOURNEY FROM POLITICAL INDIFFERENCE TO DISSIDENCE

I was born and raised in a small town outside Kansas City, Missouri. Religion and politics were not all that important in my family, so up until my junior year in college, the same was true of me. During my high school years, my priorities were girls, sports, and science (in that order!). I received a scholarship to study chemistry at the University of Missouri (1966–1970), and I majored in physical chemistry. As far as I was concerned, the only ideas that mattered were those in the hard sciences, so the broader issues of life were not on my radar screen.

All of that changed in November 1968, when I converted to Christianity through the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. Suddenly, the broader world of ideas—especially those involving "the big questions" in religion, ethics, and politics—was opened up to me and I began to study and be engaged in these areas. It was the 1960s, and revolution, marches, and debates raged all over campus. As I engaged in these debates, it became evident to me that there was a general hostility to and misunderstanding of biblical Christianity and its views on the moral and political issues of the day. Christians were accused of believing America was a Christian nation and could do no wrong. It was widely claimed that Christianity was oppressive to women by denying a woman's moral right to an abortion and by wanting women to all be stay-at-home mothers. Furthermore, Christians were supposedly intolerant bigots for "forcing" their sexual ethics on everyone else and being judgmental about the sexual revolution. None of this was true, but sadly, this was the ubiquitous depiction of evangelical Christians on the university campus.

In the 1970s, I served as a campus minister with Campus Crusade for Christ at the Universities of Colorado and Vermont. I spent all my time engaging with unbelievers and working with young Christians. While at the University of Colorado, I one day met with a pretty shaken up Christian student who had just gotten out of a large class in which the professor had announced that "Evangelicals are dumb, out-of-date, and easy to lead." At the University of Vermont, a new convert to Christian-

ity told me that she had recently attended a class in which the topic was abortion. She had raised her hand to weigh in on the subject, but the teacher interrupted her and asked her whether she was a Christian. When she said "yes," the professor said that she was disqualified from class discussion because she was biased and naively embraced moral and political conservativism. I could multiply these stories like loaves and fish, but you get the point.

In the 1980s, I did my graduate work in philosophy, taking a course on John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* and another course under John Hospers on libertarianism and political philosophy. Having been exposed to both ends of the political spectrum, it became evident to me that (1) a biblical ethic/political philosophy was much closer to conservatism than to liberal secularism; and (2) a strong, rational case could be made for a host of conservative positions. Of course, the word about this has just not gotten out. As an increasingly secular-progressive faculty has come to populate the universities of the West in the last two decades, the hostility toward—and the loathing, dismissing, and misunderstanding of the nature and basis of—an evangelical social ethic and political philosophy has strengthened the secular-leftist stranglehold on university campuses.

Last year a professor friend of mine delivered a guest lecture at a university that criticized affirmative action, only to be shouted down, threatened physically, and ushered off campus by campus security halfway through his speech. I have had the same thing happen to me several times. And with the growing acceptance of secular views on gender identity, marriage, diversity, social justice, white privilege, and more, the misunderstanding and ignorance of evangelical views about these matters is appalling. Needless to say, all of this hostility, leftist groupthink and indoctrination, and strawmen presentation of evangelical social ethics and political philosophy had turned me from political indifference to being a staunch dissident.

WHAT IS AN EVANGELICAL? WHAT IS A POLITICAL CONSERVATIVE?

As with many widely employed terms, "Evangelical" is hard to define. But evangelical theologian Roger Olson has done an adequate job for our purposes. According to Olson, an Evangelical is one who satisfies five characteristics: (1) biblicism (adherence to the supreme authority of the Bible regarding everything it teaches when properly interpreted); (2) conversionism (belief in the essential importance of radical conversion to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior); (3) the centrality of the cross of Jesus and the forgiveness it provides in attempts to grow in character and spirituality; (4) persuasive, respectful evangelism and social action on behalf of the poor, oppressed, and powerless, including the unborn; and (5) a respect for but not slavish dependence on the history of Christian tradition and doctrine.[4]

When we turn to defining a political conservative, we also confront a variety of different notions. Ostensibly, one could define a political conservative as someone

who aligns with the Libertarian or Republican Party platforms. More fully, as Peter Lawler notes, the following is part of a widely understood characterization of "political conservatives," and it is clearly the version most attractive to conservative Catholics and Evangelicals:

> *Natural-Law Conservatives*: These thinkers combine a constitutional devotion to a free economy and civil rights with a concern for the preservation of the culture of life, beginning with the right to life and the family. They think that American constitutionalism, rightly understood, is part of the tradition of natural law that includes Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and John Locke. Their intellectual leaders are Princeton's Robert George and Amherst's Hadley Arkes. Many or most of these conservatives are Catholic, but their number increasingly includes Evangelical Protestants and Orthodox Jews.[5]

