

FAITHFUL LIVES

Christian Reflections on the World – Faithful Citizenship



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The mission of College of the Ozarks is to provide the advantages of a Christian education for youth of both sexes, especially those found worthy, but who are without sufficient means to procure such training.

Faithful Lives: Reflections on the World is an annual journal produced by College of the Ozarks. The goal of the publication is to foster deep and substantive Christian thought in all areas of life by publishing articles that assume and explore the truthfulness of the Christian worldview perspective.



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Editorial:

Am I a Neighbor?

What does it mean to follow the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as a citizen of an established nation, with certain rights, and a strong sense of identity? No, we're not talking about following Jesus as an American...at least not yet. Actually, the question comes from a lawyer about two thousand years ago. The Gospel of Luke records the attempt of a certain lawyer trying to test Jesus by asking him about what he must do to inherit eternal life. In typical Jesus-like fashion, he answers the man's question with a question: "What is written in the Law?" . . . an appropriate line of reasoning for a lawyer. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself," the lawyer replies (Luke 10:27, ESV). In response, Jesus presses into the heart of the issue at hand with a simple exhortation: "do this and you will live." Then, as well as now, loving God completely and our neighbors as ourselves is easier said than done, and this appears to be the case for the lawyer.

The story moves along and apparently the man was not content to receive Jesus' admonition to simply live out what he already knew. And Luke tells us that he sought to justify himself with his follow-up question: "And who is my neighbor?" Was he trying to justify his previous inquisition or justify his own failure to live out what he knew the Law demanded? Context suggests the latter. His question could be paraphrased "How can I possibly live out the demands of the law if we don't define our terms? Who is the proper recipient of my love? Who is my neighbor?"

As a first-century Jew, this man had no lack of national pride, identity, and understanding of who his kinsmen were. And given the Roman occupation of the region of Galilee, perhaps the man wanted to see if Jesus would really insist that the Jews regard Roman hegemony as "neighborly". In response, Jesus answered the man's question with a story—a parable—we have come to know as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In telling this story, Jesus turns the man's attention from an outward survey of qualifications in the community, to an inward

conviction. The question Jesus wants the man to wrestle with is not “Who is my neighbor?” but “Am I a neighbor?”

There is little doubt that this instructive illustration shocked its listeners, as the pious Jews walk by the suffering man, who is then delivered by a *Samaritan*! Due to a centuries-old religious feud, the Samaritans and the Jews did not speak, interact, or certainly come to the aid of each other. Yet, Jesus teaches that to walk in the spirit of the Law is to look beyond these cultural and religious divides to extend mercy and compassion. J. C. Ryle’s comments get straight to the point:

Now, if these words mean anything, a Christian ought to be ready to show kindness and brotherly love to everyone who is in need. Our kindness must not merely extend to our families and friends and relatives. We must love all people and be kind to everyone, whenever the opportunity arises. We must be aware of excessive strictness in scrutinizing the past lives of those who need our help. Are they in real trouble? Are they in real distress? Do they really want help? Then, according to the teaching of this parable, we ought to be ready to help them.¹

Jesus’ intended question, “Am I a neighbor?” continues to pierce the hearts of his hearers thousands of years later. Like the lawyer, we so often seek justifications for our own lack of neighbor-love, turning to our preoccupations (like the priest and the Levite in the parable) and prior commitments. Are we prepared to stop in the midst of our own journey, take on the responsibility of the suffering and wellbeing of others, and do it all in the name of obedience to Christ?

The theme of this issue of *Faithful Lives* is faithful citizenship. What is meant by that phrase is not a faithfulness to the state, but a faithfulness to Christ’s commands while engaging as citizens of the state. Citizenship means many things, but it certainly consists of nothing less than being a neighbor. And this is the reason we have chosen to weave various artistic representations of the Parable of the Good Samaritan throughout the issue. As we explore the various ways we as Christians, support, engage, critique, defend, and celebrate our homelands, may we continue to hear the question forced upon us in this story: “Am I a neighbor?”

William R. Osborne

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Luke* (The Crossway Classic Commentaries; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 146.

FAITHFUL LIVES



Essays



The Good Samaritan (after Delacroix)

Oil on canvas

28 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

1890

Vincent Van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Public Domain

Painted when Van Gogh had committed himself to St. Paul's psychiatric asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, this copy of a famous Delacroix painting was one of several copies of other artists' paintings that Van Gogh made during his stay at the asylum. The word, "copy," used here, however, is a bit of a misnomer. Van Gogh hardly replicates Delacroix's work, but rather translates the French Romantic painter's work into his own artistic vernacular. There is a palpable exuberance and energy in the work, as if Van Gogh was experiencing the biblical event as he was painting the subject. Does van Gogh place himself in the role of the Samaritan? Is this work a way for the artist to connect to the beauty of love for neighbor revealed in the story?

—Richard W. Cummings

Religious Liberty in the Founding Era: Lessons for Today[†]

Mark David Hall*

In the Supreme Court's first religion clause case, *Reynolds v. United States* (1878), justices were asked to decide whether the First Amendment requires the government to allow a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (more commonly known as Mormons) to commit polygamy. The justices answer this question with a resounding “no.” In his opinion for the Court, Chief Justice Morrison Waite wrote that:

“religion” is not defined in the Constitution. We must go elsewhere, therefore, to ascertain its meaning, and nowhere more appropriately, we think, than to the history of the times in the midst of which the provision was adopted.¹

Waite began his discussion of history by exploring early colonial attempts to regulate religious practice and belief. He then considered reactions against these regulations, particularly in Virginia. Specifically, he reasoned that the First Amendment must be understood in light of

[†] Portions of this essay were originally published as “Did America Have a Christian Founding?” available at: <http://www.heritage.org/research/lecture/2011/06/did-america-have-a-christian-founding>.

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¹ 98 U.S. 145 (1878), 162.

James Madison's and Thomas Jefferson's opposition to Patrick Henry's general assessment bill. To explain these Founders' views on church-state relations, he relied heavily on Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance*, Jefferson's *Statute for Religious Liberty*, and Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists.

Since 1878, conservative and liberal justices and scholars have turned to America's Founders to help them interpret the First Amendment. But they often distort their views. All too often they contend that the Founders were men of the Enlightenment who embraced religious liberty for secular reasons and who desired to build a wall of separation between church and state.

In this essay I attempt to set the record straight by demonstrating that America's Founders embraced religious liberty for profoundly Christian reasons, that there is virtually no evidence that they desired a strict separation of church and state, and that they believed religious liberty was a natural right that should be protected for all citizens—regardless of their faith.

Rise of Religious Liberty

There are those who say that a commitment to biblical Christianity necessitates that one be intolerant of other religions or different expressions of Christianity. There is some historical support for this view. From a.d. 325, when Emperor Constantine called the Council of Nicaea, to the founding of the American colonies, it was common for civic authorities to promote what they considered to be true religion. This often included discriminating against or even persecuting those who deviated from the rulers' understanding of Christian orthodoxy. America's earliest colonists, from north to south, were not immune from this temptation.

If I had more space, I would argue that the colonies embraced a broader conception of religious liberty than is often assumed. Even in Puritan New England civic authorities did not try to compel belief, and orderly dissenters were tolerated. However, disorderly dissenters like Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams were not, and upon rare occasion a *very* disorderly dissenter, such as the Quaker Mary Dyer, was executed.

Providentially, the way Americans approached religious liberty changed in important ways between the early colonial settlements and the founding era. They did so for at least two reasons.

First, in spite of a desire for homogeneity, almost from the start America attracted diverse groups of immigrants from England and continental Europe. Even in Congregational New England and the Anglican south there were, from an early date, dissenters, and the middle colonies were always a muddle. A great illustration of this is a 1771 woodcut of the skyline of New York City (fig 1). Of the 21 buildings identified, most are houses of worship, including those belonging to Presbyterians, Anglicans, Dutch Calvinists, Moravians, Jews, Quakers, Anabaptists, Catholics, Methodists, and others. Admittedly, New York was a particularly diverse city, but there was significant pluralism in each colony. This diversity forced civic authorities to negotiate laws and policies encouraging different groups to get along (sometimes with more success than others).

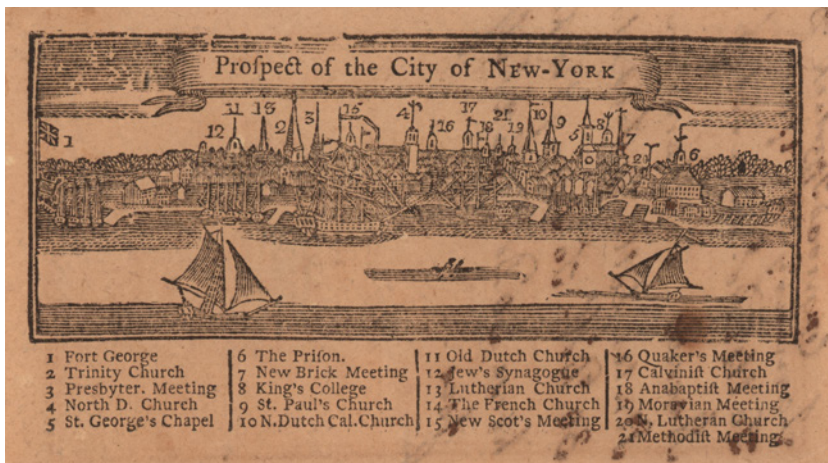


Figure 1. *Prospect of the City of New York*. Woodcut on paper, circa 1771. Published by Hugh Gaine in the *The New-York pocket almanac, for the year 1772*. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

But even more important, colonial officials were confronted with powerful arguments for the liberty of conscience. Men such as Roger Williams, William Penn, Elisha Williams, and Samuel Davies contended that a proper understanding of the Bible required religious liberty for all. These arguments became particularly pronounced during the First Great Awakening, those great revivals that swept through America in the 1730s and 1740s. In the roughly 160 years from the earliest settle-

ments to the American founding, the colonies became more accepting of dissenters and dissenting practices.

For present purposes, I focus on questions sparked by America's separation from Great Britain. Would the Church of England remain the established church in the southern states? Now that New England was not bound by Parliament's 1689 Act of Toleration, would states in that region become less tolerant? To what extent would the new state constitutions protect religious liberty? How about the federal Constitution of 1787? Debates on these questions were thoughtful and lively, and they shine important light on the Founders' views on the scope and nature of religious liberty.

Virginia and Article XVI

The controversies in every state are worthy of consideration, but let's focus on debates in Virginia. I'll pick up the story in 1776, when the Virginia Convention created a committee to write a bill of rights. This task fell largely to George Mason, who drafted what became Article XVI of Virginia's Declaration of Rights. It reads:

That as Religion, or the Duty which we owe to our divine and omnipotent Creator, and the Manner of discharging it, can be governed only by Reason and Conviction, not by Force or Violence; and therefore that all Men shou'd enjoy the fullest Toleration in the Exercise of Religion, according to the Dictates of Conscience, unpunished and unrestrained by the Magistrate . . .

This draft, which was printed and circulated throughout the states, was enormously influential. But it was not the draft that became law. James Madison, in his first significant public act, objected to the use of "toleration" in the article, believing that it implied that religious liberty was a grant from the state that could be revoked at will. The Virginia Convention agreed, and the article was amended to make it clear that "the free exercise of religion" is a right, not a privilege granted by the state.

Scholars agree that Americans came to embrace a more robust version of religious liberty in the late 18th century, but many of them contend that this is because the Founders were deists who wanted to build a high wall of separation between church and state. This is nonsense.

There is little evidence that more than a handful of them were deists of any sort, and a good argument can be made that orthodox Christianity had a very powerful influence on many of America's Founders.

With respect to the topic at hand, I want to emphasize that many Founders made explicitly theological or biblical arguments in support of religious liberty. Note that Mason grounds his argument on the *duty which we owe to our divine and omnipotent Creator*. Others, like the Baptist minister Isaac Backus in his 1773 essay "An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty," relies on a biblical account of the role of government. In a similar vein, the Presbyterians of Hanover County Virginia contended that "the thoughts, the intentions, the faith, and the consciences of men, with their modes of worship, lie beyond [the reach of government] and are ever to be referred to a higher and more penetrating tribunal [that is, God]."

A few years ago, my colleague Daniel Dreisbach and I sifted through literally thousands of founding era documents on religious liberty produced in the founding era. Collectively, these texts make it clear that the Founders were committed to religious liberty not because they thought religion was unimportant, but because it was so important to them. We entitled the collection *The Sacred Rights of Conscience*,² which is how different Founders referred to religious liberty on multiple occasions. To give just one example, when the Continental Congress wrote instruction to commissioners appointed to Canada in 1776 they included the following: "You are further to declare, that *we hold sacred the rights of conscience*, and may promise to the whole people, solemnly in our name, the free and undisturbed exercise of their religion" (emphasis added).³ Religious liberty is a sacred right because it is one of God's most important gifts to his image bearers.

By the end of the revolutionary era every state offered significant protection of religious liberty. The federal constitution of 1787 did not, but only because its supporters believed the national government did not have the delegated power to pass laws interfering with religious beliefs or practices. In the face of popular outcry, the first Congress proposed and the states ratified a constitutional amendment prohibiting Congress from restricting the free exercise of religion.

² Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Press, 2009.

³ Ibid., vii.

The exact scope of religious liberty protected by this provision has been hotly debated, but at a minimum it prohibits Congress from, in the words of James Madison, compelling “men to worship God in any manner contrary to their conscience.” It certainly means more than that, but exactly how much more is controversial. Particularly divisive, even among originalists, is the question of whether the Free Exercise Clause requires religious exemptions to general, neutrally applicable laws. Regardless of how one comes down on this particular debate, there is no doubt that the Founders believed legislatures could craft such accommodations.

Today, groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and even the US Commission on Civil Rights, contend that citizens should seldom if ever be exempted for general, neutral laws because of their religious convictions. The Founders disagreed with this view, and, throughout the twentieth century, so did most Democrats and Republicans. They understood that religious liberty is not a partisan issue; it is a foundational American principle. I have documented this claim in an essay published by the Heritage Foundation entitled “Religious Accommodations and the Common Good,” but because this essay is about the Founders, I will give just two examples from that era.⁴

Military Service

Among the many roles of the civil government, few are as important as national security. Virtually no one disputes that governments have an obligation to protect their citizens from external threats. In the modern era, states and nations have regularly relied upon compulsory militia service or conscription to raise armies. Religious pacifists often ask to be excused from such service.

Consider for a minute the government’s options when faced with such requests. Rather than force pacifists to act against their sincerely held religious convictions, civic leaders might eliminate the draft requirement for all. But, assuming conscription is necessary for self-defense, doing so might harm the public good. On the other hand, states might force pacifists to serve in the military, and jail or execute them

⁴ Mark David Hall, “Religious Accommodations and the Common Good,” <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/10/religious-accommodations-and-the-common-good>

if they refuse. Alas, too many governments have taken this approach. Fortunately, America's civil leaders have chosen a third way.

Most early American colonies required adult males to serve in the militia. Members of the Society of Friends, better known as Quakers, were often pacifists who refused to do so. As early as the 1670s they requested exemptions from military service. Rhode Island, North Carolina, and Maryland granted their requests provided the exempted paid a fine or hired a substitute. Many colonies followed their example in the eighteenth century, often expanding accommodations to include other religious citizens. During the War for Independence, the Continental Congress supported these accommodations with the following July 18, 1775 resolution:

As there are some people, who, from religious principles, cannot bear arms in any case, this Congress intend no violence to their consciences, but earnestly recommend it to them, to contribute liberally in this time of universal calamity, to the relief of their distressed brethren in the several colonies, and to do all other services to their oppressed Country, which they can consistently with their religious principles.⁵

Fourteen years later, during the debates in the First Federal Congress over the Bill of Rights, James Madison proposed a version of what became the Second Amendment that stipulated that “no person religiously scrupulous, shall be compelled to bear arms.” Although largely forgotten today, this provision provoked almost as much recorded debate as the First Amendment's religion provisions. James Jackson, a Representative from Georgia, insisted that if such an exemption was made, then those exempted should be required to hire a substitute. Connecticut's Roger Sherman responded:

It is well-known that those who are religiously scrupulous of bearing arms, are equally scrupulous of getting substitutes or paying an equivalent; many of them would rather die than do either one or the other—but he did not see an absolute necessity for a clause of this kind. We do not live under an arbitrary government, said he, and the states respectively will

⁵ Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1779* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 5:189.

have the government of the militia, unless when called into actual service.⁶

Sherman was sympathetic to the plight of pacifists, but he preferred to rely upon state and federal legislatures to protect them. Madison's proposal was approved by the House but rejected by the Senate. Madison and Sherman did not give up. Two months after approving what became the First Amendment, Representatives debated a bill regulating the militia when called into national service. Madison offered an amendment to exempt from militia service . . .

persons conscientiously scrupulous of bearing arms. It is the glory of our country, said he, that a more sacred regard to the rights of mankind is preserved, than has heretofore been known. The Quaker merits some attention on this delicate point, liberty of conscience: they had it in their own power to establish their religion by law, they did not. He was disposed to make the exception gratuitous, but supposed it impracticable.⁷

Sherman immediately supported Madison's amendment, arguing that he believed

. . . the exemption of persons conscientiously scrupulous of bearing arms to be necessary and proper. He was well convinced that there was no possibility of making such persons bear arms, they would rather suffer death than commit what appeared to them a moral evil—though it might happen that the thing itself was not a moral evil; yet their opinion served them as proof. As to their being obliged to pay an equivalent, gentlemen might see that this was as disagreeable to their consciences as the other, he therefore thought it adviseable to exempt them as to both at present.⁸

The amended bill eventually passed, but with the requirement that conscientious objectors must hire a substitute.

⁶ Quoted in Mark David Hall, *Roger Sherman and the Creation of the American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 139.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 144–45.

Few men were as influential in crafting the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights as Madison and Sherman. Their commitment to protecting religious citizens is surely noteworthy, even if the practical concerns that such exemptions could undermine national security are understandable. Fortunately, states and later Congress significantly expanded protections for religious pacifists.

Oaths

Historically, oaths have been seen as necessary for ensuring the loyalty and fidelity of citizens and elected officials. They were also viewed as essential for the effective functioning of judicial systems. In his famous Farewell Address, President George Washington wrote:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indisputable supports. . . . A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation *desert* the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice?⁹



Figure 2. George Washington's Oath of Office. Engraving, 1849. By Henry Sadd, Tompkins Harrison Matteson, and John Neale. Courtesy the Library of Congress.

⁹ Dreisbach and Hall, *The Sacred Rights of Conscience*, 468 (emphasis in original).

Given the importance and solemnity of oaths in our society, the government faces a problem if some of its citizens refuse to take oaths for religious reasons. Again, Quakers objected. They took (and take) literally biblical passages such as Matthew 5:33–5:37, where Jesus says:

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil. (ESV)

In England, Quakers were routinely jailed for failing to swear oaths in courts or, after the Revolution of 1688, to take oaths promising loyalty to the new regime. They were banned altogether in some early American colonies, but by 1710 they were permitted in all of them and many legislatures had begun to permit them to use affirmations instead of oaths. By the Founding era, all states permitted Quakers and other religious minorities to affirm rather than swear.

The most famous oath accommodations from this era are found in the United States Constitution. Articles I, II, and VI permit individuals either to swear or to affirm. The best-known of these provisions is Article II, Section 1, which reads:

Before he [the President] enter on the execution of his office, he shall take the following oath or affirmation: ‘I do solemnly swear, (or affirm,) that I will faithfully execute . . . ’

Of course, one does not need to be religious to take advantage of these provisions, but in the context in which they were written, there is little doubt that these accommodations were intended for Quakers and others who had religious objections to taking oaths.

I should note that by the Founding era Quakers—even in the state of Pennsylvania—had very little political power. They were not accommodated because they had influence, but because the Founders were committed to the idea citizens should be free to act upon their religious convictions unless their actions cause significant harm to others.

Of course religious liberty has not always been perfectly protected, but throughout most of the twentieth century liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, have shared this conviction.

Separation of Church and State

There are those who say the Founders embraced religious liberty because they wanted to build a wall of separation between church and state. This led them to, among other things, oppose religious establishments. Is this true? The answer to this question is important, because religious liberty has sometimes been limited by officials who think the constitution requires a high wall of separation between church and state.

To begin to answer this question, let's look again to Virginia's example. After 1776, Virginia ceased to provide funding for Anglican churches in the state. Patrick Henry thought such funding was important, and so proposed a general assessment bill that would fund *all* churches except those that objected to any government involvement in such matters. Supporters of the bill, like advocates of public sector unions today, contended that state funding is necessary to keep salaries high enough to attract the best candidates into the ministry.

Evangelical *opponents* of Henry's plan disagreed, responding that assessments were against "the spirit of the Gospel," that "the Holy Author of our Religion" did not require state support, and that Christianity was far purer before "Constantine first established Christianity by human laws." Rejecting their fellow petitioners' arguments that government funding was necessary to attract good candidates to the ministry, they argued that clergy should

. . . manifest to the world "that they are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon them that Office," that they seek the good of Mankind and not worldly Interest. Let their doctrines be scriptural and their Lives upright. Then shall Religion (if departed) speedily return, and Deism be put to open shame, and its dreaded Consequences removed.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., 308.

This petition was significantly more popular than James Madison's now famous "Memorial and Remonstrance" which was written in the same context. Madison's memorial has often been referenced to shine light on the First Amendment, and it is regularly treated as a rationalist, secular argument for religious liberty. But, as in the Virginia Declaration, the right to religious liberty is unalienable "because what is here a right towards men, is a duty towards the Creator." As well, Madison argued that "ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of Religion, have had a contrary operation" and "the bill is adverse to the diffusion of the light of Christianity."

America's Founders were committed to the idea that religion (by which virtually all of them meant Christianity) was necessary for public happiness and political prosperity. This view was so widespread that James Hutson of the Library of Congress has called it "the founders' syllogism." The only question, with respect to establishments, was whether they helped or hurt the faith.

Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation

Those who argue that the Founders wanted the complete separation of church and state love to quote Thomas Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in which he wrote that the First Amendment created a "wall of separation between Church & State." This metaphor lay dormant with respect to the Supreme Court's establishment clause jurisprudence until 1947, when Justice Hugo Black seized upon it as the defining statement of the Founders' views on church-state relations.

As appealing as the wall metaphor is to contemporary proponents of separating church and state, it obscures far more than it illuminates. Leaving aside the fact that Jefferson was in Europe when the Constitution and Bill of Rights were written, that the letter was a profoundly political document, and that Jefferson only used the metaphor once in his life, it is not even clear that it sheds useful light upon his views, much less those of his far more traditional colleagues.

Jefferson issued calls for prayer and fasting as governor of Virginia, and in his revision of Virginia's statutes he drafted bills stipulating when the governor could appoint "days of public fasting and humiliation, or thanksgiving" and to punish "Disturbers of Religious Worship

and Sabbath Breakers.” As a member of the Continental Congress he proposed that the nation adopt a seal containing the image of Moses “extending his hand over the sea, caus[ing] it to overwhelm Pharaoh” and the motto “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.” He closed his second Inaugural Address by encouraging all Americans to join him in seeking “the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our forefathers, as Israel of old . . . ,” and two days after completing his letter to the Danbury Baptists he attended church services in the U.S. capitol where he heard John Leland, the great Baptist minister and opponent of religious establishments, preach.

The point of the preceding paragraph is not that Jefferson was an orthodox Christian who wanted a union between church and state. He was a deist of sorts, and his public arguments and actions demonstrate that he favored a stricter separation between church and state than virtually any other founder. Yet even Jefferson, at least in his actions, did not attempt to completely remove religion from the public square. And what Jefferson did not completely exclude, most Founders embraced.

Other Founders on the Church and State

That most Founders were not troubled by the cooperation between church and state may be illustrated in a variety of ways, but a particularly useful exercise is to look at the first Congress, the body that crafted the First Amendment. One of Congress’s first acts was to agree to appoint and pay congressional chaplains. Shortly after doing so it reauthorized the Northwest Ordinance, which held that “Religion, Morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, Schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”

More significantly for understanding the First Amendment, on the day after the House approved the final wording of the Bill of Rights, Elias Boudinot, later president of the American Bible Society, proposed that the president recommend a day of public thanksgiving and prayer.

In response to objections that such a practice mimicked European customs or should be done by the states, Connecticut’s Roger Sherman “justified the practice of thanksgiving, on any signal event, not only as a laudable one in itself, but as warranted by a number of precedents in holy writ: for instance, the solemn thanksgivings and rejoicings which

took place in the time of Solomon, after the building of the temple, was a case in point. This example, he thought, worthy of Christian imitation on the present occasion; and he would agree with the gentleman who moved the resolution.”¹¹ The House agreed and appointed Boudinot, Sherman, and Peter Sylvester to a committee to communicate with their counterparts in the Senate. Congress’s eventual request resulted in George Washington’s famous 1789 Thanksgiving Day Proclamation. The text of his proclamation is worth quoting at some length:

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor. . . .

I do recommend and assign Thursday, November 26th, to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. . . .

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our national government a blessing to all the People . . .¹²

Similar proclamations were routinely issued by the Continental and Confederation Congresses and Presidents Washington, Adams, and Madison. Jefferson, it is true, refused to issue them, yet, as Daniel L. Dreisbach notes, he “employed rhetoric in official utterances that, in terms of religious content, was virtually indistinguishable from the traditional thanksgiving day proclamations.”¹³

America’s Founders did not want Congress to establish a national church, and many opposed establishments at the state level as well. However, there was widespread agreement that governments could promote and encourage Christianity, and that it was appropriate for

¹¹ *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress* (ed. Charlene Bangs Bickford, Kenneth R. Bowling, and Helen E. Veit; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 11:1500–1501.

¹² Dreisbach and Hall, *The Sacred Rights of Conscience*, 453–54.

¹³ Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation between Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 57.

elected officials to make religious arguments in the public square. There was virtually no support for contemporary visions for separating church and state that would have political leaders avoid religious language and require public spaces to be stripped of religious symbols.

Religious Liberty for All

The evidence is overwhelming that America's Founders were Christians who drew from their religious convictions when they created our constitutional order. One might conclude from this that they desired to protect only the religious liberty of Christians. This is not the case. They understood that all men and women have a natural, God-given right to religious liberty. This can be demonstrated in a variety of ways, but let me conclude by citing an excerpt from just one document—George Washington's 1790 letter to the Hebrew congregation in Newport, Rhode Island.

Following the state's ratification of the Constitution, the congregation had written Washington a letter in which they "praised the new government for 'generously affording to all liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship.'"¹⁴ In his reply, Washington noted that

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it were the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

. . . May the Children of the stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the

¹⁴ Quoted in "David G. Dalin, 'Jews, Judaism, and the American Founding,'" in *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic* (ed. Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 68.

other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.¹⁵

In their book on Washington's faith, Peter Lillback and Jerry Newcombe identify nine scriptural references in this letter. One of them is to Micah 4:4 which reads "but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (ESV). This was, incidentally, George Washington's favorite Bible verse—he quoted or paraphrased it more than fifty times in his writings in a variety of contexts.

I understand that this letter doesn't really make a biblical or theological *argument*. But I love our first president's use of Scripture in this powerful statement of religious liberty. That it was made to a tiny, non-Christian religious minority makes it all the more beautiful. And, in my mind, it serves as an important reminder that followers of Christ should make every effort to protect the religious liberty of all—even those who differ with us on important matters of faith.

Conclusion

America's Founders placed a high premium on the protection of religious liberty, a commitment that was encapsulated in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, multiple state constitutions, and numerous federal and state laws. Throughout American history religious liberty was not always well protected, but beginning in the twentieth century Democrats and Republicans routinely worked together to ensure that all Americans enjoyed religious freedom. Alas, over the past decade this one-time consensus has begun to unravel. If we desire to be faithful to, or even consistent with, the American Founders, we need to recapture their understanding of the importance of protecting "the sacred right of conscience" for all Americans.

¹⁵ Dreisbach and Hall, *The Sacred Rights of Conscience*, 464.

Recommended Resources

- Thomas J. Curry. *The First Freedoms: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment*. Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall, eds. *The Sacred Rights of Conscience: Selected Readings on Religious Liberty and Church-State Relations in the American Founding*. Liberty Fund Press, 2009.
- Daniel L. Dreisbach, Mark David Hall, and Jeffry H. Morrison, eds. *The Founders on God and Government*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
- Daniel L. Dreisbach, Mark David Hall, and Jeffry H. Morrison, eds. *The Forgotten Founders on Religion and Public Life*. Notre Dame University Press, 2009.
- Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall, eds. *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic*. Edited with Daniel L. Dreisbach. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Thomas R. Kidd. *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution*. Basic Books, 2010.



Good Samaritan

Momigami/Katazome stencil print

21 5/8" x 22 5/8"

1966

Sadao Watanabe (1913 - 1996)

Reproduced by permission of the Bowden Collections: <http://www.bowdencollections.com>

Sadao Watanabe was one of the premiere printmakers in Japan in the last century. He was also a devout follower of Christ in a country where, still, less than 1% of the population identify themselves as being "Christian."

Watanabe's *Good Samaritan* is a celebration of color, shape, and texture. Though representational, the figures and forms are abstracted and flat-tened. Watanabe's technical ability in the printmaking medium unifies with his interpretation of the scene, letting the textures of the paper and printing passes create a world where the beaten down and broken are given blessing (the Samaritan's gesture) and welcome (the women anticipating the arrival at the inn). Whereas the robbed man was once near death, the Samaritan has brought his wounded neighbor to a place of life, which is symbolized in the abundant flora and in the bird (perhaps a magpie) that also awaits the injured man.

—Richard W. Cummings

Faithful Political Engagement: Exploring Five Theological Positions[†]

Amy E. Black^{*}

Christians throughout the centuries have asked questions about how to interact with governing authorities and the broader culture. Followers of Christ owe ultimate allegiance to God, yet they also have rights and responsibilities as earthly citizens. Historical traditions have offered varying interpretations of the extent to which Christians should engage with governing powers and what it means to be faithful citizens. Yet many Christians are unaware of how these rich traditions can guide them to think more deeply about the relationship between their faith and politics.

My most recent book project, *Five Views on Church and Politics*, introduces five of these historic traditions of Christian political thought—Anabaptist, Lutheran, Black Church, Reformed, and Catholic—and places them in dialogue with one another to help laypeople, students, and scholars think more deeply about theology and politics. Each of these five traditions offers insights for navigating the complexities of church and state.

[†] This essay is adapted from *Five Views on the Church and Politics* by Amy E. Black, general editor. Copyright © 2015 by Amy E. Black, J. Brian Benestad, Robert Benne, Bruce Fields, Thomas W. Heilke, and James K. A. Smith. Used by permission of Zondervan.

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In this essay, I will briefly sketch the political thought of these five historic traditions. Then I will consider these views in the context of contemporary American politics, mapping the extent to which their teachings correlate with the strategies and goals of the two major parties.

Not every theological tradition has a robust and distinctive set of teachings that we might call a “political theology,” but four in particular (Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Anabaptist) stand out for their enduring influence on conversations about church and state over many centuries. A fifth tradition, that of the Black Church, is specifically rooted in the United States and represents a distinctive theological perspective that is too often discussed in isolation or simply ignored.

The Spectrum of Views: Introductory Descriptions

Anabaptist Political Thought

The first tradition to consider is Anabaptism. This tradition arose in the sixteenth century when a group of “Radical Reformers” including Menno Simons taught that baptism was reserved for adult believers. Early Anabaptists faced intense suffering, persecution, and even execution because of their beliefs, a legacy that has deeply shaped Anabaptist political thought.

The Anabaptist tradition emphasizes the life and teaching of Jesus. Jesus explicitly taught what it means to prioritize forgiveness and grace—even to the point of loving our enemies. Jesus personified this teaching by rejecting the violent tendencies of the Zealots, by refusing to resist his own death, and by giving his life as a ransom for others. As a result, Anabaptists have a distinctive “inclination toward nonviolence,”¹ not wanting to endorse use of lethal force or coercion, whether at the hands of individuals or the government.

Because of their pacifist tendencies, Anabaptists have an uneasy relationship with politics. For many in this tradition, such a stance leads to complete separation from the work of the state and the belief that indi-

¹ Thomas W. Heilke, “The Anabaptist (Separationist) View,” in *Five Views on the Church and Politics*, 26.

viduals should not participate in the government because of its coercive power. Other Anabaptists permit some forms of political involvement, expecting that Christian presuppositions will shape all political interactions and believers will oppose violence in every form.

Instead of looking to government as an agent of change, Anabaptist thought emphasizes the centrality of the church and her call to serve as an alternative community that embodies the truths of the gospel and points to the kingdom of God.

Lutheran Political Thought

The Lutheran tradition stems largely but not exclusively from the teachings of Martin Luther. Core elements of the Lutheran tradition include emphases on justification by faith alone, the reality of human sinfulness, the significance of the Word and sacraments, the “two-kingdoms doctrine,” and vocation. Lutherans differentiate between life in society, the order of creation for all people, and the gospel order of redemption that is given to the people of God. God has chosen to rule the earthly kingdom through universal principles and laws that can be rightly regulated through governmental institutions. But human effort and laws cannot redeem sinful hearts.

According to Lutheran teaching, the state resulted from the effects of the fall, but it exists in order to fulfill the God-ordained purpose of restraining evil, protecting citizens, and seeking justice, which sometimes entails the legitimate use of force. Christians can participate in government because government is the means by which God governs a fallen world, and Christians can fulfill their call to love their neighbors by helping the government effectively pursue justice and punish wickedness.

The church as an institution is called to maintain its focus on the gospel of redemption, preaching the word of God and administering the sacraments. Thus, the institutional church refrains from direct involvement in politics, focusing instead on molding the hearts of Christians to love and serve people well. Christians, moreover, bear the power of Christ wherever they live or work, so no activity or job escapes the powerful influence of the gospel.

Political Thought of the Black Church

Unlike the other four traditions under consideration, the Black Church is distinctly American. Transcending common denominational boundaries, this tradition is rooted in the response of African Americans to their tragic history. For much of American history, whites sought to dominate all aspects of black lives, including their religious practice. Historically black denominations emerged from this oppression, creating safe spaces for African Americans to worship freely and independently.

At the centerpiece of this tradition stands the cross, a reminder to view human suffering in light of the One who faced the greatest suffering to free others from it. With the cross and the harsh realities of life in mind, the Black Church emphasizes God's heart for the marginalized, the downcast, the "least of these." Attuned to the sin and suffering that invade the people and institutions of this world, this tradition speaks truth to power with a prophetic voice.

The goal of the Black Church is the pursuit of liberation, justice, and reconciliation. The tradition has a mixed view of the role of government. On the one hand, it emphasizes the positive role that government can play in serving justice, seeking the good of all people, and promoting reform and reconciliation. At the same time, the Black Church is acutely aware that power can be a means of oppression, because her people have faced it firsthand.

The Black Church tends to focus on community. This communal outlook calls attention to institutional wrongdoing and systemic sins, especially evidenced in racism, and seeks the transformation of social and political institutions. Corporate sins require structural changes, instituted through political means. Thus a central part of the church's mission is to be a voice for such communal reform.

Reformed Political Thought

The Reformed tradition developed from sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers including Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox. This tradition emphasizes God's supreme sovereignty over all things, including people, the church, and governments. At the center of the Reformed tradition is the narrative of creation, fall, and redemption, a perspective that helps Christians understand God's relation to humanity.

Reformed thinkers emphasize that God created the world very good, bestowing beauty and granting humans the ability and responsibility to fill the earth and multiply the good in it. However, the fall affects every aspect of life, including politics. In his mercy, God allows sinners outside of Christ to do good through common grace—a gift that enables wicked people to live rightly and receive earthly blessings. While total redemption is not possible in earthly life, Christians should be agents of renewal and restoration, even as they yearn for the complete harmony and glory that will come in eternity.

Government is thus a good gift from God that, along with other fundamental societal institutions such as schools, churches, families, business, and labor, can be an agent of transformation. Christians are called to engage the world in all its dimensions, to spread the transforming power of the gospel into each area of life, and to let the light of Christ shine more and more brightly in society at large.

Government should promote justice and the common good, and Christians should have tempered expectations of what government can and cannot do.

Catholic Political Thought

The Roman Catholic tradition centers on the unity and mission of the church, with emphasis on the incarnation and the sacraments. Just as Christ came to earth and lived among humanity, so God designed all people to live in deep communion, taking responsibility for the needs of each other and God's created world. The sacraments physically connect Christians with Christ as the center of life in the church.