James W. Ceaser characterizes political conservatism as a coalition of similar views that derive from the foundational principles of four different streams of thought, three of which are presented here:[6]

1. Traditionalism: Our history and culture—the "Anglo-Protestant heritage" that has been handed down to us—is the foundational principle by which good and bad are judged.
2. Neoconservatism: The foundational concept is natural right, which is a theoretical way of saying that the standard of right or good, so far as political or social action is concerned, is ascertainable by human reason, even if it may also have been established by divine law.
3. The religious right: Biblical faith as the standard of right and wrong. Faith as a foundational concept in the political realm does not aim to supply a complete standard of political right for all issues. It supports a more limited political-cultural project related to the interests or concerns of faith. Stated defensively, that project includes collective action designed to protect havens conducive to fostering a life committed to faith, which in practice has often meant undertaking efforts to counterbalance forces working in politics and culture that are indifferent or hostile to religion. But the project is misunderstood if only its defensive aspect is considered. There is a positive element as well, captured in an older idea rooted in Puritanism, that America has a role to play as an instrument in the service of the transcendent.

For some time now, social-science polling has shown a close relationship between political conservatism and evangelicalism. To cite two examples, first, a Pew Research Center poll published in 2021 discovered that largest religious grouping ofconservatives was evangelical Christians (38 percent), with the second highest being Catholics (21 percent). By contrast, 1 percent of conservatives were atheists and 1 percent were agnostics.[7] Second, a related poll by the Pew Research Center published in February 2016 found that a significant majority of Evangelicals were political conservatives. For example, The Church of the Nazarene was 63 percent Republican/Republican-

leaning to 24 percent Democrat/Democrat-leaning, Southern Baptists were 64 percent to26 percent, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod members were 59 percent to/27 percent) and Assemblies of God were 57 percent to/27 percent.[8]

In a very insightful article on this topic by Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, a number of polls are cited by Barna, the Pew Research Center, the Public Religion Research Institute, and others, taken over several years.[9] Thomson-DeVeaux and the other research groups sought data to explain why "values voters" (identified as evangelical Christians) were political conservatives. Among the main reasons discovered were advancing the pro-life movement; preserving the traditional view regarding heterosexual sex and marriage; religious liberty; capitalism; and the preservation of historic, objective, biblically based moral values. As we will see, given my definition of an Evangelical, the biblical case for limited government, and the priorities of an evangelical/Catholic social ethic, there is a fuller set of reasons that Evangelicals are (and ought to be) political conservatives beyond the helpful factors identified by Thomson-DeVeaux.

A BIBLICAL CASE FOR LIMITED GOVERNMENT

In this section, I argue that, when properly interpreted, biblical teaching implies a minimal government with a specific function, to be outlined below. First, I present a biblical methodology for getting at scriptural teaching about the state. I apply that methodology to support the claim that Israel's ethical policies in the Old Testament are better analogies for the church/covenant community than for the government. In this context, I clarify the role that "defining terms of address" plays in my discussion. Second, I distinguish negative and positive rights and argue that the best kinds of texts for unpacking biblical teaching about the state include four key New Testament texts and prophetic texts from the Old Testament that place obligations on pagan nations. I claim that these key texts depict the state as a protector of negative rights and not a provider of positive rights. Thus, the scriptures support a limited view of government and its function. Since Evangelicals take the Bible as authoritative, they should adopt the same view.

When we come to examine the scriptures to see whether there is a biblical view of the state, how should we go about the task? In my view, three principles should guide our investigation. The first principle regards Old Testament teaching. *One should avoid using commands about what Israel was or was not to do when those commands seem grounded in the theocratic nature of Israel.* Why? Because it is far from clear whether Israel is a good analogy with the contemporary state or instead with the covenant community—the church. As a theocracy, Israel is not a good parallel to the church–state relationship as depicted in the New Testament and the one with which we live today, because the church is not called to create a theocracy, or to relate to the secular state theocratically (e.g., by appealing to natural moral law rather than trying to impose biblical commandments on the state.)[10] However, it is arguably the

case that Israel is a parallel to the church so that, for example, principles of caring for the poor within Israel should be applied to the covenant community and not to the state. After all, when she was at her best, Israel was a voluntary covenant community.