These principles undergird some core elements of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a tradition that lays out fundamental principles for engagement with society. CST identifies seven central themes for the church's posture toward the world: the dignity of all human life; the call to family, community, and participation; rights and responsibilities; preferential care for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work; solidarity; and care for God's creation.² Because humans are created in the image of God, human life is sacred. All people and institutions should protect human life and uphold human dignity. God created humanity

² "Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching," U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed February 16, 2017, at <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>.

to live and flourish in community, beginning with the foundational relationships of marriage and family and extending outward to other forms of community. Rights and responsibilities indicate the way in which justice ought to govern life on earth. Special concern for the poor is modeled after Christ's sacrificial love and care for the "least of these." The dignity of work and the rights of workers give meaning to life in a fallen world by upholding central ways of participating in creation. Solidarity binds the members of communities together in a mutual commitment to the common good. Finally, the Catholic Church teaches care for creation; humans have the responsibility to be good stewards of the world God made.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church outlines three specific obligations of all Christian citizens: voting, defending one's country, and paying taxes.³ Duty to country extends beyond national borders to the entire world community, especially to the goal of promoting peace.

Above all, the church has a transcendent purpose only she can fill—to follow Christ and further the Gospel. Government has a necessary and important role, but it cannot meet all societal needs on its own. Christian engagement in politics is held in tension with a commitment to a sacramental life shaped by the church.

Historical Traditions, Contemporary Applications

So how do these historic traditions fit into the context of contemporary American politics? To what extent do these views connect with the politics and goals of the Democratic and Republican parties? As we will see, none of the perspectives overlaps completely with the dominant positions of either of the two major parties, but we can identify useful trends.

Catholics and Contemporary American Politics

Of the five views, the Catholic tradition is the most open to interaction between church and state. The unified structure of the church

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.; Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1997), 540.

allows her to speak directly to the divisive issues of the day. Individual parishioners, of course, are free to disagree with the church's official teaching on certain matters, and evidence suggests this is rather common. Even so, the church has institutional authority unparalleled in Protestantism and consequently speaks to her people and the world with a much more unified voice than any Protestant tradition can offer.

Catholic teachings address a wide range of political issues that do not fit neatly with either major party's priorities, so Catholics are unlikely to find a natural political home as Republicans or Democrats. Different principles of Catholic Social Teaching pull adherents in opposite partisan directions. The emphasis on the dignity of the human person and the sacredness of life, for example, translates into strong positions against the practices of abortion and euthanasia, views most commonly held by Republicans. In stark contrast, these same principles lead the Church to oppose capital punishment, a position more commonly held by Democrats. As an extension of the principle of the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, Catholic leaders have tended to support Democratic policies and proposals in their advocacy for public safety net programs. Yet, Catholic leaders have been critical of recent Democratic-promoted regulations that threaten their religious freedom. As these examples demonstrate, different aspects of official Catholic teachings line up with each of the two major parties. Catholic voters face the dilemma of choosing which set of issues they believe is most relevant to earn their support.

The Black Church and Contemporary Politics

Forged from experiences of great oppression and suffering, the Black Church seeks transformation in the here and now, confronting evil and calling for correctives that will combat injustice and help her people. At the same time, the church brings comfort with the gospel message of ultimate redemption and restoration in the life to come.

As Bruce Fields describes, the African American experience with politics and government has been "complex and perplexing."⁴ At times, government actions have oppressed and marginalized African Americans; at other times, government has been a forceful agent of empowerment and righting societal wrongs. Their experiences with

⁴ Bruce L. Fields, "The Black Church (Prophetic) View," in *Five Views on the Church and Politics*, 113.

government—both positive and negative—have helped them realize the power political systems can wield. Despite government attempts at redress and in no small part as a consequence of racism and discrimination, African Americans continue to face significant economic disadvantages. Leaders in the Black Church have been at the forefront of social movements demanding change, and many pastors incorporate political themes into their preaching.

In the decades immediately following emancipation, most blacks identified with Republicans, the party of Abraham Lincoln. But the issue positions and allegiances of the two major parties shifted over time. By the 1960s, the Democratic Party had become the champion of civil rights and government programs designed to alleviate poverty and combat discrimination, and most African Americans switched their party allegiance.⁵ In contemporary politics, most African American elected officials are Democrats, and most in the Black Church identify as Democrats, especially on economic issues and civil rights. This alliance is not without tension, however, as the more conservative social and cultural views associated with the Republican Party align more closely with the typical teachings of the Black Church. In most election cycles, Democratic elected officials and candidates actively court Black voters as an essential part of their political base, whereas few Republicans make concerted efforts to win their support.

The Reformed and Lutheran Traditions and Contemporary American Politics

As we have seen, the Reformed and Lutheran traditions share roots in the magisterial reformation, yet they have different theological perspectives on the interaction between faith and politics. The dominant strain of Reformed thought emphasizes government as part of God's created order, a conviction that, as James K. A. Smith outlines, "propels believers into government and politics."⁶ The state is one of many societal institutions that can serve as an agent of transformation, and believers can and should participate in it. Integration is an overarching theme. The Lutheran tradition, in contrast, envisions govern-

⁵ For a more detailed discussion of this shift, see Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁶ James K. A. Smith, "The Reformed (Transformationist) View," in *Five Views on the Church and Politics*, 151.

ment as a post-fall reality, needed to restrain evil, and draws sharp distinctions between the temporal and eternal kingdoms. Much of the tradition, as Robert Benne notes, has tended toward quietism.⁷

Although the Reformed and Lutheran traditions have different theological perspectives on the interaction between faith and politics, their behavior in contemporary American politics connects closely with trends in other Protestant traditions. Denominational differences matter, but they have been eclipsed in recent decades by theological differences. Most American Protestant traditions are split between historic mainline, often more “liberal,” denominations and their evangelical, more theologically conservative, counterparts. Evangelicals emphasize the authority of Scripture, the centrality of the cross, and the importance of individual conversion; mainline Protestants are more communitarian in focus, have a more optimistic view of human nature, and tend to interpret the Bible with more influence from modern reason and contemporary experience.

Mainline denominations are larger and more established, so they tend to be more theologically diverse than their evangelical counterparts. In recent decades, theologically conservative congregations from a range of mainline denominations have moved to evangelical branches, often breaking away over contentious issues such as the ordination of gays and lesbians and recognition of same-sex marriage.

Most of the large mainline Protestant denominations have offices in Washington, DC that advocate on a range of social justice issues, and their official political stances most often align with the Democratic Party. Evangelical churches are less likely to have a denominational presence in Washington, but many of their members are politically engaged, and several national interest groups advocate on their behalf. Evangelicals tend to hold views opposite those of their mainline counterparts, especially on cultural issues, and identify strongly with the Republican Party.

As the cleavage between evangelical and liberal Protestantism has become more politically significant, evangelical Lutherans and Presbyterians are more likely to find political common ground than mainline Lutherans and Presbyterians. This cleavage also holds true within other Protestant groups that have less cohesively distinctive political traditions, such as Methodists and Baptists.

⁷ Robert Benne, “The Lutheran (Paradoxical) View,” in *Five Views on the Church and Politics*, 61–63.

Anabaptists and Contemporary Politics

As Thomas Heilke notes, the Anabaptist tradition is less recognized for its political thought than for its ethics.⁸ The movement emphasizes the teachings of Jesus, lay leadership, non-violence, and communal practice.

The complexities and emphases of this tradition make it an uneasy fit with contemporary politics. Separatist tendencies and suspicion of governmental authority pull many away from direct political activity, so very few Anabaptists seek elected office or other forms of formal participation. The tradition's commitment to non-violence does not fit well with the mainstream of either major political party and offers a sharp contrast to many elements of American foreign policy. An analysis of data from the Pew Center shows that contemporary Anabaptists favor more government protection of morality and prefer a smaller role for government, views that align best with the Republican Party.⁹ Even so, some Anabaptists prefer the Democratic Party due to its emphasis on combating poverty and promoting social justice.

Anabaptists have political concerns, but such matters are typically secondary to other areas of focus. Ultimately, the hallmark of the Anabaptist tradition is its distinctive witness, modeling an alternative community that demonstrates love for neighbor and points people to Christ.

Enduring Principles, Enduring Questions: Reaching Across Borders

As we have seen, the political behavior of American Christians varies quite dramatically between and even within traditions. But questions about the role and nature of government extend far beyond the United States and the particularities of its political system. These rich

⁸ Thomas W. Heilke, "The Anabaptist (Separationist) View," in *Five Views on the Church and Politics*, 20.

⁹ Tobin Grant, "Politics of American Churches and Religions in One Graph," Religion News Service Blog, August 27, 2014, accessed June 5, 2015, <http://religionnews.com/2014/08/27/politics-american-churches-religions-one-graph/>. Data drawn from Pew's Religious Landscape Survey.

theological traditions reach back across centuries—all but the Black Church tradition predate the founding of the United States—and span across the globe. Even the Black Church, a uniquely American tradition forged in the midst of tragedy and oppression, connects themes of liberation and prophetic witness that inform many other contexts. Each of these five traditions speaks far beyond the contemporary American scene, identifying core principles and raising questions that challenge us all to be citizens of the global kingdom of God.

Agreement on Core Principles

All five of these traditions share important core principles that animate their political theology. Four common themes are particularly striking:

The centrality of the church and its witness to the gospel. Each tradition differs about the specific location of this witness, but they all share this common goal. Anabaptists look primarily to the church as a community of discipleship, set apart as a witness to the outside world. The Catholic and Reformed views hold a broader interpretation of the role of the church in the culture, seeking to transform law and society.

The importance of governing institutions. Governments have significant power to further the common good, and significant power to oppress. Most traditions view government as a potential source for good, and each wrestles with how to guide, limit, or control its power.

The importance of civil society/free associations. These must be allowed the freedom to flourish. The Catholic doctrine of subsidiarity and the Kuyperian notion of sphere sovereignty that emerged in the Reformed tradition offer two specific ways of thinking about these relationships, but all traditions agree that churches, families, schools, and other important institutions play essential roles in society and deserve protection.

A concern for cultivating virtue in individuals and working toward a more virtuous society. The different traditions are divided in how to define virtue—are true virtues knowable for all, as the Catholic tradition of natural law attests? Or is virtue only revealed through Scripture? Yet despite these significant differences, all traditions agree that God is the source of all virtue and that virtue is essential to human flourishing.

Enduring Questions

This discussion has also revealed points of tension and disagreement, raising central questions about the relationship between the Christian faith and politics:

- When addressing societal problems and making collective decisions, what are the proper roles for individuals, churches, and political authorities? How and to what extent should they relate to one another?
- What is the proper level for Christian political engagement? In what ways should individual Christians participate in the political community? Do churches have a proper political role?
- In what ways should Scripture (and its interpretation), reason, historical perspective, and contemporary experience guide Christian political thought?
- In what ways does sin corrupt government, politics, and Christian interaction in the public sphere? What are the best ways to counteract the effects of individual and systemic sin?

We need not expect to always find common answers to these questions. Instead we can use them as starting points for rich and meaningful conversations about the nature of politics and its relationship to Christian life.

Political-Theological Difference and Christian Unity

The purpose of this discussion, and the larger project from which it is derived, is not to convince readers to choose a side as if in the midst of a raging debate that must be settled once and for all. Instead, consider this discussion of alternative views as an invitation to compare and contrast central ideas and themes from each tradition to help develop a more thoughtful, careful, and Christ-centered approach to politics and government.

Conversations about the role of church and state are dynamic, not static. These five traditions overlap in many significant ways, have

borrowed from each other's teachings over time, and continue to learn from one another and change from within.

As long as societies face collective problems and decisions, government will be necessary, and political issues will divide people. Cultural and political battles will continue to rage, and faithful Christians from all traditions will get caught in the crossfire. The nature of how we engage politically and how we disagree with each other is an aspect of our discipleship. By working together across boundaries of denomination and nation, we can seek unity in Christ as we share the gospel message with a broken world.

Recommended Resources

- J. Brian Benestad. *Church, State, and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine*. Catholic University of America Press, 2011.
- Amy Black, ed. *Five Views on the Church and Politics*. Counterpoints. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Phillips, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Paul Charles Kemeny, Clarke E. Cochran, and Derek H. Davis. *Church, State, and Public Justice: Five Views*. IVP Academic, 2007.
- C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Duke University Press, 1990.
- Elizabeth Phillips. *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.
- Corwin E. Smidt. *American Evangelicals Today*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.



The Good Samaritan Carries the Wounded

Ink on Chine paper

10 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

exact date unknown

Jules Chadel (1850 – 1941)

Reproduced by permission of the Bowden Collections: <http://www.bowdencollections.com>

Chadel's moving ink drawing of the Good Samaritan story shows the Samaritan gruelingly lifting and hauling the man beset by robbers by his torso. I can remember the flannelgraph depictions of this story from my youth. If I recall, they always seemed to have the Samaritan placing the man on a donkey. Indeed, my ESV translation states that the Samaritan put the battered man on his "animal."

I find Chadel's chosen moment from the narrative to be enlightening. Somehow I have always failed to conceive of the intense physical struggle that the Samaritan must have undergone to move the dead weight of the incapacitated man from wherever the man was lying to his "animal." The two denarii was not the only cost that the Samaritan incurred that day. Chadel captures the gift of the Samaritan to the wounded man. It wasn't the two denarii paid to the innkeeper, it was the choice of an individual to see and to respond in love to a neighbor in need.

—Richard W. Cummings

Love without a Reason: G. K. Chesterton and the Heart of Patriotism

Kyle D. Rapinchuk*

The air is blistering hot and thick with humidity, even with the sun long set behind the horizon. The sky hangs like a black canvas dotted with golden stars. Into this picture erupts the thundering sound and explosive color of fireworks, painting the black canvas with picture after picture. Good friends and family sit closely together staring into the sky, and we are content. Fireworks and family have been a Fourth of July tradition for many American families, and this date on the calendar remains a yearly reminder of how grateful we are to live in the United States of America.

Our gratitude and love for our nation are often described using the term patriotism, defined at College of the Ozarks as “an understanding of American heritage, civic responsibilities, love of country, and a willingness to defend it.” Focusing on the middle of this definition, what does it mean to love one’s country? What does living out that love look like? Certainly there is more to patriotism than attending a fireworks display once a year. If our understanding of patriotism is intimately tied to our love of country, as Christians, what that love looks like calls for serious reflection.

My own deeper reflection came several years ago while re-reading *Orthodoxy* by G. K. Chesterton, who, as many surely know, was not an American. Among the many profound statements Chesterton makes,

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one stood out as particularly powerful. In Chapter 5, “The Flag of the World,” he writes: “Men did not love Rome because she was great. She was great because they had loved her.”¹ This brief yet profound statement has much to say in helping us formulate a Christian perspective on patriotism.

G. K. Chesterton was a prolific British writer who regularly demonstrated prophetic insight into human culture. For example, he was once ridiculed for a novel that he wrote, *The Flying Inn*, in which London had become populated by a Muslim majority, yet in 2017 this is becoming a reality. Many of his other observations in *Orthodoxy* have likewise seemed to have insight far beyond 1908, the year of its publication. So when Chesterton has something to say about the nature of patriotism, as he does in “The Flag of the World,” we would be wise to consider his thoughts closely. In addition to his prophet-like insight, two other reasons commend Chesterton’s work for consideration. First, since he is removed from our time and culture, he has the ability to speak into our context with different assumptions and perspectives and help shed light on areas to which we might be blind. Second, he was a brilliant writer and thinker and regularly sought to bring his commitments to Christianity and the Scriptures to bear on every area of life, especially issues of worldview and culture.

In the previous statement about Rome, Chesterton is suggesting that our love for a country is what can make it great, in opposition to the idea that we merely love a country because the country is already great. Following Chesterton’s model of “patriotism without a reason”² could help Christians embrace a biblically faithful patriotism that aligns with our global gospel mission, while still retaining a robust love for America.

Patriotism with or without a Reason

In his work, Chesterton makes a helpful distinction between what we might call patriotism with a reason versus patriotism without a reason.

¹ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Barnes & Noble Library of Essential Reading; New York: B&N, 2007), 59.

² In his work Chesterton literally speaks of what he calls “irrational patriotism.” What this meant in 1908 was a love for something without a reason, not without reason. The word “irrational” did not carry the negative connotation for Chesterton, as it often does today. I therefore speak of Chesterton’s rational and irrational patriotism with the terms patriotism with and without a reason respectively.

The former view relates to the person who loves his country *for* some specific reason. This would relate to those Americans who might love America simply because of its global greatness, or because it is seen as a Christian nation, or its celebration of liberty and justice for all. Patriotism without a reason, however, relates to the person who loves his country without a reason, save that it is his.

Chesterton illustrates his position using the example of Pimlico, a town which by 1908 had become a low income slum. He argues that no one would have any reason to love Pimlico, but even Pimlico may have some hope if someone were “to love it with a transcendental tie and without any earthly reason.”³ In fact, Chesterton goes so far as to assert “that when you do love a thing, its gladness is a reason for loving it, and its sadness a reason for loving it more.”⁴ Chesterton envisions a society in which men and women love a place because it is their home, and simply because it is theirs they work to make it better. A place that has some reason for loving it can certainly be a cause for joy; but Chesterton correctly asserts that its sadness is a reason for loving it more. When we see something undesirable about our home, we work to improve it. Sometimes the deficiency itself prompts in us a deeper commitment and desire to make it better.

This insight is Chesterton’s point as he uses patriotism again as an illustration for how loving something with a reason leads to stagnation, but loving something without a reason leads to reform. He then adds, “The man who is most likely to ruin the place he loves is exactly the man who loves it with a reason. The man who will improve the place is the man who loves it without a reason.”⁵ Not only does patriotism without a reason help us love our home regardless of its current beauty or lack thereof, but it also serves as a better model for future reform.

The Problems with Reasons

Suppose, however, that we reject Chesterton’s patriotism without a reason in favor of its opposite: patriotism with a reason. Then we might say that “Men love America because she has religious freedom.”

³ Ibid., 59.

⁴ Ibid., 58

⁵ Ibid., 61.

Or “Men love America because she is a Christian nation.” Or, to put America in Chesterton’s terms, “Men love America because she is great.” But each of these reasons leads to significant problems.

The first problem, “men love America because she has religious freedom,” becomes evident in several ways. For example, a number of Christians during the past election season expressed concern over the possible loss of religious liberty if a particular candidate was elected. They argued that if religious liberty were compromised and America became less and less a Christian nation, then they would have trouble singing the patriotic hymns with as much passion and joy. In clearer terms, we might say these individuals would love America less because of the loss of these values. In theory, such an approach could lead to a time in the future where the reasons for loving America are gone, and all love for America is gone with it. It is difficult to understand how a love for country that rises or falls on the basis of certain liberties is capable of sustaining itself. The frequent refrains I heard from Christians about how they would love America less if they lost these freedoms serves as confirmation that Chesterton is at least partly correct about the dangers of loving one’s country on the basis of specific reasons.