If someone remarks that my assertion here is highly controversial, then my response is that this controversy is precisely my point. Because the issue of Israel is so controversial, Christians should try to find common—and more solid—ground on which to build our views of the state. We should avoid needless controversy if at all possible. Moreover, unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary, we have little epistemic justification to apply to the contemporary state a mandate given to Israel, precisely because the use of Israel as a parallel to the state is unclear and problematic.

Does the lack of parallel mean that Old Testament teaching addressed to the people of Israel is irrelevant to society today? Not at all. Old Testament moral teachings that have nothing to do with the special duties of the covenant community are relevant to society in general (e.g., murder is wrong, not because it violates the covenantal arrangement of God with Israel, but because it violates the image of God). More important, we should focus our attention on the obligations the Old Testament places on pagan nations (cf. Amos 1 and 2). These obligations would apply directly to contemporary nations such as the United States (see below).

In this regard, the hermeneutical notion of "defining terms of address" becomes relevant. When a biblical command or teaching addresses, say, someone (or some group) in Old Testament times, it may address the person as a human being, a worshipper of God, a member of Israel, or a member of Israel at a specific time and place (e.g., when they were about to enter the Promised Land). In each case, a person or group is addressed precisely within a certain defining context. Now if I share that defining term of address, the biblical teaching/command applies directly to me. So, if murder was forbidden for ancient Israel because it involved taking the life of an image-bearer of God for reasons other than war, self-defense, or a capital offense, then I must avoid murder since I share in those defining terms of address. By contrast, certain ceremonial commands given to the people of Israel do not have direct application to me since I do not share in their defining terms of address (though I may, with care, derive secondary applications).

Even though there are clear texts given to Old Testament Israel with which we share defining terms of address, many of the law's teachings are addressed to Israel at a unique place in history. Moreover, in many cases it is hard to know whether a social obligation is due to the theocratic nature of Israel and its civil or ceremonial laws (e.g., a tithe-tax to provide for the priesthood) or whether it is a general principle of the state *per se*. Given this ambiguity, we should be very careful when applying Israel's social obligations to the state. Generally speaking, applying Israel's social obligations to the church is easier to justify since we share with the people of Israel the defining term of address "members of God's covenant community."

The second principle states that one must be careful to distinguish between positive and negative rights when trying to grasp the biblical view of the state's obligations. A positive right is a right to have something given to the right-holder. If Smith

has a positive right to X (say, to health care), then, limiting our focus to the state's duties regarding rights, the state has an obligation to give X to Smith. In general, if someone has a positive right to something, then a duty is placed on others—in our case, the state—to provide that right to that person (or class of persons). Thus, the state has the moral right to impose on citizens the duty to provide that right to the right-holder. A negative right to X is a right to be protected from harm while one seeks to get X on one's own. It is a right not to be subjected to some action or state of affairs. If Smith has a negative right to X (say, to health care), then—again, within our limited focus—the state has an obligation to protect Smith from discrimination and unfair treatment in his attempt to get X on his own. We learn much if we approach key biblical texts about the state armed with the distinction between positive and negative rights.

The third principle is this: given principle one above (that it is risky and, in many cases, wrong to determine the state's nature and duties by applying to the secular state some teaching given to Israel), the best way to approach the development of a biblical view of the state is to examine two types of texts. The first type of text is Old Testament prophecy in which the prophets speak to (and usually against) pagan rulers and nations and explicitly state something about their obligations. Here we have biblical teaching about what rulers and nations outside the covenant community were to do to fulfill their proper function. The second type of text is New Testament passages on the state in general, of which there are four: Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1–7, 1 Timothy 2:1–2, and 1 Peter 2:13–14.

Elsewhere I have provided fairly detailed exegeses of these texts.[11] Space considerations forbid me from providing that here. Suffice it to say that, when carefully examined, the texts show that the state is not to show compassion or provide positive rights for its citizens through its use of coercive power (e.g., taxation). These are matters of individual moral responsibility and obligation for the people of God (and various charities). Rather, the state is the protector of negative rights.

These points about the state, coercion, and positive/negative rights tie in quite nicely to the voluntary, noncoercive nature of Jesus's ethical teachings. It is widely agreed that two features are at the core of Jesus's ethical teachings—virtue ethics and the love commands. According to virtue ethics, the primary questions of ethical theory are "What is the good life of character and virtue? How do I learn to live such a life?" To count as a genuinely good act before God, an act must flow from good intentions grounded in a good character.

Besides virtue ethics as a general approach to ethics, the love commands of Matthew 22:37–39 and the agape-filled character expressive of those commands are at the heart of Jesus's ethical vision. Since love cannot be coerced but must be given freely, the good person is the one who voluntarily chooses to embody Jesus's love commands and to live according to their nature.