The second problem, “men love America because she is a Christian nation,” likewise has many facets. One facet of this problem relates directly to the issue of religious liberty. Similar to the example above, if America becomes more and more secular and less and less Christian, then the person who loves America because she is a Christian nation would have less cause to love America. A second related facet is that the love we have for America would not be for America as she is, nor even what she could be, but a love for America *as she once was*. Such an approach does not bode well for the future of patriotism. The third facet is the question of what does it mean to call America a “Christian nation” in the first place.⁶

Many Christians challenge this “Christian nation” narrative. They would argue the view, as often presented, is much closer to a misguided nationalism rather than a faithful consideration of historical reality. While the debate among historians continues, Chesterton’s premonition that patriotism for a reason could give rise to agenda-driven views

⁶ For a helpful discussion of what was “Christian” about America’s founding, see Mark David Hall, “Did America Have a Christian Founding?” Heritage Lecture no. 1186, *The Heritage Foundation*, June 7, 2011, accessed September 5, 2017, <http://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/did-america-have-christian-founding>.

of history is arresting: “A man who loves England for being English will not mind how she arose. But a man who loves England for being Anglo-Saxon may go against all facts for his fancy.”⁷ Christians who love America because it is a Christian nation are in danger of going against the facts as Chesterton warns. No doubt many of the founders were Christians, and Christianity certainly had a huge impact on the culture, context, education, and background of the founding fathers who wrote these founding documents, but does this mean that they intended to create a “Christian nation”?⁸

Chesterton himself provides the best analogy of this distinction between patriotism with and without a reason. He gives the analogy of a mother and child when he writes: “If men loved Pimlico as mothers love children, arbitrarily, because it is *theirs*, Pimlico in year or two might be fairer than Florence.”⁹ Although we certainly admire qualities in our children, we do not love them because of these qualities, but rather because they are our children. Our love for them is unconditional because they are ours; our love does not grow or diminish because of qualities they possess. Likewise, Chesterton suggests that our country, because it is ours, should receive a similar unconditional love, which reflects his description of patriotism without a reason.

Patriotism without a reason finds support in countless stories of community initiatives for improvement. Stories abound of citizens in otherwise unlovable areas banding together to make their community a better place. These stories are often reported in the news as “feel-good” stories that we admire, but I would describe them as patriotism without a reason in action, and I think most people respond positively to such initiative.

Loving Neighbors because They're Our Neighbors

Saint Augustine of Hippo is not only one of the greatest theologians in the history of the church, he was also one of the most insightful

⁷ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 61-62.

⁸ Again, Hall gives an excellent historical survey that mediates between extremes.

⁹ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 59.

regarding the challenge of living as citizens of two kingdoms—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man—a topic which stands at the heart of his great book, *The City of God*. However, it is in another work, *On Christian Teaching*, where Augustine discusses what it means to love God and to love our neighbor as our self, which is the two-fold way Jesus summarizes the way his followers should live (Matt 22:37-40). Augustine speaks of the possibility of enjoying and using something, and he defines these words lest we import a meaning he does not intend. “To enjoy something is to hold fast to it in love for its own sake. To use something is to apply whatever it may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love.”¹⁰ Augustine then asks “whether one person should be loved by another on his own account or for some other reason. If on his own account, we enjoy him; if for some other reason, we use him. In my opinion, he should be loved for another reason.”¹¹ Yet Augustine’s answer is not that one person should love another because of any quality that he or she possesses, but rather because it is our duty to love God and to do so by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength in concert with the other person.¹²

Ultimately, then, Augustine is promoting a love for another without a reason, save that they are, like us, creatures in the image of God. The main difference between Augustine and Chesterton on this idea, though I think ultimately they have the same conclusion, is that Chesterton says we should love a child because it is ours, whereas Augustine is teaching about loving another person because we are both God’s.

But what does this have to do with patriotism? Although we recognize that loving a person and loving a country will have some differences, this distinction seems to be applicable here. If we love America for the liberties it gives us, then are we not using it, according to Augustine’s terminology? And if we are using America, in what sense can we claim to love America? Or if we love America because it is great, are we not enjoying it, when “enjoyment” as Augustine is defining it refers to that which ought to be rendered to the Triune God alone?¹³ Rather, we should love America in the way that Augustine says we must love our

¹⁰ Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* (trans. R. P. H. Green; Oxford’s World Classics; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10. There is a close correlation here between “enjoyment” as Augustine is defining it and the idea of primary loyalty that I discuss below.

neighbor if it is truly to be called love. We should love America because it is ours, since it is the land God has given us to cultivate, and we, in concert with the land and its fellow inhabitants, work together for the glory of God. I think as Christians our resounding answer should be “Yes!”

Living out Patriotism without a Reason

Bearing in mind the ideas of Chesterton and Augustine, how does the Bible speak more directly to issues of patriotism and love of one’s country? Do we see biblical support for what Chesterton calls patriotism without a reason? And finally, what would it look like for the Christian?

First, it would require a healthy love for our country, simply because it is ours. In Genesis 1–2, God gave Adam and Eve what has been called the “cultural mandate”: to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it. They were to be God’s vice-regents and caretakers of creation. From the beginning of humanity, we were called to cultivate the land we were given, to care for it, and to be fruitful and multiply upon it. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were cast out of the garden. The cultural mandate became a much more difficult task, in part due to the curses that the ground would work against them and woman would have pain/difficulty in childbearing.

Interestingly, the apostle Paul makes a similar connection between Adam and our nationalities in his address to the Areopagus in Acts 17. Paul says, “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods *and the boundaries of their dwelling place*” (ESV, emphasis added). God has allotted our dwelling places as the location for our own faithful stewardship of creation. Thus, despite the challenges introduced by the fall of Adam, practicing the cultural mandate in our own land is an example of patriotism, since God has placed us in *this* land and given us the same mandate.

Second, a word of caution. Although we should love our country because it is ours, we must ensure that we have proper priorities. Patriotism (and here we certainly recognize that all nations have their patriots) is a virtue only insofar as our first allegiance is to the kingdom of God, and only then to our earthly citizenship. In *The Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis provides helpful insight into a particular danger of patriotism,

namely that our allegiance to country would become our primary allegiance. He writes:

The rescue of drowning men is, then, a duty worth dying for, but not worth living for. It seems to me that all political duties (among which I include military duties) are of this kind. A man may have to die for our country, but no man must, in any exclusive sense, live for his country. He who surrenders himself without reservation to the temporal claims of a nation, or a party, or a class is rendering to Caesar that which, of all things, most emphatically belongs to God: himself.¹⁴

Lewis makes a valuable point. The fact that a man is willing to die for his country is honorable. But if a man lives only for his country, then his primary allegiance is misguided.

The reality that a Christian's primary allegiance is to the Kingdom of God also has an important application. We must always remember that the family of faith—those united in Christ by faith—includes believers in America and around the world. As Christians, we have a deeper and longer lasting connection to non-American believers than non-believing Americans. If our primary citizenship is in heaven, then we are first and foremost fellow citizens with our brothers and sisters around the world before we move into our role as citizens of our earthly kingdom. The notion of “America First,” to the exclusion and neglect of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world, simply does not resonate with the Bible's teaching on the universal scope of Jesus's mission.¹⁵

Third, we need to recognize that patriotism is connected to various vocations, meaning we can love our nation and defend it in many different ways. However, there are times when we might be tempted to equate patriotism with military service. I have no doubt that many who serve in our armed forces are true patriots, and we enjoy a great deal of peace and freedom because of their sacrifice. In no way do I wish to diminish that sacrifice or take it for granted. The problem arises though, if patriotism is tied primarily to military service, how do the

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 53.

¹⁵ Consider, for example, how Israel's nationalism was not viewed by God as proper patriotism but rather a neglect of the Abrahamic Covenant's goal to bless *all* nations (e.g., Jonah).

millions of Americans not serving come to understand their love for country and civic responsibility as patriotism?

As an illustration, I suggest that a similar distortion often happens within Christianity. We as Christians often make distinctions between the ultra-spiritual Christians who are pastors and missionaries and “the rest of us.” No such classes of Christians exist, and those who live faithfully in whatever place or profession they find themselves are capable of accomplishing God’s mission. The same can be said for patriotism’s relationship to the military. Instead of believing that those who serve in the military are the super-patriotic ones and everyone not serving is a second-rate patriot, just as with Christianity, we should acknowledge that patriotism can be expressed in many different vocations and those who love their nation and work for its good in any field are patriotic.

Conclusion

Patriotism looks like loving our country because it is ours, a place in which God has placed us to fulfill and obey His cultural mandate. There may be many reasons why we love America, but if our love for America is based solely upon those reasons, then our love for our nation may grow and shrink with each passing electoral season. As Christians, we must orient our patriotism in accordance with Scripture, remembering God calls us to love our neighbors, seek the good of our communities, while maintaining our primary loyalty to the kingdom of Christ. With this primary loyalty established, a healthy view of patriotism, I argue, is best portrayed by Chesterton’s vision of a patriotism without a reason. If we keep these things in mind, then we can have a robust and lasting love for America as our home until the day we see the fullness of the kingdom of God.

Recommended Resources

G. K. Chesterton. *In Defense of Sanity: The Best Essays of G. K. Chesterton*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011.

Steven Garber. *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2014.

Russell Moore. *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*. Nashville: B & H, 2015.

Miroslav Volf. *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011.

John D. Wilsey. *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015.



The Good Samaritan

Painted sculpture

26" x 44"

2006

Anthony Novak

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Anthony Novak is a contemporary artist living and working in Nashville, TN. Novak's version of the Good Samaritan story contains more figures than we are used to seeing in the depiction. Above, a heavenly being resembling Christ (bearing the scars of his wounds in his hands?) oversees the interaction between the Samaritan and the wounded man. Swirling wisps populate the composition, hinting at the Holy Spirit's presence in this act of kindness. The enigmatic figure on the left appears to be a woman holding a baby. Is the Samaritan in this depiction a woman as well? Perhaps the same woman now cradling her adult son instead of her infant child? If so, the Samaritan's neighbor is someone very close. Perhaps the young man's injuries needing tending to are spiritual in nature, and perhaps the only one not abandoning the young man is a loving mother, strengthened by the presence of an even more loving God.

—Richard W. Cummings



The Good Samaritan

Oil on canvas

100 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 74 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

1850

George Frederic Watts RA (1817-1904)

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This relatively early work of Watts shows the influence of his extended stay in Italy from 1843-1847. The figures of the Samaritan and the man beset by thieves draw heavily from the figures and minimal landscapes found in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescos. This is not a critique of the work as travel to Italy and study of the great masters' works was part of any serious artist's education. The Samaritan (it could almost be a portrait of Michelangelo himself) holds up the beaten man, who, in a pose that borrows from the Sistine Chapel Sybils, reclines against the Samaritan's chest.

In this work, Watts fills the picture plane with the two figures, their muscular forms presenting an idealized version of humanity. This painting is one of a number that Watts created on the subject of the Good Samaritan, indicating an affinity for the subject. The mood in this piece seems optimistic, and perhaps reflects the artist's own values and outlook at this point in his life. The piece may also capture a sense of the social responsibility and general optimism that existed in the UK as the empire expanded its borders and rose to its greatest influence during the Victorian era.

—Richard W. Cummings

Grace-talk: Christianity and Public Discourse

Stacy A. McNeill*

Call it an occupational hazard, if you will. As a communication educator for over 20 years, I have an almost hyper-awareness of poor communicative and argumentative practices. Degradation, fallacious reasoning, and an utter lack of civility mark interpersonal debate today. On more than one occasion, I've read comments in a social media interaction and silently screamed, "Why?" Why would someone speak (or, to be exact, type) with such anger? Such apathy? Such callousness?

Yet, despite the copious examples of missteps in public dialogue today, the exchange of ideas is a benchmark of democracy. As a part of the American citizenry, it is both my privilege and obligation to participate in this process. Further, as a Christian, I am to ". . . always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [me] to give a reason for the hope that [I] have" (I Pet 3:15b, NIV). This biblical direction isn't an edict of silence; rather, it is an encouragement toward engagement.

This essay is both an examination of the Christian's voice in public discourse and an overview of guiding principles for the promotion of both integrity and civility in communicative practices within the public sphere.

The Christian's Voice in Public Discourse

Before a Christian can participate in public discourse, it's essential to accurately perceive what exactly constitutes public discourse. Simply put, it's dialogue regarding national issues, or topics that affect large

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segments of the population (think immigration or health care reform), in public settings (from formal debates to informal social media posts). Tollefsen says, “Our public life is riven by significant moral and political disagreements . . . their resolution is crucial to the common good.”¹ He further elucidates this process of public discourse:

‘Discourse’ indicates the crucial means by which this project is to be pursued. Proponents of competing positions must communicate—not just to those who already share their views, but to those who don’t; they must be part of a public conversation.²

This last statement, of course, represents the difficulty of public discourse. It’s easy to talk about significant societal matters with those who agree with us. If I know my colleague, friend, or family member espouses my political beliefs, for example, I’m more than happy to fortify our similar stances with an article or meme that articulates our shared reasoning or priorities. But if I know I have an opponent on a prominent issue, I may be somewhat reticent in my engagement regarding civil issues. Part of this is the human desire to avoid conflict, but it may also involve relationship maintenance. I can like someone’s personality, but it doesn’t mean I like his or her position. If I avoid controversial subjects with the people I like, I don’t have to find out where we disagree. We can maintain a pleasant—albeit superficial—co-existence. Ignorance, in this case, is indeed bliss.

And, as it would seem, it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate a person from his or her argument. Let’s face it: debate in our country has gotten downright ugly. As Watson says, “Public discourse in the United States has fallen on hard times. From social media to political debate to the college classroom, we are losing the ability to have meaningful dialogue in public settings.”³ The desire to win an argument overrides the need to assess counterarguments fairly. When confronted with dissenting opinions, many resort quickly to outright name-calling, or the *ad hominem* fallacy. If I choose to insert my assertions into a debate, I’m opening myself up to criticism of not just my arguments, evidence, or

¹ Christopher O. Tollefsen, “What is Public Discourse?” *Public Discourse*, The Witherspoon Institute, October 9, 2009, accessed August 31, 2017, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2009/10/945/>.

² Ibid.

³ David F. Watson, “What Christian Should Know about the Sad State of Public Discourse,” *The Christian Post*, November 25, 2016, accessed August 31, 2017, <http://www.christian-post.com/news/what-christians-should-know-about-the-sad-state-of-american-public-discourse-171668/>

reasoning, but of my personal characteristics (like my intellect, socioeconomic status, or even my appearance). It's one thing to hear someone say my *argument's* stupid, but quite another to be told *I'm* stupid.

Yet in our individualistic, win-at-all costs American culture, it seems, at times, all bets are off when it comes to couth. So if for no other reason, face-saving would seem one reason Christians might choose to avoid public discourse. Who desires a personal character assassination? But I believe, despite our trepidation or hesitancy toward engagement, there is still compelling motivation for Christians to participate in ongoing discussions in the public sphere.

In her essay, "The Christian Calling to Citizenship," Jennifer Marshall says,

. . . we serve the God who defines the common good. The first cultural task God gave human beings was to order society and care for creation in a way that reflects his design for human flourishing. Applying that charge in our American public policy context today means seeking consensus that reflects that design . . . we know that God has placed eternity in the hearts of all human beings—a longing for the transcendent, for fulfillment, for wholeness.⁴

Marshall's words outline for Christians the primary impetus for civic engagement: care for God's creation. She further states, "it is necessary and proper for Christians to enter the public square with a biblically shaped perspective . . . to apply a Christian worldview to [such] questions of public policy isn't self-interested. It's serving our neighbor."⁵ Thus, our service to others through public discourse has to outweigh our need for self-preservation via debate avoidance. Public dialogue begs for a Christian worldview, because God has tasked Christians with inserting His narrative into a society filled with individuals who need to flourish and seek fulfillment. Christians will not always apply their worldview in the same ways with the populace, but that doesn't negate our responsibility to make our fundamental biblical viewpoints known.

So, if we have established the why of Christian engagement in the public conversation, what about the how? Engagement in public

⁴ Jennifer Marshall, "The Christian Calling to Citizenship," *The Gospel Coalition*, October 24, 2012, accessed August 31, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-christian-calling-to-citizenship/>

⁵ Ibid.

discourse is a daunting task, even for the bold among us. How do we fulfill, successfully, the need for cultural influence, while at the same time navigating the sometimes treacherous waters of debate? How can we think about and communicate Christianly on public policy, and what are some guidelines to consider when entering the public arena?

Guiding Principles for Communicative Practices within the Public Sphere

When evaluating public discourse from a Christian worldview, two areas of importance rise to the top: integrity and civility. Within each of these two frameworks are several tenets for further consideration.

Integrity

On integrity in cultural engagement, Paul Dean lays the foundation for integrity in the public context well:

Anyone who fails to demonstrate integrity will eventually become fruitless in his efforts. Of course, the issue is magnified when the failure lies with Christians. . . . While moral failure attracts more headlines, perhaps the most subtle way a Christian loses his preserving and flavoring effect is through his words.⁶

When we think of integrity, words like *honesty*, *decency*, and *cohesion* come to mind. An individual who communicates with integrity seeks to convey messages fairly and completely. This isn't a simple task; it involves time and focus. More specifically, it is necessary to both research well and utilize rhetorical practices to their most genuine and fullest extent.

I've taught public relations courses for many years, and one thing I have expressed, consistently, to my students is this: before one can plan a public relations program, it is imperative to do the research. Why? "Early research helps to determine the current situation, prevalent attitudes, and difficulties that [a] program faces."⁷ This focus on research isn't just

⁶ Paul J. Dean, "Integrity in Cultural Engagement," accessed August 31, 2017, <http://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/dr-paul-j-dean/integrity-in-cultural-engagement-11556322.html>.

⁷ Fraser P. Seitel, *The Practice of Public Relations* (12th ed.; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Publishing, 2014), 147-48.

for a formal public relations campaign; it works for the individual as well. In light of this discussion, suppose a Christian desires to represent his or her worldview on issues of public debate. Before weighing in on any topic of public dispute, whether it's assisted suicide or the definition of marriage, it's wise to research the history, facts, and current state of the debatable points. Then, as a follower of Christ, look for guidance on the issue from the Bible and related commentaries. Don't enter a conversation unprepared. As representatives of Christ, we are to love Him with our hearts, souls, strength, and *mind* (see Luke 10:27). Even though God is certainly desirous of our devotion, He also created within us the abilities to understand and interpret, in light of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In other words, God can utilize both our emotions and our intellect . . . our pathos and our logos. We shouldn't rely solely on the former.