Forced, heartless conformity to external standards (think of the Pharisees) counts for very little in God's ethical economy (cf. Matthew 5:27–32). By contrast with the voluntary nature of compassion and genuine, character-grounded ethical action, the

state is coercive and forces conformity to its dictates. The coercive approach works well when the state is protecting negative rights, but it undercuts the state's ability to genuinely show compassion.

And when the state steps outside of its biblically mandated purpose by providing positive rights, it is primarily interested in results, not in the character of the individuals who produce those results. For example, through taxation, the state is concerned with garnishing the funds needed to engage in various social programs. It is the results of such taxation policies that matter to the state, not the moral intentions or character of those who give their tax dollars that support such programs. In Jesus's ethic, helping the poor by the coercive power of the state with no interest in moral intentions or character is of little ethical value. It follows that when the state steps outside its role of protecting against the violation of negative rights, the state will be incompetent and less effective than private or charitable alternatives.

But here is an objection: this "virtue-ethics argument against state action seems weak since it misconstrues the purpose of state action, which is a just result rather than a virtuous character."[12] This objection provides me with an occasion to clarify precisely what my virtue-ethics argument is. I am claiming that evangelical Christians will hold that because the state acts coercively, and focuses on results—in this case, just results—irrespective of the character and intentions behind those acts, by its very nature government should be limited.

This is particularly true when the government goes beyond the preservation of negative rights and tries to show compassion or funds various social programs (that beg a number of substantive moral questions) in order to provide positive rights in a coercive manner and with a results-only perspective. The Evangelical will view these as examples of the government violating its proper nature/function and acting according to a false, leftist political philosophy. The reader may not agree with the claim that these examples are problematic, but this is what a biblically based Evangelical does and should believe.[13]

THE FOUNDATION AND HIERARCHICAL CHARACTER OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHIC

The ontological foundation of a biblically based social ethic is the idea that human beings are made in the image of God. Thus, they have extremely high and equal dignity/value and as such and should not be treated as mere means to an end.[14] Of secondary importance is the Christian doctrine of the intrinsic value of a good—though fallen—creation made by a good God. Below, I lay out a precis of a biblically based Christian social ethics.[15] I believe it will become clear that conservative political theory best secures this ethic. The points to follow are listed in order of importance. My primary purpose is not to defend these points, but to present them to clarify what constitutes a widely held evangelical (and, more generally, a theologically conservative Christian) social ethic as it relates to evangelical political theory.

Nevertheless, where I think it would be most helpful, I will present a brief defense of some of the principles or their ranking and provide endnotes for further research.

1. It is important to preach the Gospel and create a plausibility structure in society (a society's general framework for which ideas are plausible and worthy of consideration and which are not) for its reception as a rational, true message. The central calling of the church is to preach the Gospel and work for its receptivity.[16] Among other things, while the church has often flourished under persecution and oppressive governments, nevertheless, freedom of speech and religion are high political and ethical values.[17]

   A personal illustration may be useful here: I teach at Biola University in Southern California. Biola is an evangelical institution. In keeping with our theological beliefs, we do not hire people who support abortion or gay marriage. The state government is widely recognized as a secular-progressive, leftist one. As a result, a number of times in recent years, the state government has been very close to passing bills that would censure Biola or bring various punitive actions against the university. By contrast, conservative politicians (e.g., Republicans) are strongly in support of religious freedom. Indeed, the reason these attempts to censure or punish Biola have failed so far is due to the significant backlash raised by conservative politicians (and cultural leaders) around the country in support of the university.
2. We must protect the right to life and promote the high, intrinsic dignity of the human person. The right to life and to be treated with high, intrinsic dignity are fundamental, grounded in the image of God. Thus, creating a "culture of life" within which abortion, active euthanasia, and other violations of the sanctity of life are considered immoral is at the top of the church's political and ethical values. And human persons have much, much higher intrinsic value than do animals or the rest of creation.

   It is well known that a rigorous case has been made against abortion and for the right to life.[18] What is less known is the fundamental nature of the right to life for the rest of a well-ordered social ethic. According to Pope John Paul II:

   > It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop. A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of society, such as democracy and peace.[19]

   A few years ago, I was helping to staff a pro-life booth at the University of Vermont. Suddenly, a female student walked up to the booth and started

yelling at me: "You Christians only care about human life in the womb. But once a child is born you couldn't care less. You do nothing to help the poor and those on the margins of society. You are nothing but hypocrites." From talking to pro-life activists, this claim is not all that uncommon. Besides the fact that it is simply wrong—Evangelicals give more money, time, and effort to care for the poor and needy than they do for the unborn[20]—even if it were true, as John Paul II points out, there are reasons for Christians to make the right to life a top priority.

3. It is crucial for human flourishing and the preservation of a well-ordered society that we protect the flourishing and exclusivity of the traditional view of the family. Grounded in Trinitarian relationality among the persons of the Godhead, the image of God is meant and designed to flourish best when partaking of wise, loving, and Christ-honoring relationships with others. The natural family was designed by God to be grounded in the nature of image bearers and to be the ideal facilitator of the proper maturation of relational skills and character so as to promote human flourishing. Alternative depictions of the "family" are contrary to human nature and will, eventually, lead to a dysfunctional society constituted by people with disordered desires and behaviors.[21]

   Ubiquitously, when I or other Christians I know have defended the natural family on secular university campuses, we are often interrupted during our talks, and called intolerant bigots who don't love and respect gay rights. Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, we hold that the very best way for people to flourish as human beings is to follow biblical and natural moral law about human sexuality and the family. And to the degree that the Bible teaches that the state has a duty to preserve peace and order, if the natural family is, indeed, the best way to socialize flourishing human beings, then the state has an interest in strengthening the natural family.

   To cite John Paul II once again:

> The first and fundamental structure for "human ecology" is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. Here we mean the *family founded on marriage*, in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny. But it often happens that people are discouraged from creating the proper conditions for human reproduction and are led to consider themselves and their lives as a series of sensations to be experienced rather than as a work to be accomplished. The result is a lack of freedom, which causes a person to reject a commitment to enter into a stable relationship with another person and to bring children into the world, or which leads people to consider children as one of the many "things" which an individual can have or not have, according to taste, and which compete with other possibilities.

> It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the *sanctuary of life*. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life—the gift of God—can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life.[22]

4. We should encourage the dignity of work and promote a morally informed capitalism.[23] Work is a permanent feature of humankind's design, dignity, and destiny within a Judeo-Christian perspective. Work was initiated in the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall ("fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion," Genesis 1:28; 2:15). Conservative evangelical scholars Lester DeKoster and John Taylor develop a representative view on these matters. Accordingly, DeKoster suggests, "Work is the form in which we make ourselves useful to others."[24] It is also a labor of love, as the Apostle Paul teaches. According to John Taylor, "Work is meant to be an act of love. Paul celebrates the work, labour, and endurance of the Thessalonians as the proper products, and therefore, evidence, of their faith, love, and hope in Jesus."[25] Furthermore, the dignity of work is affirmed from the examples of both Jesus and Paul as common laborers—one a builder (in Greek, *tektōn*, Mark 6:3), the other a tentmaker or leatherworker (Acts 18:3).

   Yet what context best facilitates fulfillment of these ends? Evangelical economists Victor Claar and Robin Klay argue that a just and abundant society must sustain a balanced relationship among three important sectors of that society: (1) strong moral and cultural institutions, including churches; (2) political democracy; and (3) a relatively free market. Societies with such a foundation "respect the freedom of human agency and provide an especially fertile environment for human flourishing under God's care."[26] According to Claar, historical evidence readily exposes the failures of alternate economic systems with patterns of "inefficiency, restricted freedom of choice for groups and individuals, and relatively poor living standards."[27] Alternatively, Claar and Klay affirm that free markets are "one way in which God's providence works to sustain and bless humankind."[28]
5. We ought to have compassion for the poor and vulnerable. Showing compassion for the poor and vulnerable in society was a priority in Jesus's ministry, and as a result, for his followers as well. But Jesus taught that it was the church's obligation to exhibit such compassion, not the state's (see above). Indeed, Jesus held that the church and state had separate callings and spheres of authority. This is a widely held interpretation of Jesus's assertion "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).[29] Placed in its context, Jesus is not saying that the state is outside of God's providential authority. Rather, he is contrasting duties to the state and duties to serve God within the covenant community.

   Given this widely held interpretation of Jesus's assertion, it follows that a believer could do things as a citizen and representative of the state (for example,

be a soldier) that he could not do as a representative of the church (the church cannot field an army, but believers can serve the state in this way). Conversely, the church should do certain things (show genuine compassion for the poor and vulnerable, a set of actions that entail they are voluntary) that it is not the state's job to do (as the state acts by the power of force).

6. We need to work toward the solidarity of the human family by promoting justice, peace, and love in society. Biblical justice is very different from contemporary social justice, which is neo-Marxist in origin and ideological commitment. I cannot go into detail about that here,[30] but a few words are in order.