Once we've done our due diligence with research, it's time to consider our rhetorical practices. Rhetoric, or the art of persuasion, can have a negative connotation for some. Why? Because rhetoric is sometimes linked to empty persuasion or argumentation without sufficient support. Yet when employed well, rhetorical practices can enhance an argument. Aristotle defined it as, "The faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion."⁸ As previously mentioned, God may speak to both our heart and our mind. When we seek to persuade others, we must also consider their hearts (pathos) and minds (logos), as well as their need for credible sources (ethos).⁹

Many of us have either witnessed or been involved in public discourse where emotions got out of control. Pride and anger can easily become our weapons of choice in such conversations. Yet attention to pathos can also show care to others, and concern for their needs. It involves asking one's self, "Am I in this debate only to make someone else look foolish, or to make myself look better than others?" Two of the first things I learned as a new Christian were the need to love God and love others. Am I loving others well if I refuse to see my opponent's needs, even within the context of disagreement? If I hear sadness or rejection in his physical or written voice, should I ignore it and instead center my vigor on crushing him further?

In addition to pathos, I must also consider my logos in public dialogue. Is my reasoning sound? Is it based on reliable evidence? For example, if I utilize inductive reasoning to claim what is true in *some* situations is true in *all* situations, I need to make sure the "some" represents an adequate

⁸ Cielia Iles Jaffe, *Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills for a Diverse Society* (8th ed.; Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2016), 8.

⁹ Ibid, 215-21.

amount of evidence, suitable for generalization. I can't merely articulate the circumstances of one instance and argue it is true in all circumstances, unless the evidence truly points to that logical conclusion. As a Christian, I must study my Bible for more than just one verse that suits my argumentative fancy in the moment. Instead, I need to engage in inductive study, looking for patterns and cohesion I can then interject into the public realm. How many times have we seen one verse taken out of context to suit a one-time confrontational purpose?

It's also important to avoid logical fallacies, or errors in reasoning. At the beginning of this essay, I mentioned one of the more common fallacies I've witnessed in public discussion: name-calling, or the *Ad hominem* fallacy (an attack against the man). One individual doesn't like the other's stance on a matter, and vice-versa. Further, the two parties don't believe each other's evidence or reasoning, so they begin to engage in derogatory epithet-slinging: "flip-flopper," "tree-hugger," "Bible-thumper." On a personal note, it reminds me of when I realized my younger brother had outgrown me and became too strong to beat up in a wrestling match. Instead of participating in the fight, I began to instead go straight to "jerk face" or some other eloquent phrasing. This lasted only until he caught on to what I was doing and proceeded to go back to thumping me with a superior ability to pin his opponent. In a barrage of disparaging monikers, we seek to verbally "pin" the person on the other side of the dispute.

Yet name-calling is only one of several unfortunate fallacies too often present in public debate. Some of the many others include the slippery slope fallacy (one event will lead to a chain of others that cannot be stopped), the bandwagon/*Ad populum* fallacy (it's popular, so it must also be correct), the either-or/false dilemma fallacy (there are only two available solutions to a problem, and compromise is not an option), and the red herring fallacy (introducing an argument which has nothing to do with the true argument at hand, to detract attention from the real issue). I've seen these mistakes in reasoning too many times to count, and they distract from authentic communication. We twist each other's statements, sometimes intentionally and other times inadvertently, until our opponent's original position is almost unrecognizable. Yet,

It is incumbent upon the ambassador of Christ to know a position if he is going to refute a position. Not only is a sound disputation at stake, but so, too, is honorable disputation. If the Christian is to truly honor Christ in her discourse, she

must set forth her opponent's position in such a way that her opponent would say that she has represented his opinion *well*. This is simply a matter of truthfulness.¹⁰

And, in addition to pathos and logos, our ethos in the public arena must be sound. This has to do with our credibility—are we believable? Part of this is related to both pathos and logos: Do others perceive us as caring? Do we articulate their stances well? Yet a large part of our credibility is centered on others' perceptions of our character. Are we consistent with our opinions and our Christian witness, or do we say one thing and do another? Do we deride others for their shortcomings (both personal and argumentative), then ignore our own? Do we reach out to others, seeking common ground, or do we emphasize and expand upon our differences? Our evidence must be sound, but so must our attitude.

Civility

The second major area of importance in public discourse from a Christian worldview is civility. According to Chia, “Christian civility is best described as *convicted* civility...not the result of intellectual wooliness or moral laxity, but [stemming] from profound and robust convictions...[speaking] the truth...in love, respecting those who do not share our convictions.”¹¹ Thus, civility encompasses a mindset of rational discussion and appreciation of others. It can be linked closely to the idea of *grace-talk*.

As Christians, we know grace is unmerited favor from God. We've done nothing to earn or deserve God's grace, yet we freely receive it. Likewise, when we participate in public discourse, we can communicate with the mindset that those with whom we speak can have our true attention, listening ability, and focus as a chance to model the grace so freely given to us. Indeed, may “your conversation be always full of grace” (Col 4:6a, NIV). It is possible, I would contend, to both disagree with others and show them grace in a public platform. Yet this isn't always what we see or hear when we participate in or observe discussion of public issues. Too quickly, it would seem, differing opinions delve into personal wars. Yet I maintain grace is not only desirable in public discourse; it is both possible and necessary. But how do we strive, specifically, for this *grace-talk*?

¹⁰ Dean, “Integrity in Cultural Engagement.”

¹¹ Roland Chia, “Christians Engaged in the Public Square must be Humble and Civil,” Ethos Institute for Public Christianity, accessed August 31, 2017, <https://ethosinstitute.sg/christians-engaged-in-the-public-square-must-be-humble-and-civil/>.

Daniel Yankelovich articulates three dialogical perspectives that can mark a civil attitude: equality, empathy, and examination.¹² Each viewpoint represents a different angle of encouraging dialogue while maintaining gracious two-way communicative practice.

Equality: This involves respecting others and considering their opinions.¹³ As previously noted, this can include avoiding name-calling; however, this is not the only form of deference in a public debate. We must also seek to understand how others acquire and formulate worldviews different than our own, and even acknowledge, at times, the thoroughness of the sources of their viewpoints. For example, I might appreciate a person who is well-read, even if that reading didn't include books, journals, or essays written from a Christian's perspective. I could acknowledge someone's educational endeavors, even if that education wasn't taught within the context of the intersection of the Christian faith and one's subject matter. Even when we disagree with the tenets of their outlooks on life, we can still show consideration for our differences and for those who hold them.

Empathy: This is how we show compassion for others and seek to identify emotionally with them.¹⁴ It doesn't mean we share all the emotions our interlocutors hold or display, but we cannot show compassion for those whom we do not truly recognize. This perceptive work involves an effort to identify and relate to the narratives of others in public discourse. Before we can relate to the narratives of others, we need to first understand our own, individual narratives as followers of Christ:

Seeking to organize our often chaotic world into a narrative that has sequence and meaning tells us much about the God who created us and the meaning he has injected into our existence. Eschewing a postmodern rejection of transcendent meaning and value, Christians hold to the belief that God is purposefully directing the individual narratives of his followers. Even the difficulties of life serve a higher purpose and add to the maturity of a believer (Rom. 8:28; Jas. 1:2-5).¹⁵

¹² Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 41-46, as cited in Jaffe, *Public Speaking*, 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

¹⁵ Tim Muehlhoff and Todd V. Lewis, *Authentic Communication: Christian Speech Engaging Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 52.

Just as we can appreciate how God has written our personal narratives, we can seek, with compassion, to learn the narratives of others involved in public discussion, identifying and knowing their stories.

Examination: This is considering the assumptions of ourselves and others with an open mind.¹⁶ In other words, it's putting aside your own know-it-all attitude and truly listening for the merits of the contentions of others. There is a fear in this, at times. In my tenure as a college professor, I've encountered more than one student who shunned the mere idea of engaging a religious belief outside of his own, simply because of the notion that the act of doing so would disrespect, discredit, or contaminate long-held personal convictions. Yet, truly, if our assumptions, beliefs, and positions are deeply rooted and carefully developed, they will not change easily when challenged. In fact, we may find them further entrenched.

Conclusion

As Christians, we can and should have a voice in the public arena. However, that voice may sound differently than others around us. As we consider what we say in person or via social media platforms in the public sphere, our words should always be characterized by integrity and civility. Indeed, there are times when we should listen more and speak less, but the voice of a Christian worldview should not be a muted one. It should be a confident, well-informed, relatable one.

Recommended Resources

Tim Muehlhoff and Todd V. Lewis. *Authentic Communication: Christian Speech Engaging Culture*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.

OS Guinness. *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

Richard J. Mouw. *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

Daniel Yankelovich. *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

¹⁶ Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue*, 44-46.



The Good Samaritan Nurses the Man at the Inn

Stained glass

Chartres Cathedral, France

Lower windows, Bay 44, image 12 (bottom scene of the central quatrefoil)

Early 13th Century

Anonymous

Public Domain

This scene is a minor addition to the biblical narrative, which was not an uncommon practice in medieval depictions of biblical stories. In this depiction, the Samaritan is in the inn with the wounded man, attending to him. Another pane in the *Good Samaritan Window at Chartres Cathedral* depicts robbers lying in wait for the man that the Samaritan would eventually help. The choice of the images added to the stories intrigues me. Perhaps the anonymous artist is making a statement about application of the story in this piece. Maybe the artist is implying that we are to go even above and beyond what the Bible describes in doing good to our neighbor.

—Richard W. Cummings

The Integrity of Faith: How the Book of Daniel Portrays Believers Engaging Culture

Andrew E. Steinmann*

To many Christians in contemporary western democracies it appears as if they are living in a post-Christian culture which displays an antipathy and at times hostility toward historical Christianity. How does a Christian living in such circumstances navigate the changing currents within society? While no two eras or cultures are the same, we can learn from the book of Daniel how God's people living in an ancient culture that was antipathetic, and at times hostile, to their faith managed to engage the pagan ethos of Babylon and Persia. How did God's people survive and even thrive within those systems without compromising their faith?

One theme that permeates Daniel is the ability of God's people to maintain their faith with integrity even though they were living in a polytheistic environment that was unable to understand their core beliefs and was disinclined to tolerate them. Throughout Daniel, this ability is implied to be a gift from God himself. Daniel and his friends are able to resist defiling themselves with the king's food because of

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God's strength that is in them, and that strength became apparent in their appearance (Dan 1:8–15). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were able to resist Nebuchadnezzar's order to worship the idol he had erected because God was with them, as became evident in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:25). Daniel worshiped daily without ceasing even under the threat of death (Dan 6:6–10), a testimony to the work of God's Spirit in his life.

The visions in the latter part of the book also are intended to offer the strength of God to his people who read and believe his promises. He will “refine them, purify them, and make them white” (Dan 11:35) so that they can maintain their faith with integrity, even in the face of persecution. He will make them insightful enough to avoid compromising their faith (Dan 11:33, 35; 12:3, 10), and he will also awaken them from death, raise them bodily, and make them shine like the brightness of the sky forever (Dan 12:2–3).

This integrity of faith in the face of persecution is not simply the product of belief in an omnipotent God. Instead, it is the product of faith in a merciful God who will keep his promise to send his Messiah and establish his kingdom. Daniel and his friends can defy erring and arrogant human kings because they are servants of the eternal King, the Son of Man (Dan 7:13–14), who establishes his eternal covenant (Dan 9:27) with his people.

As believers who live on the other temporal side of history's great divide—the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus—we have even more encouragement than they did. We know that in Christ God kept his promise given to his ancient people, guaranteeing us a better covenant through the forgiveness that comes through his blood (Heb 7:22; 8:6; 10:29; 12:4; 13:20). Therefore, we can learn from the examples in the book of Daniel to engage our culture even more effectively now that we are able to live in the comfort of Christ Jesus. Let us examine the early chapters of Daniel to see ways in which the book can be instructive for contemporary Christians as they interact with the cultures in which they live.

Learning the Proper Times to Accept Cultural Norms While Holding on to our Faith (Daniel 1)

In the first chapter Daniel relates his initial experience in the Babylonian court. One of the first ways that the Babylonians sought to

enculturate Daniel and his Judean counterparts was by giving them Babylonian names (Dan 1:7). The names given the four young men are Belteshazzar (Daniel), Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael), and Abednego (Azariah). Their Hebrew names honored the God of Israel, containing either *el* (God) or *yah* (short for Yahweh). Scholars have long puzzled over the Babylonian names, but it appears as if Daniel has specifically corrupted the names they were given, since those names honored the gods of Babylon: Marduk (the main Babylonian god, also known as Bel) or Nebo. This corruption of the names had not only confused modern scholars, but also may have been a covert and subversive way of protesting the attempted detachment of these young men from their God. Daniel may have been indicating that while they could not do anything significant about what the Babylonians were intent on calling them, these young men did not personally approve of having names associated with pagan gods. Daniel knew that protesting the names to the authorities would have been pointless, but he did not have to tolerate them when writing about his experiences.

Daniel's subtle subversive corruption of the Babylonian names assigned to him and his companions was not, however, the only way which he found to maintain his faith and piety. In the matter of their avoidance of eating the king's food these young men wisely negotiated their way through the Babylonian system (Dan 1:8–16). Clearly Nebuchadnezzar wished to enculturate them into the royal court, which included worship of the Babylonian gods. When Daniel decided not to eat the king's food, he could have been seen defying royal authority. However, he was aware that authority existed at several levels. He did not appeal directly to the king, but to the chief of the eunuchs (Dan 1:8–10). When that did not work, he proposed a plan to the guard to whom the chief of the eunuchs had entrusted the day-to-day handling of matters (Dan 1:11). This proved to be more successful. Thus, Daniel did not have to openly defy the king. He recognized that if he appealed to authorities who mattered most—those who actually implemented the royal policies—he might have more success than if he had attempted to change the mind of the king himself. This is an important lesson for readers of the book of Daniel. It reminds us that we do not need as a first reaction to resort to open defiance of every cultural norm or of every government mandate. There may be other ways to effect change without displaying overt hostility, especially if there are multiple layers of authority to which faithful believers may appeal.

Finally, we ought to note the cleverness of Daniel's solution to the problem of eating the king's food. He suggests that he be given only vegetables (Dan 1:12). If part of Daniel's concern was that he would have been given meat from animals forbidden in the laws given by Moses (e.g., pork), a vegetarian diet was a good solution. There were no non-kosher vegetables. Instead of asking his Babylonian guardian to memorize a list of meats that were forbidden to Israelites, Daniel makes the guardian's task easy by asking for a vegetarian diet. As he lived out his faith, Daniel felt no need to impose an undue burden upon the Babylonians when asking that they accommodate his practices. Instead, he was willing to take most of that burden on himself by giving up eating meat in order to maintain his piety.

Serving under the Authority of Unbelievers While Making Our Faith Known to Them (Daniel 2)

While Daniel continued to guard his faith, that did not preclude him from serving the Babylonian authorities. In Daniel 2 he is eventually called upon to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This came about because the Babylonian diviners in Nebuchadnezzar's court claimed that their gods did not communicate with them (Dan 2:10–11). When Daniel's turn came to address the king and interpret his dream, he used it to testify to the true God and his power. Unlike the Babylonians, Daniel spoke of a God who reveals mysteries (Dan 2:28). He also clearly disavowed any notion that there was something in him that allowed him to explain Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Daniel's words demonstrate his winsome way of speaking about the true God to the king. He did not criticize him for the pagan assumption he and his advisors held. Nor did he show open disdain for the king's religious errors. Instead, knowing that those type of actions would have muted his witness to the true God, he instead simply spoke to the king about the nature, power, and kindness of God.

Daniel recognized that in some situations a combative stance would only alienate his audience. By avoiding direct confrontation with Nebuchadnezzar and his false beliefs, Daniel was able to speak the truth about God that would lead to Nebuchadnezzar acknowledging that Daniel's God was indeed what Daniel said he was:

The king said to Daniel, “Your God is indeed God of gods, Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, since you were able to reveal this mystery.” (Dan 2:47 CSB)

Nebuchadnezzar may not have been converted that day to faith in the God of Israel, but he was brought a long way toward seeing that Daniel’s faith was firmly fixed on the true God who alone can reveal mysteries. Christians, especially those whom God has called to serve him as pastors and teachers in his church, need to keep in mind that like Daniel they are entrusted with God’s mysteries, especially the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 4:1). We ought to find similar ways of sharing the good news of Jesus as winsomely as possible.

Accepting Persecution as True Martyrs (Daniel 3 and 6)

Two of the best-known accounts in the book of Daniel are about God’s people practicing their faith. In Daniel 3 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the gold statue erected by Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 6 Daniel refused to abandon his worship of Israel’s God when prayer to any god or person except Darius was forbidden by decree. In some ways these stories depict two sides of the same coin: God’s people worship him and him alone. Worship is not optional, but necessary, since the person who has known God’s love, mercy, and blessings will desire and eagerly look forward to praising, glorifying, and thanking him, as well as coming to him with petitions of all types. At the same time the person who has received God’s love and mercy will be repulsed by the thought of giving praise and honor to any false god.

In Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to participate in the worship of Nebuchadnezzar’s false god. It is noteworthy that these three young men do not stage a protest against Nebuchadnezzar’s order. Instead, they simply declined to take part in the pagan worship demanded of all of the king’s officials. Their lack of participation was not brought to Nebuchadnezzar’s attention by them but by others (Dan 3:8–12). When threatened with death in Nebuchadnezzar’s blazing furnace, they continue to refuse to worship his gods. They trusted that their God could rescue them from the king. More importantly, they recognized that God, not King Nebuchadnezzar, was the ultimate authority, and he may have chosen not to rescue them:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, “Nebuchadnezzar, we don’t need to give you an answer to this question. If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king.” (Dan 3:16–17 CSB)

In either case—rescue or death—they would remain faithful to Yahweh. Their attitude is not belligerent toward the king or Babylonian culture. Instead, their attitude is shaped by their orientation toward God. They defy the king and his pagan culture, but refrain from a pugnacious and unnecessarily confrontational strategy. Instead, these three men maintain a quiet confidence in God, hold fast to their principles, and confront the king only when the unacceptable is demanded of them and their lives are threatened.