   It is widely acknowledged in the literature about diversity, social justice, and white privilege (DSW), whether pro or con, that it has neo-Marxist roots.[31] A brief clarification of "neo-Marxism" should make this evident. Marx (and classical Marxism) saw the development of world history being driven, not by ideas (you may recall he supposedly turned Hegel on his head), but by material factors, viz., the circumstances and means/methods of economic production. These factors create two classes in constant warfare—the bourgeoisie (who own the means of economic production) and the proletariat (roughly, the working class). Marx did not treat individuals and their behavioral evaluation as individuals, but as members of classes. This has led to class (as well as race and sexual orientation) identity politics. Thus, the goodness or badness of an individual and his actions are solely due to his class, a profoundly unbiblical idea. This is the exact opposite of a biblical understanding. Thus, the claim is made today that only whites—or, perhaps, straight white males—can be racists. Those in the dominant class are by definition oppressors and victimizers; those outside the dominant class are innocent victims. This is neo-Marxist at its core.

   Further, it is important to note that on this Marxist view, all ideas—ethical, philosophical, religious, artistic, etc.—are mere epiphenomena produced by the real driving force of cultural conflict and movement (the circumstances and methods of production)—all ideas except, of course, Marxist ones! One result of this is the dismissal of the ethical and religious ideas of the bourgeoisie as mere attempts to retain cultural hegemony by keeping the proletariat in its place (as Nietzsche put it, Christianity is Platonism for the masses). This dismissal finds its parallel in the DSW notion that any dominant class resistance to DSW is merely an intentional or unconscious attempt (since members of the dominant class are blind to race) to retain dominance. Accordingly, the intrinsic rationality of arguments raised by members of the dominant class may safely be ignored with impunity since those arguments are nothing but the expression of irrational causes that attempt to retain cultural dominance and power.

   Beginning with the thought of Antonio Gramsci in the early twentieth century, Marxists saw that the West could not be destroyed by classical Marxist theory and its concomitant analysis of class struggle in terms of economic factors because, especially in America, there was a huge middle class that did not fit neatly into Marx's two-fold division of capitalist countries. So, Gramsci devel-

oped what has come to be known as "neo-Marxism". It is Marxist because (1) it reduces the individual to a mere member of a class, (2) it dismisses ideas as mere attempts to gain or retain cultural dominance, and (3) it sees class struggle for power as the central moving force that drives history and the evolution of cultures (sin, connection to God, and ideas have little or no place in this scheme). It is "neo" because Gramsci cashed out the fundamental nature of class warfare, not in terms of economics, but in terms of dominance and power—the dominant class and those various groups who are victimized by the dominant class.

Against this secular worldview, suffice it to say that Evangelicals are against secular social justice for several reasons that should be evident, and, instead, seek to promote a more holistically healthy social order. As Adrian van Kaam and Susan Muto have noted, for the spiritually mature Christian, proper social action will seek to balance social justice (understood biblically), social peace, andharmony with the absence of social rage, and social mercy.[32]

7. We must all care for God's creation. There has been a great deal of confusion about the Bible's teaching on care for creation.[33] Evangelicals understand that teaching to entail that we are to be stewards of creation and care for it since it is intrinsically good and, though fallen, the handiwork of God. Given the Fall, animals are now provided by God to be used as food. Moreover, given the law of double effect and the teleological (nonutilitarian) principle of proportionality it entails, care for creation is not an absolute obligation with the highest degree of incumbency. The principle of proportionality states that the moral rectitude of an action is a function of the preponderance of human value over disvalue that results through the action.

   Even if the principle is stated in terms of the preponderance of value and disvalue in general, given the vastly more value embodied by human persons compared to the rest of creation, the same implications follow when cases of care for creation are evaluated. While care for creation is a divine obligation as such, any proposed ethical or political principle or plan to honor this obligation cannot be evaluated in an ethical vacuum. One must always consider the negative impact such a principle or plan will have on the lives of human persons. For example, providing jobs and a thriving economy within which humans flourish could easily take priority over certain programs designed to control pollution. Applying these notions should be done on a case-by-case basis. Informed Evangelicals should vote for policies that err on the side of providing for human needs while keeping an eye on the care of creation.

CONCLUSION

It is often claimed that the evangelical social ethic and its resultant political views presented in this chapter are a paradigmatic case of intolerance and should be rejected for that reason. To reflect adequately on tolerance, we need to get clear on

what the principle of tolerance is. Actually, it has been defined in different ways, but two senses can be distinguished.