In Daniel 7, Darius’s decree had no effect on Daniel’s worship practice (Dan 7:10). His enemies had anticipated this (Dan 7:5, 11). Nevertheless, Daniel was intent on praying to God. No decree of a human authority could override his love of God that compelled him to worship. His responsibility toward the Almighty was not to be overruled by human decrees (compare Acts 5:29). When God’s angels delivered Daniel from the lions, Daniel not only claimed that he had been found innocent before God, but also *that he had done nothing harmful toward the king* (Dan 7:22). The principle that guided Daniel was the belief that true and faithful worship of God can never be harmful to anyone, any culture, or any society. Today’s Christians often follow in Daniel’s example: Despite cultures that view Christianity as harmful and dangerous, Christians know that their worship of God is not what the culture portrays it to be. In fact, it is the opposite—a helpful leaven in societies that oppose the eternal and living God. Indeed, Christians pray even for hostile rulers when they find themselves in cultures that are aggressively unfriendly to the gospel (e.g., Christians in the largely Muslim Middle East or in communist Vietnam; see 1 Tim 2:1–3).

In both of these narratives in Daniel we see God’s faithful people clinging to an absolute commitment to worship only the true God. They do this not with confrontational rhetoric or quarrelsome actions but with gentleness and respect (see 1 Pet 3:15–16).

Speaking Truth to Power (Daniel 4 and 5)

Two adjacent narratives in Daniel depict the prophet as having to explain unwelcome interpretations of God's revelations, one coming through a dream (Dan 4), the other in the famous handwriting on the wall of the banquet hall in the palace of Babylon (Dan 5). In each case Daniel's task is made more difficult because he must break unwelcome news to kings: they will fall under God's punishment. Being the bearer of bad news is never easy, and when that messenger is viewed as a cultural outsider the message is likely to be greeted with hostility and rejection. Fortunately for Daniel, he had gained a reputation as reliable and trustworthy (Dan 4:9; 5:11–12). This is in itself an important lesson for Christians in engaging their culture—they must strive to maintain a good reputation for honesty and integrity, and this is even more important in cultures that are inclined to view Christianity with suspicion or scorn (see 1 Pet 2:12).

In Daniel 4 Nebuchadnezzar reports a dream which Daniel interpreted. The dream revealed God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar for his arrogance and for injustices in his kingdom. Daniel had to tell the king that he was liable to God's punishment. However, he was able to do it in a way that showed his concern for Nebuchadnezzar while never minimizing God's wrath against sin. His initial reaction upon hearing Nebuchadnezzar describe the dream is depicted this way:

Then Daniel, whose name is Belteshazzar, was stunned for a moment, and his thoughts alarmed him. The king said, "Belteshazzar, don't let the dream or its interpretation alarm you." Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, may the dream apply to those who hate you, and its interpretation to your enemies!" (Dan 4:19-20 CSB)

Note that Daniel's good relationship with the king made Nebuchadnezzar willing to hear Daniel's interpretation—and the king even sought to reassure Daniel that he could relate the dream's interpretation honestly. In return, Daniel could assure Nebuchadnezzar that he harbored no wish that the king be punished by God by wishing that the punishment would instead be applied to Nebuchadnezzar's enemies.

Then, after Daniel interpreted the dream, he also advised the king:

Therefore, may my advice seem good to you, my king. Separate yourself from your sins by doing what is right, and from your injustices by showing mercy to the needy. Perhaps there will be an extension of your prosperity.” (Dan 4:27 CSB)

Daniel demonstrated that it is not enough simply to proclaim God’s displeasure with sin and the coming punishment on Nebuchadnezzar. He also engaged with Nebuchadnezzar as a person, urging him to repent and rely on the mercy of God. This is a paradigm also for Christian engagement with culture. We need to show that we are not simply preaching at our culture, but engaging with it because of our concern for all persons, for both their temporal and eternal welfare.

In Daniel 5 the situation is different, and so are Daniel’s words. In this account of God’s judgment on King Belshazzar, the handwriting on the wall foretells the imminent end to the Babylonian empire. When no one can read the mysterious writing on the wall of the banquet hall, Daniel is summoned to decipher it. His response is much more confrontational. This may be partly due to the fact that he had no prior relationship with Belshazzar, who had to be informed of Daniel’s prior service under Nebuchadnezzar (see Dan 5:10–12). But Daniel’s more direct approach in this instance may also have been due to the urgent nature of the situation and the inevitability of God’s judgment against Babylon.

When Daniel began to address Belshazzar, he started with a rejection of the rewards offered to him for reading the message from God (Dan 5:17). This in itself would have been seen as impolitic—one did not reject a royal bestowal of favor. Yet, Daniel did not refuse to interpret the writing. His rejection of gifts combined with his offer to read the inscription conveyed not only his personal rebuff of Belshazzar but also his willingness to read God’s message. It expressed the need to continue to speak God’s Word even in the face of the insulting behavior exhibited by the king and his court (see Dan 5:3–4).

To display the reason for God’s verdict against Belshazzar and his kingdom, Daniel did not immediately decrypt the message on the wall. Instead he delayed that in favor of upbraiding the king for his foolish and defiant behavior toward the true God: Belshazzar’s behavior was all the more contemptible because he knew how God had punished

Nebuchadnezzar for his arrogance (Dan 5:18–24). Despite this, Belshazzar committed an even more heinous offense against God by using Yahweh’s vessels from Jerusalem’s temple to praise gods who were mere “gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone” (Dan 5:4).

Daniel’s interpretation of the wall’s inscription was devastating: God had run out the number of days for the kingdom and ended it (Dan 5:26). He had found it to be deficient (Dan 5:27). He had divided it between the Medes and the Persians (Dan 5:28).

There are times for blunt speaking of God’s condemnation in a confrontational manner that risks offending the hearers, especially in a culture that is already deeply committed to belief in things other than the true and living God. Daniel did that when speaking to Belshazzar. However, placed in the context of all of the narratives in the book, Daniel also shows us that this is not the normal mode of interacting with cultures that are indifferent or hostile to the Gospel. Instead, it ought to be reserved for only in the gravest of circumstances. For instance, when God’s people detect an entrenched and callous defiance of God is practiced with impunity and threatens all of society, it may be appropriate to be extremely provocative and condemnatory—not as a general practice but as an alarm amidst an all too complacent and self-satisfied society.

Learning from the Judeans in Babylon

While the situation of Daniel and his Judean companions in Babylon is not the same as ours, we nonetheless can learn from their example. As Christians who worship the only true God whose love for humankind led him to send his Son into the world, we have perhaps an even more compelling reason to engage modern civilization than Daniel had when he encountered Babylonian culture. In light of Jesus’s ministry, death, and resurrection we can bring even more clarity about the gospel than Judeans who could only point to God’s love and mercy as they awaited the promised Savior. Yet we need to do it in ways that connect with those who are otherwise disinclined to hear about God’s work on their behalf. The book of Daniel provides us guidance in how to do just that as we live as foreigners and temporary residents on earth (Heb 11:13).

Recommended Resources

- Joyce Baldwin. *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1978.
- David W. Gooding. “The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel and Its Implications.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 32 (1981): 43–79.
- Stephen R. Miller. *Daniel*. New American Commentary 18. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994.
- Richard D. Patterson. “The Key Role of Daniel 7.” *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1991):246–261.
- . “Holding on to Daniel’s Court Tales. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 36 (1993): 445–454.
- Andrew Steinmann. *Daniel*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia, 2008.
- David Wenham. “The Kingdom of God and Daniel.’ *Expository Times* 98 (1986–1987): 132–134.



Good Samaritan

Engraving

9" x 13 ½"

1872

Paul Frenzeny (1840 – 1902)

Reproduced by permission of the Bowden Collections: <http://www.bowdencollections.com/>

Frenzeny's depiction of the Good Samaritan in this May 4, 1872 issue of *Harper's Weekly* was set in a modern (for the time) city and replaced the figures found in the biblical text with contemporary persons. The victim of this story is a little girl with a broken water pitcher who is first seen sitting distraught on the curb of a wealthy neighborhood street. The girl is ignored by a wealthy family riding by in their carriage. The husband (perhaps a lawyer?) turns his head away as their well-dressed boy seems self-absorbed in his finery.

The central scene, set in a more public area of the city, is a subtler but more pointed critique. The steeple in the background combined with the respectable-looking man, who glances at the girl but walks by, represents the Church. As the Levite passed by the Samaritan in Scripture, so too does this religious member of society pass by the weeping child.

In the final scene, the little girl is, of course, made whole. The setting for this final vignette is a city shanty or slum. A poorly dressed worker with a shovel, the "Samaritan," presents the girl with a coin so that she might purchase a new pitcher. The man kneels down to meet her and presents his hard earned coin to her with joy, happy to help one in need.

Like Jesus' parable critiqued the wealthy and religious of his time, Frenzeny critiques the contemporary versions of those institutions. Frenzeny's focus in the final scene, however, not only captures the concern the Samaritan had for the wounded man described in Scripture, but presents a model for the attitude in which a "modern" Samaritan acts—with joy.

—Richard W. Cummings

Harper's Weekly, A Journal of Civilization was an American political magazine based in New York City, published by Harper & Brothers from 1857 until 1916.

American Exceptionalism: What It Is, How We Got It, and Should We Keep It

John D. Wilsey*

To say that America is an exceptional nation is so cliché these days that the term “American exceptionalism” is almost meaningless. “Exceptionalism” is a term like “freedom,” “rights,” “democracy,” or “equality”—a lot of folks use the term assuming that everyone is in agreement on what it means, but in reality, the term’s meaning often depends on the person using it. Since the election of Donald Trump, the concept of American exceptionalism has gotten a lot of press, and increasingly, many pundits¹ have questioned whether it is wise to keep advancing it.

Another term that gets used—more in the academy than in the media—is “civil religion.” When “civil religion” is deployed among laypersons, you can see the eyes glaze over as the smartphones come out and the Facebook apps are tapped.

Still, American exceptionalism and civil religion are concepts that are alive and well. Books continue to be published that examine, define, and debate them. Walter McDougall, Philip Gorski, Raymond Haberski, Jr., Arthur Remillard, Ronald Beiner, Benjamin T. Lyncer,

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¹ See Daniel Strand, “The Future of American Civil Religion,” *Providence Magazine*, July 24, 2017, accessed August 10, 2017, <https://providencemag.com/2017/07/future-american-civil-religion/>.

Kevin Kruse, John Fea, and I are among others who have produced books on or related to American exceptionalism and civil religion *since 2010!*

So what are we talking about when we refer to American exceptionalism? What is civil religion, and how does it relate to American exceptionalism? Is American exceptionalism a form of Christian nationalism? Is exceptionalism a harmful ideology that distorts the gospel, or is it a helpful concept fostering healthy patriotism?

Simply put, American exceptionalism means that the United States is the greatest nation in human history. It has been the most consistent and most powerful force for good in the world and it is indispensable to world peace and human flourishing. But exceptionalism goes beyond mere greatness; it signifies that the American nation is the *exception* in human history.

According to James Ceaser,² that can mean one of two things: it can mean that the United States is *different* from other nations, unique in its character, culture, history, political process, and role in the world. Or, it can mean that the United States is *special*—it is chosen by God, commissioned for a divine task, morally pure, and immune to the deleterious problems and questions faced by other nations, like those pertaining to class strife, social inequity, economic atrophy, military defeat, or moral degradation. And if America ever does face one or a combination of those questions, “the fault is with the question” rather than the people, as W. E. B. Du Bois described in his 1896 book, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America*.³

What about civil religion? Civil religion is a broad category, and American exceptionalism fits within that category. Historians and religion scholars differ on how to define civil religion, but basically it entails a unifying narrative, defined by texts, symbols, practices, and concepts, that serves to unite a people around a transcendent idea of the *patria*—the nation and its homeland. Generally speaking, civil religion is not a soteriological construct; more often, it is political and social, and it changes over time. Some scholars of civil religion have envisioned it in national terms (e.g. Robert Bellah, Peter Gardella, and Philip Gorski). Others have seen it in localized terms (e.g. David Krueger and Arthur

² James Ceaser, “The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism,” *American Political Thought* 1/1 (2012): 3–28.

³ See the full text at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015004773563;view=1up;seq=1>

Remillard). When understood in national terms, American exceptionalism is a belief within civil religion, expressed through texts, stories, monuments, places, and practices.

In my recent historical and theological treatment of American exceptionalism, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea*,⁴ I sought to explore the concept's two categories of "different" and "special." I traced the history of the idea going back to the Puritan colonies of the seventeenth century, and considered how those two exceptionalist categories evolved over time. Considering exceptionalism historically, I found that the term has been used in sometimes sharply theological terms, and at other times, it has been articulated in political terms. At various points in American history, some have used exceptionalist language to draw boundaries between a favored and dominant group and inferior minority groups. At other times, American figures have used exceptionalism in terms of the brotherhood of humanity, underscoring ideals such as "liberty and justice for all," "inalienable rights," and propositions like "all men are created equal." One brand of exceptionalism is priestly, casting America as the mediating link between the people and God. Another brand of exceptionalism is prophetic, calling Americans to faithfulness to their stated high-minded principles.

How then, should we differentiate between these two formulations of exceptionalism? I call one formulation "closed exceptionalism." Closed American exceptionalism (CAE) is exclusive, limiting the blessings of the nation to the Chosen. It is also self-satisfied, since it asserts its own moral superiority and invincibility. And CAE is imperialistic and triumphalist, believing that the success of its destiny to fulfill God's millennial commission has been foreordained. Advocates of CAE have drawn on Christian doctrines and themes such as election, mission, regeneration, sacred land, and glory to cast America in messianic terms.

In contrast, Open American Exceptionalism (OAE) is based on natural law and the dignity of human personhood—specifically as expressed in the founding documents. The Declaration of Independence (e.g., the statements concerning "laws of Nature and Nature's God," and the affirmation, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and

⁴ John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

the pursuit of Happiness”), the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights are representative of the United States’ “first founding” in the revolutionary period. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, Gettysburg Address, and Second Inaugural Address (for example, “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in”) represent America’s “second founding,” which occurred as a result of the outcome of the Civil War. Freedom, as defined in republican terms: citizenship, rule of law, and self-restraint; inalienable rights, sourced in God our Creator; equality of human persons, with the entailment of equal justice under law—these are some of the principles undergirding the American nation. They make America the exception because no other nation has been founded on such a commitment to principle and no other nation has been the object of emulation because of those commitments as America is, and has been.

Still, Americans are not angels. Americans, like all human beings, are sinful. They have fallen short with regard to their ideals since the founding, particularly when it comes to recognizing the human dignity of all persons, regardless of race. Yet another feature of exceptionalism is that Americans consistently call one another to abandon hypocrisy and pursue their founding ideals more fully and faithfully. By fits and starts, Americans strive toward making good on the promises of the founding, and progress continues to be made over the long term toward that end.

While CAE hijacks Christian doctrines and themes and puts them to work for nationalistic purposes, OAE affirms what the gospel teaches about human beings being created in the image of God. CAE directs attention to America as the agent of salvation from tyranny. OAE shrinks from messianic depictions of the nation, but rather, promotes humility by subjecting the nation to prophetic testimony in the Judeo-Christian tradition. We see this prophetic testimony leveled through the Puritan jeremiad, the abolitionist movement, and the civil rights movement, to name a few examples going back to the colonial period of the 1600s. OAE can serve as the basis for a Christian engagement with the state—an engagement informed by both faithful citizenship and sincere patriotism, but also a refusal to render to Caesar what is God’s alone.

What is the source of the term, “exceptionalism”? A Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, first applied the word “exceptional” to Americans in 1840. Tocqueville, and his travel companion Gustave de Beau-

mont, toured the United States from May 1831 to February 1832. They were on an official visit to the US from France to study prison reform. They wrote up their conclusions in a jointly authored work, but they also penned their own books from their observations of American institutions and culture. Beaumont wrote a novel exposing the absurdities of race prejudice in America entitled *Marie, Or, Slavery in the United States*. Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America*, a two-volume consideration of American politics, society, and institutions. Tocqueville's work, since the publication of volume one in 1835, has never been overshadowed as the greatest political and social treatment of the United States.

At the beginning of the second volume, in his chapter on "Aptitude for Science or Art," Tocqueville gave voice to a powerful observation of Americans. He refused to distinguish Americans from their British cousins in terms of national identity; he merely considered the Americans as British living in an independent political entity in North America. But he did differentiate between their national characters. One group of English speakers was philosophical, artistic, and pursued the life of the mind. The other group of English speakers was practical, hardy, and audacious. The former were Englishmen living in the Old World; the latter were Englishmen in the New. Here is how Tocqueville said it:

In spite of the ocean that intervenes, I cannot consent to separate America from Europe. I consider the people of the United States as that portion of the English people who are commissioned to explore the forests of the New World, while the rest of the nation, enjoying more leisure and less harassed by the drudgery of life, may devote their energies to thought and enlarge in all directions the empire of mind.

The position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one. Their strictly Puritanical origin, their exclusively commercial habits, even the country they inhabit, which seems to divert their minds from the pursuit of science, literature, and the arts, the proximity of Europe, which allows them to neglect these pursuits without relapsing into barbarism, a thousand special causes, of which I have only been able to point out the most important, have singularly concurred to fix the mind of the American upon purely practical objects. His passions, his wants, his education, and everything about

him seem to unite in drawing the native of the United States earthward; his religion alone bids him turn, from time to time, a transient and distracted glance to heaven. Let us cease, then, to view all democratic nations under the example of the American people, and attempt to survey them at length with their own features.⁵

Notice how Tocqueville framed the word “exceptional.” He used the term to describe the Americans’ fortitude in hacking out a civilization from the wilderness. Such people were not inclined to the abstract, the aesthetic, or the theoretical because they were not at leisure to pursue such interests. Americans were busy about practical things, and if something was not practical, then they had no use for it. The reason for this state of affairs was simple—Americans were in a unique situation, in that their origins were unlike those of anyone else in Europe.

Also notice what Tocqueville was not saying. He was not using the term “exceptional” in any normative sense. In other words, he was not saying that America was God’s chosen people with a divine mission to democratize the world. He was making a rather ordinary, unexceptional use of the word “exceptional.”