According to the *classical sense* of the principle of tolerance, while a person holds that his own moral (or religious, political, etc.) views are true and those of his opponent are false, he still respects his opponent as a person with a right to make a case for his views. Thus, person A has a duty to tolerate a different moral view of person B, not in the sense of thinking B is morally correct, but quite the opposite: in spite of the disagreement, person A will continue to value and respect person B, to treat him with dignity, and to recognize his right to argue for and propagate his ideas and so forth. Strictly speaking, in the classical view, one tolerates persons, not their ideas. In this sense, even though someone disapproves of another's moral beliefs and practices, he will not inappropriately interfere with them. However, it is consistent with this view that a person judges his opponent's views to be wrong and dedicates himself to doing everything morally appropriate to counteract those views, such as using argument and persuasion.

The *modern version* of tolerance, popular in the general culture, goes beyond the classical version in claiming that one should not even judge that other people's viewpoints are wrong, morally or otherwise. On this view, it is intolerant simply to claim that another's beliefs, attitudes, or actions are morally or religiously incorrect and even harmful. Christians embrace the classical sense of tolerance and not the modern version, because the latter has two defects that make it completely unacceptable.

First, it is rationally impossible to apply consistently the modern version since advocates of it tolerate (do not claim to be wrong) only those who already agree with their modern version, but do not tolerate those who reject the modern version (such as those who, say, hold to politically incorrect views). But, then, these advocates tolerate (do not claim to be wrong) those who agree with them and do not tolerate (claim to be wrong) those who do not agree with them. Thus, the modern principle of tolerance is inconsistently applied. The principle implies that one should not judge anyone else to be wrong. But its proponents apply this mandate only to those with whom they agree. They judge people with whom they disagree (e.g., those with politically incorrect views) to be wrong and their views as not tolerable.

Second, the modern version is immoral because, if followed, it silences the protest of evil. Why? To protest evil, you first have to make (in the modern conception) the intolerant judgment that what you are protesting *is* evil. If you can't do that, then you have no grounds for protesting anything. Unfortunately, it is the modern version of tolerance that lulls some to sleep in thinking that tolerance requires us to accept DSW ideas and reject those of biblical Christianity.

My purpose in this chapter has been to foster civil and political dialog between Evangelicals and other biblically grounded Christians, on the one hand, and those who advocate different views, on the other. I believe that the principles I have offered are both true and rational, and while my primary objective has been to clarify this perspective, I have also provided a set of standard arguments usually offered for its support. Given the wide misunderstanding of evangelical political advocacy and

the ubiquitous strawmen proffered as accurate representations of evangelical political thought, I have attempted to make this thought intelligible. I hope this will facilitate rich and accurate conversations in the future.[34]

NOTES

1. June 19, 2007.

2. Moreland, J. P., "Jesus' View of Healthcare," *Cape May County Herald*, July 10, 2007.

3. See Haidt, Jonathan, "Two Incompatible Sacred Values in American Universities" , Hayek Lecture Series, sponsored by the Center for the History of Political Economy, the program in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, and the program in American Values and Institutions at Duke University, Duke University, Durham, NC, October 16, 2016, https://hope.econ.duke.edu/file/1885.

4. Olson, Roger, *How to Be Evangelical without Being Conservative* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008), 23–24.

5. Lawler, Peter Augustine, "The Confused Student's Guide to Conservatism," *Intercollegiate Review*, August 17, 2016, 1.

6. Ceaser, James W., "Four Heads and One Heart: The Modern Conservative Movement," APSA 2010 Annual Meeting Paper, posted July 9, 2010, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1643418. Ceaser's fourth stream is libertarianism, but I leave it out because his discussion of it fails to draw an important distinction between secular/economic and religious (especially Christian) libertarianism.

7. The pole can be found at https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/political-ideology/conservative/.

8. The poll can be found at "Conservatives: Religious Composition of Conservatives," Religious Landscape Study, *Pew Research Center*, n.d., https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/23/u-s-religious-groups-and-their-political-leanings/.

9. Thomson-DeVeaux, Amelia, "The Values That 'Values Voters' Care about Most Are Policies, Not Character Traits," *FiveThirtyEight*, November 20, 2017, https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-values-that-values-voters-care-about-most-are-policies-not-character-traits/.

10. For a helpful exposition of the nature and relevance of the Natural Moral Law, see Budziszewski, Jay, *What We Can't Not Know: A Guide* (revised and expanded ed.) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011).

11. Moreland, J. P., "A Biblical Case for Limited Government," *The Institute for Faith, Work and Economics*, Spring 2013, http://tifwe.org/research/a-biblical-case-for-limited-government/.