Indeed, Americans have not looked to “exceptionalism” as a term to describe themselves until recently. Historically, Americans have been fond of the term “patriot” and its derivations to describe their devotion to their country. They have also used other terms, such as “manifest destiny” to describe themselves as God’s chosen people. But media figures (for example, Charles Krauthammer) and politicians (for example, Newt Gingrich) have deployed “exceptional” and “exceptionalism” to describe the United States with increasing frequency since 9/11. Whereas “exceptionalism” had once been largely a term used by academics in political science and sociology prior to 9/11,⁶ the term has become a point of departure in discussions on nationalism, patriotism, and America’s role in the midst of a progressively more complicated world.

How did CAE and OAE develop as ideas in American history? I have argued that while these two exceptionalist articulations existed

⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America* (trans. G. E. Bevan; New York, NY: Penguin Putnam, 2003), II.i.9.

⁶ See works like Seymour Martin Lipset’s *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996).

in various forms during the colonial period into the early republican period, it was during the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln's presidency that the two culminated as terms used in opposition to one another. John L. O'Sullivan (1813-1895), editor of the influential journal *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, coined the phrase "manifest destiny" in 1845 while Texas was in the process of being annexed to the United States. O'Sullivan stands as an historical example of CAE in the antebellum United States. His manifest destiny was charged with biblical themes, such as millennialism, messianism, the dominion mandate, and the conquest of a special land set apart by God for His chosen people.⁷

Abraham Lincoln serves as a contrast to O'Sullivan as a figure representing OAE. His exceptionalist expressions are the most inclusive ever made by an American president up to the 1860s. In his speeches and writings, from his 1838 Lyceum speech through his death in 1865, we see how Lincoln's exceptionalist language develops until it culminates during his presidency between 1863 with the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation until his Second Inaugural Address of March 4, 1865. While O'Sullivan limited the blessings of American liberty to the "Anglo-Saxon race," Lincoln saw those blessings as being open to blacks who were being held in bondage. O'Sullivan believed he could predict God's providential designs for America, while Lincoln confessed ignorance of God's will. And as O'Sullivan thought that the will of the American people was always right, Lincoln knew that the people could only be right when they were aligned with God's standards of justice.

Still, Lincoln was no idealistic internationalist. He believed that the United States was the greatest nation on earth, and he said so. He famously referred to America as the "last best hope of earth" in his December 1862 message to Congress. Still, he did not mean to express messianic sentiments. The context of this reference was the lingering slavery question in the dark early days of the Civil War. Confederate armies, while on the retreat in the Western theatre, were advancing in the Eastern theatre. Lincoln's message was meant to urge the Congress to be creative and think through ways to restore the Union and bring peace, while at the same time bringing slavery to a gradual end. He had

⁷ For extended treatments of O'Sullivan and manifest destiny, see the excellent piece by Adam Gomez, "Deus Vult: John L. O'Sullivan, Manifest Destiny, and American Democratic Messianism," *American Political Thought* 1/1 (2012): 236-62. See also John D. Wilsey, "'Our Country Is Destined to be the Great Nation of Futurity': John L. O'Sullivan's Manifest Destiny and Christian Nationalism, 1837-1846," *Religions* 8/4 (2017): 68.

his own ideas as to how that could work, and he made his proposals in that message—but his primary exhortation was to break from old habits of thinking in order to achieve a goal beyond the mere winning of the war and restoring the status quo. He said,

Fellow-citizens, *we* cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We *say* we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We – even *we here* – hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In *giving* freedom to the *slave*, we *assure* freedom to the *free*—honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless.⁸

Ultimately, as Americans and as Christians, we must reject CAE. For Christians, the reasons should be obvious—CAE assumptions rest on another gospel (Gal 1:8). In claiming America as a new Israel, CAE appropriates the biblical doctrine of election. In prodding America to pursue a global messianic mission, CAE hijacks the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. In gloating over America’s innate innocence, CAE exhibits hubris and subjects America to endless war. In casting the land as a new Canaan, CAE perverts the dominion mandate of Gen 1:26-28. And in uncritically assessing American history as a golden age to be recovered, CAE subverts history and the pursuit of truth, replacing these with mythmaking, contributing to a continuing and tragic cycle of nationalism and the many entailing betrayals and hypocrisies.

While Christians have specific theological resources to work with in rejecting CAE, Americans of all religious backgrounds—or none at

⁸ “Annual Remarks to Congress—Concluding Remarks, Washington, D.C., December 1, 1862,” accessed August 22, 2017, <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/congress.htm>.

all—have good reasons to reject CAE, too. Practically speaking, CAE has always been exclusionary. Of course, OAE focuses on Americans also, but CAE draws lines separating American from American. Slavery and Jim Crow were institutions waging war against African Americans for centuries. Conquest, removal, and annihilation were the practices whites used against American First Nations. More could be said on official American policies toward Asians, Hispanics, Catholics, Irish, Italians, and anyone outside Anglo-Saxons.

Is it then necessary for us to jettison American exceptionalism? Is the term no longer “politically correct?” Political correctness aside, we must be precise in our terms, especially when we mean to use those terms to apply to everyone. If CAE is unchristian, if it is racist, if it is historically inaccurate, or if it contributes to destructive cycles—which I believe that it does, then OAE can still serve a helpful civic purpose.

OAE allows for dissent against unfaithfulness to the timeless ideals animating the American founding. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his leadership during the Civil Rights Movement represents the apogee of the American tradition of dissent. King appealed to American founding ideals, perhaps most famously in his “I Have A Dream” speech. But King is not the only one to speak a prophetic word of dissent. Isaac Backus, John Leland, Phillis Wheatley, Richard Allen, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Reinhold Niebuhr, Henry Steele Commager, J. William Fulbright—these are but a few representative voices of fruit-bearing dissent in both the colonial and the national period of American history.

One of the dynamics of American democracy that Tocqueville observed was that it had a tendency to lead to tyranny. To be sure, Tocqueville was astounded at the level of freedom that existed in America, and he believed that the Americans were taking necessary steps to guard freedom in their democracy. Some of these steps were in forming voluntary societies that took care of local problems and fostered a cultural value system rooted in Christian morals; in citizens’ ability to wed self-interest with the interest of the community; and in ensuring that the political center of gravity was in local government rather than in the federal government.

But Tocqueville also saw that democracy tends toward encouraging selfishness in the people. As they grow prosperous, their public spirit declines. Their self-interest becomes of greater concern to them while

they are more and more willing to entrust the interests of the whole community to a centralized power.

In a patriotism animated by CAE, the government can do no wrong. Selfishness can thrive when true patriotism is defined as complete loyalty to the institutions of political power because individuals become content to cede their political influence to a tyrant. Here is another practical reason why CAE must be rejected.

But when OAE is the prevailing patriotic formula, citizens employ a critical view of their ruling institutions on every level. When changes come, citizens embrace change, but do so with a critical mind—they do not embrace change for the sake of change. This is because they are committed to fundamental principles of natural law—“permanent things” as J. Daryl Charles has recently discussed in his book *Retrieving the Natural Law*.⁹ Those natural law principles are expressed in American founding documents, and they make us who we are as a nation. And as Charles asserts, it is these principles that are the starting point for Americans of every political stripe as we discuss what policies represent us best, both to the world and to ourselves.

Recommended Resources

John Fea. *Why Study History? Reflecting on the Importance of the Past*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.

Jack P. Greene. *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity From 1492-1800*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Conrad Cherry, ed. *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny. Revised and updated edition*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur. *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth Century America*. New York: Penguin, 1981.

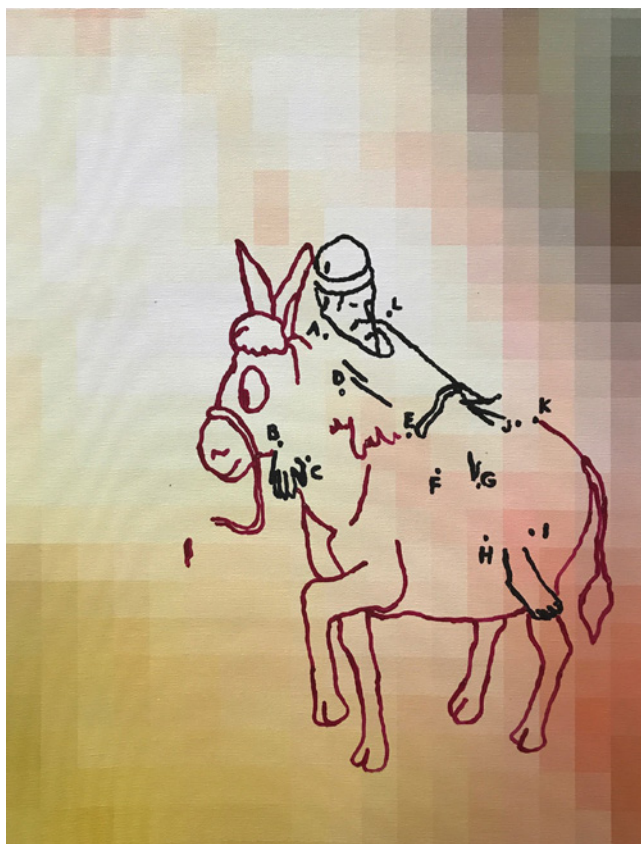
Anthony D. Smith. *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁹ J. Daryl Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Critical Issues in Bioethics; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

FAITHFUL LIVES



*Reviews &
Resources*



Good Samaritan

Acrylic on paper

20" x 15"

2017

Wayne Adams

Reproduced by permission of the artist. <http://www.wayneadamsstudio.com/>

Wayne Adams is a contemporary artist living and working in New York City. This whimsical depiction of the Good Samaritan draws from visual aids used in churches to teach children the stories of the Bible. By leaving the dot-to-dot area of the victim unfinished, Adams effectively asks the question to a contemporary audience, "Who is my neighbor?" I also just enjoy the big-eyed expression of the donkey in this piece, who is being forced to carry a burden that he had not signed on for.

—Richard W. Cummings

A Little History of the United States

by James West Davidson.

New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015.

xiv + 344 pp., US \$15.00, softcover.

My institution is unique in a number of ways, not the least of which is its active promotion of patriotism. About two decades ago, the college decided that instead of our students taking either the first or second half of an American history survey class as part of the General Education curriculum, which was (and still is) standard across the country, we would teach the entire span of American history in one semester. In other words, our students would be exposed to all of our history, not just some. The immediate task, then, was to find a textbook that was concise, readable, and affordable. If only James West Davidson's *A Little History of the United States* would have been around twenty years ago because it fulfills my most pressing needs.

In the interest of full disclosure, I have used various versions of Davidson's texts for some time. I especially enjoyed *Nation of Nations*, then moved to *US: A Narrative*, but from now on I will be using his latest offering, in large part because it is written as a true narrative, a wonderfully flowing story of our history, in just over 300 pages! Of course, such an undertaking means that the grand story is broadly told, but there are enough details to make it extremely interesting, such as the "Great Cattle Caper," a bidding war during the Gilded Age between two titans, Cornelius Vanderbilt and Jay Gould, involving the transportation of livestock via competing railroads. Or the personal vignettes of men and woman from around the globe who dealt with and survived the tragedies of WWII.

One of the things that immediately held my interest was the author's attempt in the preface to personalize the book, by making a connection between the discipline of history and the reader who may have no real curiosity about the past because it is not pertinent to them. But as the author posits,

So many different people. So different that surely they have nothing to do with you! Or do they? Whether you realize it or

not, all these people are a part of your history....We all wish to make history by living it. But never forget that the more you read, write, and remember history, the better your chances of living it in such a way that your deeds are remembered, too. (p. xiv).

The primary themes of *A Little History* are freedom, equality, and liberty, which are woven throughout the book in a paradoxical way. Freedom is questioned early on as kidnapped Africans are brought to America as slaves. Davidson then exposes the irony of proclaiming equality while not only maintaining slavery, but also due to the fact that half of the nation's inhabitants (women) were denied such status until the early 20th century. And he explores the notion of unity even as sections (north, south, and west) of the country developed in vastly differently ways.

A Little History, a summation of our nation's past in roughly 300 pages, inevitably has its issues. If the reader needs visual aids, there are precious few maps, and some of those included are sure to raise a few eyebrows. For example, there is a two page map of North America during the French and Indian War, but only a one page map of the American Revolution (which focuses on George Washington's 1776 retreat from New York City into New Jersey.) There is a two page map of westward expansion during the antebellum era, but no maps for World War II or Vietnam. I also quibble with certain omissions from the narrative such as the Kentucky/Virginia Resolutions as our original statement of states' rights, the numerous violations of US neutrality by Great Britain and France during the Early Republic, the contributions of Chief Justice John Marshall (especially *Marbury v Madison*), Henry Clay, Antietam, Japanese expansion prior to Pearl Harbor, JFK's "New Frontier" or LBJ's "Great Society," and the Gulf of Tonkin incident or the Kent State massacre, to name a few.

Despite these issues, I must say that *A Little History of the United States* is a book that I couldn't put down. And I have adopted it for my entry level American history classes next year, hoping my students will find it just as engaging. I can always supplement the text with appropriate maps and details of our history that I wish to emphasize. These days, many faculty assume that their students are part of an entitled generation with little motivation for things from which they do not personally derive benefit. And many (if not most) students see a required General

Education course in that light. They think they know all they need or want to know about their history—just because they are Americans. Maybe, just maybe, with a brief and wonderfully written narrative like *A Little History*, coupled with lively and entertaining lectures, they will realize the value and wonderment of all that is American history.

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Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel

by Russell Moore.

Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015.

ix + 224 pp., US \$24.99, hardcover.

On a recent tour of the 1607 colonial settlement of Jamestown, our group leader questioned the location of the old settlement's church building in relation to the place where historians reconstructed the fortress fence. "Do you think the settlers would have built the church inside the fence where they could have met in safety, or would they have built outside the fortress risking hostile attacks?" she asked. Metaphorically, the church has always faced the dilemma of how best to relate to the world in a particular time and place. Should the church venture out into the world or remain safely hidden away behind closed doors and high walls?

In *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel*, Russell Moore sets out to answer the question for Christ-followers called to live as strangers in the increasingly hostile land of modern America. Moore, the author of several books and former pastor and seminary professor, currently serves as President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. As a regular contributor to *Christianity Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*, Moore frequently garners national news and media attention as a voice for conservative Christianity. Throughout the pages of his latest book, he uniquely interweaves scriptural insights, cultural observations, and his rustic Southern wit.

In the introduction and first two chapters, Moore wastes no time rousing comfortable Christians slumbering under false presumptions of being at peace with the world: "The Bible Belt is teetering toward collapse, and I say let it fall" (p. 3). This is a surprising sentiment from a conservative evangelical employed by the nation's largest Protestant denomination. "American culture is shifting, it seems, into a different

era, an era in which religion is not necessarily seen as a social good” (p. 4), he writes. While recognizing that the American church and secular America have long coexisted peaceably under a commonly held moral code, Moore believes this anomaly in church history is the exception rather than the rule. He further contends that as Americans increasingly come to view religion as offensive and oppressive, Christians must be equipped for this new reality, or risk wrongly reacting in fear, belligerent anger, or withdrawal.

While his analysis initially seems disheartening, Moore’s contagious hope drawn from Jesus’ authoritative promise to build His prevailing church (Matt. 16:18) shines through. As the moral divide between the church and American culture widens, *Onward* encourages the church to embrace her distinctive nature and re-engage in the life and work given by Jesus.

“Engaged alienation” is one of many phrases used by Moore to describe the proper posture Christians must adopt in relation to the world. He says today’s Christians should embrace an identity less like “chaplains in some idyllic Mayberry” and more like “Apostles in the book of Acts” (pp. 26–27). “Christ-shaped culture warriors” (p. 4) who are unashamed of the cross and unafraid to be out of step with the majority of Americans is the call of the Christian, according to Moore.

In order to illustrate the oddity of the Christian message to modern American ears, Moore recounts an interchange with a lesbian progressive activist in a major urban area. After explaining to the young lady the traditional Christian views on sexuality, she replied “Seriously do you know how strange this sounds to me?” Moore answered, “Yes, I do. . . . But what you should know is, we believe even stranger things than that. We believe a previously dead man is going to show up in the sky on a horse” (p. 10).

Chapters three through five deal in depth with the eternal nature and purposes of the church. The book’s respective treatments of Christ’s Kingdom, Culture, and Mission provide a unified and compelling vision for Christians as Kingdom ambassadors. Moore sounds the trumpet for the church to reprioritize seeking first the Kingdom of God and building thriving Kingdom cultures within the church. He highlights the irony of how we frequently “rail at the culture outside the church while turning a blind eye to sin within the church, while the Bible admonishes us to do the opposite” (p. 87). Herein, the reader also encounters the gravity of the everlasting nature of Christ’s Kingdom

and how an eternal Christian perspective gives a longer and more appropriate view of history. Such a view, in Moore's estimation, transforms Christian interactions with the culture by infusing confidence, hope, compassion, and urgency.

Moore well points out that the job of the church is not to condemn sinners, but he insists that the righteousness of Christ demands that the church work to end injustice and unrighteousness within the culture. Well-meaning Christians have often done much harm by engaging in angry attacks on the one hand and acquiescing to sinful behavior on the other. Moore's book decisively addresses important issues of the day such as abortion, pornography, and variegated forms of sexual immorality. Helpfully, though, these topics are set within their broader context which helps the reader step back and see the issues within a broader moral and theological framework. Chapters six through eight provide a detailed treatment of human dignity, family stability, and religious liberty. As Moore walks through these issues, he points out the true enemy of humanity, the devil, and calls Christians to view those ensnared by the devil as prisoners of war in need of rescue.

The ninth chapter on "Convictional Kindness" provides insights on finding the right tone and recognizing the rules of spiritual engagement, in order to avoid the error of fighting "like the devil to please the Lord" (p. 190). Throughout the volume, and especially here, the point is driven home that Christians are at war *for* the culture, not *with* the culture. Though many modern Christians are embarrassed to speak of Satan, Moore insists that victorious Christian battle is contingent upon recognizing the real enemy of our soul.

In the final chapter, "Gospel Counter-Revolution," Moore highlights the primacy of the life-changing gospel as the core conviction and message of the church. "Christianity is not genetic . . . the next Billy Graham might be drunk right now" (p. 206). Here, readers are reminded that Christ indeed saves sinners. Christians are not born, but rather born again. God's history of transforming scandalous people into pillars of His church is illustrated by mentioning the conversions of the blood-thirsty Saul of Tarsus, the vociferous atheist named C.S. Lewis, and a scandalous political figure and convict named Charles Colson. In looking back through history at how the gospel previously transformed lives, *Onward* encourages us to have eyes of faith to view the present and future with renewed hope.

Onward provides the kind of straight-forward, biblical wisdom Christians need to avoid pitfalls that come as we live as Christ's people in a broken world. Moore's book is clear, convincing, and convicting. Personally, I was greatly helped by the chapter on convictional kindness and the scriptural analyses and applications. While I would not consider *Onward* a gripping, one-sitting read, Moore's writing style is still relevant and interesting. Several, if not all, of the chapters are strong essays that might easily be used as stand-alone resources for small group discussions. If you are serious about living faithfully as a Christian witness, I commend this book to you.

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Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule

by Jonathan Leeman.

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016.

392 pp. US \$40.00, paperback.

*P*olitical Church begins with a brief preface and a lengthy introduction. The preface establishes a two-fold goal for the book: “to replace the map of politics and religion that many Christians have been using since the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century with a more biblical one” and “to explain where the local church fits onto this redrawn map as a political institution or embassy of Christ’s rule” (p. 13). Leeman claims in this preface that the church has erroneously followed Enlightenment views of politics and religion that have weakened the church’s power to represent Christ in secular societies. Therefore, churches, Leeman argues, tend to fall into one of two errors:

Either they falsely claim to be spiritual, not political, and so fail to take the stands that they should. . . . Or they convince themselves that political advocacy in the public square is their most important work and distract themselves from their primary mission: being the church. (p. 14)

In order to provide a biblical understanding of the church and the state that corrects these two errors, Leeman spends most of the book developing a thorough ecclesiastic framework by explicating the covenants in the Bible. He then applies this theoretical framework to address practical issues of how local churches and individual Christians should involve themselves in public and political concerns in modern society.

The structure of this book involves six lengthy chapters. Chapter one, “What Is Politics?” and chapter two, “What Is an Institution?” “serve the purpose of developing a vocabulary, a prolegomenon”

(p. 55). Leeman uses these chapters to create the most basic foundation before even consulting biblical covenants to develop a specific view of church and politics. In chapter one, Leeman largely critiques the Enlightenment view that separates the realms of the public and private, politics and religion. Leeman chronicles what politicians and philosophers such as James Madison and John Locke argued, as well as stances specific churches have taken in the past, focusing especially on the development of the philosophy that posits conscience as the grounds for religious freedom in modern European and American societies (but especially the United States). In this chapter, Leeman concludes that this long-established separation of politics and religion is implausible because “people ‘worship’ in everything they do, whether in public or private” (p. 95) and because political and spiritual concerns necessarily overlap.

Chapter two simply continues the titular question of chapter one by seeking to define *institution*. Among other aspects of his formulation of *institutions*, Leeman claims institutions involve “behavior shaping rule structures” (p. 107) and “the application of authority to a relationship” (p. 111). In consequence, Leeman posits that political institutions involve some sort of force, serve an ideal of justice, and unite members (pp. 112–13). Leeman also emphasizes the role of one’s membership in an institution as a factor that shapes that individual’s identity and values. The discussion of institutions culminates in a discussion of how these factors (and a few others) lead to political institutions both in the church and the temporal political world. The latter part of the chapter involves Leeman’s development of “an institutional hermeneutic,” which he sums up in the following formula: “*whom* does Jesus authorize to do *what* with the keys of the kingdom?” (p. 132). Leeman applies this hermeneutic in subsequent chapters as he develops his covenantal ecclesiology.

Chapter three, “The Politics of Creation,” begins with God’s triune nature and applies it to his political rule, concluding “that our relationships should bear the same (holy and just) ordering or shape of the triune God, which leads to . . . our absolute and comprehensive subjection to the institution of God’s authorizing, citizen-making law” (p. 143). As the chapter’s title suggests, it focuses on Adam’s and Eve’s pre-fall relationships with each other and with God, analyzing how humans were created to exist as worshipers in political institutions defined by God and reflecting his nature.

Chapter four, “The Politics of the Fall,” seeks to answer the question, “How then do we map out the political cartography of a whole world of insurrectionists whom we know won’t finally succeed?” (p. 174). Leeman looks at what he calls “the imbroglio of Genesis 3 politics” (p. 175), as well as Martin Luther’s Two Kingdoms approach and Abraham Kuyper’s one kingdom with separate spheres formulation (pp. 176–77). Finally, Leeman focuses on the Noahic covenant, which he sees as a “common covenant” that relates to all humans and the Abrahamic covenant, which he sees as a “special covenant” that relates to God’s specific people. In short, Leeman claims the Noahic covenant mandates that “groups of people living in society *must* form or support a government” and that their forms of government must enforce what he calls a “God-given justice mechanism” (p. 188). While Leeman firmly rejects social contract theories of political institutions, he avers that because of the Noahic covenant, a political institution that fails to provide such a justice mechanism “has exceeded its authorization and self-refuted its own mandate, thereby triggering the operations of God’s Noahic justice mechanism to strike back” (p. 195).

Because Leeman argues that authority to establish political institutions comes from God and is not based on the consent of the governed, his conception of the dissolution of such an institution varies from Locke’s formulation of the governed rejecting the governing authorities based on perceived violations of a social contract. Instead, he reflects that those authorities who fail to provide justice face a divine wrath. Leeman also emphasizes that the Noahic covenant does not favor one form of government over another; rather, it simply specifies that individuals must submit to authorities and that political institutions must establish justice. Following this part of chapter four, Leeman begins to lay out his theory of religious tolerance as a replacement for the Enlightenment model of religious freedom, which Leeman argues undercuts the very religion it claims to protect. Following his discussion of the Noahic covenant as the foundation for common political institutions, Leeman points to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants as the foundation for the special political institution occupied by God’s people.

Chapter five, “The Politics of the New Covenant,” discusses the New Testament church as a political institution. Leeman claims, “The doctrine of justification does not merely have political *implications*; it is a political doctrine outright” (p. 244). Leeman further argues that in

the New Testament, justification involves both kingly and priestly work. The discussion in chapter five continues a summary of the storyline of the Old and New Testaments, exploring implications from Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. Leeman concludes the Old Testament survey with his claim that the movement to the new covenant “is not about moving from corporate to individual, from obedience-required to no-obedience-required, or from political to spiritual. It is about moving from a political life dependent on their own strength to a political life dependent on God’s Spirit . . .” (p. 253). This conception enables Leeman to contrast his covenantal view of the New Testament church to common conceptions of the new covenant’s implications. Leeman concludes, “The new covenant uniquely presents the Spirit’s own political program that penetrates the inner person and implants a ‘yes’ to God and the Davidic Son among every member” (p. 278). He contrasts this political institution to temporal governments, claiming, “In their best moments, the kingdoms of this world reach for justice and sometimes even offer a glimmer of it. In the new covenant community alone will true righteousness and justice be found” (p. 278).

In the final chapter, “The Politics of the Kingdom,” Leeman seeks to define the new covenant church as more than what he calls “‘church politics’ or ‘team politics’” (p. 294). Consequently, Leeman portrays the local church as a part of the universal church, both of which are political institutions “united by the new covenant, by the Spirit, by faith and by the lordship of Christ” (p. 295). Leeman emphasizes that the new covenant church exists as a political institution to demonstrate to the world God’s character, namely his righteousness and justice. Leeman continues the theoretical discussion he has sustained in the previous chapters through much of this final chapter, but at the end, he addresses practical concerns, such as what it means to “bind and loose,” and who specifically has the authority to do so, according to Matthew 16 and other New Testament passages. Leeman also provides a survey of various historical Protestant positions concerning eldership, congregationalism, and episcopacy, favoring congregationalism. Finally, Leeman gets around to addressing questions such as how and when members of the church should involve themselves in temporal politics. Here, Leeman favors using wisdom to determine which matters the Bible specifically speaks to, claiming that many issues will not necessitate specific stances from the church. Instead, Leeman claims, “Jesus does not commission churches to wield the sword and challenge govern-

ments directly. But he does commission churches to challenge the idols and false gods that prop up every government and marketplace . . .” (p. 383). Leeman argues the proper method of challenging such idols is through biblical preaching.

Leeman’s argument is certainly thorough, and it certainly helps to expose faults in common conceptions of the church, as well as its involvement in temporal politics. However, this book suffers from stylistic problems. First, the discourse level of the book leaves it out of reach for most lay persons. While Leeman never specifies his intended audience, his writing assumes a fairly extensive familiarity with theological language and categories. At the very least, readers need to be pretty well versed in covenantal theology, Martin Luther’s teachings (especially his Two Kingdoms theory), Abraham Kuyper’s theology, and the social contract theory of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. However, even with such background, lay readers will likely baulk at the theological jargon Leeman often employs, as well as the extensive (and, at times, largely unexplained) quotations of other theologians he drops in throughout the book.

Second, the book’s chapters (and perhaps the book itself) are too long. Most of the chapters are approximately eighty to ninety pages in length, and they often involve a section entitled “Conclusion” long before their ends, followed by subsequent and entirely new headings before they actually conclude. This type of organization leads to significant difficulty in connecting the parts of each chapter and even more so in connecting the chapters to one another. Third, rather than defining his argument and then critiquing and correcting opposing views, Leeman spends significant time critiquing opposing views before ever establishing his own argument (such is often the structure of individual chapters, as well as the book as a whole). For instance, rather than its given title (“What is Politics?”), chapter one could more aptly be called “What Is Wrong with the Current Formulation of Church and State Politics” because it largely critiques the Enlightenment philosophy of church and state rather than providing any argument of its own or defining *politics*.

Readers with theological training may find Leeman’s argument insightful, but those without tolerance for theological jargon will do better to look for another book.

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One Nation Under God: A Christian Hope for American Politics

by Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo.
Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015.
xii + 160 pp., US \$14.99, hardcover

Using a historically significant and presently provocative title, Bruce Ashford and Chis Pappalardo tackle the tough topic of Christians and American politics in their book *One Nation Under God*. Ashford, who serves as Provost and Professor of Theology and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, speaks and writes regularly on the topic of Christians and culture. Pappalardo serves as the lead researcher and writer at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina.

Ashford and Pappalardo aim to strike a path between the cliffs of “political withdrawal” and “political salvation” by helping their readers “relate their Christianity to politics and public life” (p. 2). They write, “We hope to share a perspective on politics that tempers the expectations of those with inflated hopes, empowers those with deflated hopes, and equips every Christian to apply Christ’s love in the muddled arena of politics” (p. 2). To accomplish this goal, they divide their book into two major sections. The first part of the book addresses the broader questions of Christian political engagement while the second part addresses specific issues in American culture and politics.

After a brief introduction, the authors review the four major parts of the biblical story—creation, fall, redemption, and restoration—in order to provide “the bigger picture” for Christian political conversation (p. 5), arguing, in particular, that the story’s end (restoration) provides Christians with confidence. In chapter 2, they give an overview of “four competing views of public life,” using each view’s explanation of the relationship between nature (“the created world we live in”) and grace (“God’s gracious salvation”) as the dividing point between the various

positions. Their position, “grace renews nature,” follows the work of the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper and argues that Christian political activities should “paint a preview of Christ’s coming kingdom, when he will renew this heavens and earth” (p. 23).

Ashford and Pappalardo use chapter 3 to critique the common belief that religion is a private matter. Not only do they argue that Christianity is “a public truth,” but they also assert that secular modernity “*acts as a religion [italics original]*” (p. 26). When Christians view Christianity and secularism in such a manner, they can proclaim Christianity as a superior worldview, or in their words, “public truth” and a “deeply and abiding *relevant truth for every sphere of culture [italics original]*” (p. 28). To avoid the problem of theocracy (a church-run government), the authors introduce Kuyper’s concept of “sphere sovereignty,” a concept that recognizes “God has ordered every aspect of our lives but has done so in distinct ways” (p. 29). Thus, God is sovereign over each sphere, and he has not assigned the church authority over the other spheres.

The fourth chapter builds on the concept of “sphere sovereignty” by discussing the relationship between the two spheres of church and state. The authors survey Jesus’, Peter’s, and Paul’s interaction with and teachings on the state before addressing today’s church and state situation. When dealing with the American context, the authors outline two dangerous positions Christians must avoid: 1) statism (“state oversteps its boundaries”) and 2) theocracy (“church oversteps its boundaries”). Ashford and Pappalardo continue their journey toward more specificity in chapter 5, which they entitle “Doing Politics in a Post-Christian Country.” After a brief defense of America as a post-Christian nation, the authors devote most of the chapter to the topic of pluralism. They outline six different forms of pluralism and propose “principled pluralism” as an appropriate position for American Christians. This view recognizes pluralism as a part of our world until Christ returns, but emphasizes the importance of Christians remaining convictional and faithful in such a context.

Chapter 6 is the most practical chapter in the first half of the book. In this chapter, the authors give six specific ways Christians can engage politically with “wisdom and virtue” (p. 55). They encourage Christians to live “as alien residents” (pp. 55–56) by seeking the good of culture, be realistic “in a time between the times” (pp. 56–57), restore the “lost virtue” of civility in speech and attitude, take a broader view of poli-

tics and its role in culture, choose appropriate language in the public square, and be careful about “politicking in the pulpit” (pp. 62–63).

The seven chapters in the second part of the book each address a current topic in American politics. The topics include life and death (abortion and euthanasia) (ch. 7), marriage and sexuality (ch. 8), economics and wealth (ch. 9), environmental and ecological stewardship (ch. 10), racial diversity and relations (ch. 11), immigration (ch. 12), and war and peace (ch. 13). In addition to outlining their position on each issue, the authors also highlight “a Christian who has proven to be an exemplary public witness” on the respective topic (p. 3). The authors also provide discussion questions and a recommended reading list at the end of each chapter. Finally, the authors explicitly state their disdain for the view that one political party “conforms to the kingdom of God;” instead, they attempt to follow the example of Jesus, whom they label “an equal opportunity offender,” by pushing against all political parties in these chapters (p. 45).

Ashford and Pappalardo have done an excellent job of providing the American church with a balanced, biblically-informed, and historically-sensitive paradigm for political engagement. Several strengths merit mention. First, the organization of the book is very helpful. They move from broad theoretical foundations to specific practical steps. Such a movement provides readers with the necessary framework to understand the specific proposals in chapter 6 and the second half of the book. Second, although the authors argue their position persuasively, they regularly articulate their position on certain issues (for example, nature vs. grace, church and state, and pluralism) in the context of alternative viewpoints, thus providing the reader with a survey of various approaches to the issues. Third, the chapters on specific issues (second half of book) are very user-friendly. Their use of case studies gives readers concrete models for political engagement. The discussion questions make the book a great option for a small group or one-on-one discipleship setting, and the recommended reading, which is accompanied by annotations, provides an opportunity for deeper study.

In conclusion, Ashford’s and Pappalardo’s stated goal was to provide an alternative to “political withdrawal and political salvation” (p. 2). Not only did they accomplish their goal, but they went beyond that goal and provided their readers with categories that help them better live out their faith in every area of life. By situating Christian political

action in the context of the Bible’s storyline, the authors have reminded Christians that they serve the King of the Universe who will one day return and set up his Edenic kingdom. Presently, Christians proclaim the “public truth” of King Jesus and his kingdom while recognizing that he will make all things right when he returns. Such a truth gives Christians the boldness, faith, and hope to live out kingdom priorities in every sphere of life.

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Political Thought: A Student's Guide

by Hunter Baker. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
121pp. \$11.99, softcover.

As a college professor, pastor, and parent, I frequently feel the pressures coming down on the Christian community to better educate future generations in how to live faithfully as Christ followers in an ever-changing world. We cannot assume that our present issues are the same issues that future generations will face. Therefore, we must lay a foundation of biblical literacy, theology, philosophy, and ethics to provide these budding young culture shapers the tools needed to address their own context. One arena that takes in all of these disciplines is political thought. Whether we are radical isolationists or deeply involved in the political process, as Christians, we *will* think about the intersection of the Christian faith and the public square. However, given the current circus-like state of American politics, where does one begin? Is it possible to raise a younger generation of Americans that take seriously the burdens of living together as a civil society without becoming cynical or wholly disengaged? With regard to this question, only time will tell. But in the meantime, books like Hunter Baker's *Political Thought: A Student's Guide* will provide accessible guidance for those willing to try.

Baker's work is a part of a series of books produced by Crossway called Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition that seeks to provide entry-level discussions on important topics: such as literature, philosophy, the natural sciences, history, and psychology. So, the book is designed to be accessible, short, and geared toward students or readers engaging the topic for the first time.

Baker begins his volume by comparing political realities to life in a family, where he introduces the ideas of rules, order, structure, and freedom. While he states explicitly that this is only meant to be an illustrative comparison and that citizens are by no means children of the state, the point is well taken—politics is about relationships. As people

cross paths in their daily existence, mutual relationships will take shape and give rise to the foundational elements of society. However, different approaches have been developed in assessing these mutual relationships, and Baker spends chapter three introducing his readers to some of the thinkers that have most impacted the American experiment: Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke.

Chapter three discusses these three philosophers alongside the idea of a social contract, which Baker defines as “cessions of some portion of personal sovereignty by individuals to a government in exchange for the superior protection of the rest of their rights and freedoms” (p. 30). This contract necessarily moves from the state of nature to that of political society, and each of these thinkers defines these categories differently. For Hobbes nature was brutish and violent and therefore needed to be reined in by an even more brutish and violent Leviathan that would establish order, even if it meant squelching individual freedom. Rousseau proposed that human beings were all equal in nature and societies often stifled such equality, so the role of government was to ensure the individual has a voice and equality is established. Addressing Locke, Baker summarizes his position over against Hobbes and Rousseau stating: “Locke saw the human being in nature as a human, not as an advanced animal, with an awareness of God and his natural law. What made human beings special was their exercise of reason within the context of this natural law” (p. 37).

In the chapters that follow, Baker chooses to structure his discussion of political thought around the central themes of order (chapter four), freedom and liberty (chapter five), justice (chapter six), and the political good (chapter seven). Briefly addressing order, he argues that peace and order are not the same thing. One can establish order—the lack of violent action—in an oppressive way that stifles justice and the peace that ensues.

Baker’s longest focused discussion is on freedom and liberty. Discussing the works of Mill, Locke, and Burke, the author highlights the evolution of political liberty, starting after the French Revolution. Baker purports that Mill’s views of freedom have largely shaped our modern views: “We are all free to attempt to convince someone to change his behavior, but we may not compel him through the device of law unless the specific behavior causes us real harm. . . . The only real freedom is to pursue our own good in our own way without interfering with others. This conception of freedom is strikingly modern

and seems, in many ways, to have won the day.” While his historical recounting is helpful, the chapter concludes with only question after question. And yes, the questions are very good ones, but there is little guidance as to how to answer them.

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