12. This objection is a direct quotation from an anonymous referee's report.

13. A referee also objected to my assertion that, in Jesus's ethic, helping the poor by the coercive power of the state with no interest in moral intentions or character is of little ethical value. He or she claimed that this assertion implies the inefficacy of state action. But this is not so. My argument is not fundamentally about the efficiency (or lack thereof) of state action when it provides positive rights and expresses compassion. Rather, my argument is that, in light of Jesus's ethic, the state is limited in its purpose (to protect negative rights) and its limited focus on efficiency is precisely why state action beyond the states' purpose/nature counts for very little, morally speaking; this fact reinforces the conservative view of limited government.

14. I have argued elsewhere that it is very difficult to generate a secularly based social ethic that enjoys any plausible ontological grounding. See Moreland, J. P., *The Recalcitrant* Imago Dei *: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009*),* chapter six. I have also argued elsewhere that an appeal to emergent properties does not solve this problem. See Moreland, J. P., "Wielenberg and Emergence: Borrowed Capital on the Cheap," in *God and Morality: What Is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?* ed. Adam Lloyd Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2020), 93–114.

15. My list has been adapted from United States Conference of Bishops, "Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching," 2005, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm. Evangelical ethicist Scott Rae has developed and defended these points in his *Moral Choices* (4th. ed.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2018). Some Christian ethicists, including Rae, do not see these principles as forming a hierarchy. Two things should be noted by my employment of this document. First, on these points, conservative Evangelicals are in significant agreement with conservative Catholics, and since the Catholic statement is brief and clear, I use it as representative of conservative Evangelicalism. Second, I have altered or adjusted the Catholic statement and some of the arguments for my presentation at key points here and there. The result is a representative presentation of a distinctively conservative Evangelical view that overlaps at several points with Catholic social ethical teaching.

16. DeYoung, Kevin, and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011).

17. See Goodrich, Luke, *Free to Believe* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah: 2019).

18. See Beckwith, Francis J., *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case against Abortion Choice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Pearcey, Nancy, *Love Thy Body* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2018).

19. Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 1995): 101. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html.

20. See Warren, Roland, "Abortion and the Church: What Can We Do?" *CareNet* December 22, 2015, https://www.care-net.org/churches-blog/abortion-and-the-church-what-can-we-do.

21. Gallagher, Maggie, *The Case for Marriage* (New York, New York: Doubleday, 2001); Lee, Patrick, and Robert George, *Conjugal Union: What Marriage Is and Why It Matters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.)

22. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, May 1, 1991), 39, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html.

23. See Richards, Jay, *Money, Greed and God: The Christian Case for Free Enterprise* (revised ed.) (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2019).

24. DeKoster, Lester, *Work: The Meaning of Your Life—A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2015), 1. Originally published in 1982.

25. Taylor, John, "Labour of Love: The Theology of Work in First and Second Thessalonians," in *Work: Theological Foundations and Practical Implications*, ed. R. Keith Loftin and Trey Dimsdale (London: SCM Press, 2018), 64; Issler, Klaus, "Exploring the Pervasive References to Work in Jesus' Parables," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57(2) (2014): 323–39.

26. Claar, Victor, and Robin Klay, *Economics in Christian Perspective: Theory, Policy and Life Choices* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 24.

27. Ibid., 28. History has shown that "Communism is incapable of providing high living standards using top-down directives" (35).

28. Ibid., 47.

29. For an application of the notion of sphere sovereignty to the issue of caring for the poor, see Bradley, Anthony, "The Kingdom Today," in *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 239–42.

30. See DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* chapters six and seven; Williams, Thaddeus, *Twelve Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2020).

31. To satisfy oneself of this, all one needs to do is google "Neo-Marxism and X," where X may stand for racial diversity, social justice, or white privilege.

32. van Kaam, Adrian, and Susan Muto, *Formation of the Christian Heart: Formation Theology Volume Three* (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania: Epiphany Association, 2006), 181–87; Muto, Susan, *ECP Course Three, Lecture Ten: The Practice of Social Presence and the Risk of Its Erosion* (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania: Epiphany Association, July 2019), www.epiphanyacademyofformativespiruality.org.

33. Decades ago, Francis Schaeffer made clear what the Bible teaches on this topic and provided defeaters for several strawmen that misrepresented that teaching. See Schaeffer, Francis, and Udo Middelman, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1970).

34. I want to thank professors Francis J. Beckwith, Klaus Issler, Sean McDowell, Scott Rae, William Roth, and an anonymous referee for their suggestions that strengthened an earlier draft of this chapter.

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