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Faith, The Church and Public Policy: Towards A Model of Evangelical Engagement

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Introduction

In 1989 Francis Fukuyama, announced in an article in the journal *National Interest*, that we had arrived at the end of history.[1] The ideological war was over. A 'remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged … as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism and most recently communism'.[2] Though there were still battles to be fought in some countries, the ascendancy of a liberal vision of life and society was assured and history, the drama of the clash between competing ideological and philosophical ways of life, was over. Twin forces within liberalism, scientific rationalism and the struggle for recognition, would lead to the collapse of tyrannies and drive us relentlessly toward establishing liberal democracies as the 'end state of the historical process.' The realization of the core liberal principles of liberty and equality—both political and economic—would result in a form of society that Fukuyama associates with German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, a socie-

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1 Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History' *National Interest* no.16 (Summer), pp. 3-18.

2 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. xi.

ty which satisfies humankind's 'deepest and most fundamental longings'. While many would question whether liberalism can claim victory over all other philosophies of life, others continue to grapple with the implications of this liberal vision of life for religion and non-liberal ways of life—consider books such as *Jihad vs. McWorld* and more recently, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*.[3]

When we consider themes of globalization, secularization, capitalism, universal civil, political and human rights, and consider modes of influence such as the multinational corporations, the World Bank, the IMF, UN agencies, international tribunals, we must reflect on the spirit, the worldview, the philosophy, or the vision of life that guides these. In what follows, I want to examine liberalism as a philosophy, or in the language of American political philosopher John Rawls, a comprehensive doctrine. Liberalism is the predominant comprehensive doctrine in the West and is the driving force behind globalization, political reform, economic growth and social change — the focus of our next few days together. I will then explore the nature and purpose of the state and the political role of the church in a differentiated society, and end with a model for Christian engagement in a liberal democracy, drawing on our experiences in Canada.

Liberalism

I will begin with some comments on liberalism. I will briefly examine its core principles and how these principles have evolved. I will also look at its spirit or ethos, which I will describe as being religious in nature. Due to the predominance of liberalism in the West and its influence around the world, it increasingly shapes the context within which we seek to engage politically.

Liberalism considers the fulfilment of individual desire to be the highest good.[4] Two characteristic principles of liberalism are freedom and equality.[5] Freedom, usually framed in terms of individual freedom, is understood as the absence of coercion in all areas of human life—social, economic, political and religious. The second principle is that we are all to be regarded as equal and to be treated equally in law and public policy. These principles, however, are not static, and how freedom and equality are understood continues to evolve. Freedom is no longer framed merely in terms of freedom from coercion (negative freedom), but is understood in terms of our capacity to pursue our chosen good. If you have no choices, can you be considered free? Likewise, the equality of all persons before the law has shifted to equality of opportunity which car-

3 Benjamin Barber *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995); Thomas L. Freidman *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999).

4 For example, see George Grant *English Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974).

5 The following description of liberalism is a typical understanding. Much of this section follows the presentation of liberalism in Mark Dickerson and Thomas Flanagan's *An Introduction of Government and Politics* 4th edition (Scarborough, ON: Nelson, 1994).

ries with it a claim to positive action by others (including the state) to ensure all are equal. This is a demand not only that one's dignity as a person be respected, but also that one's choices be respected. I am not accepted as equal unless I, and the choices I have made, are respected and even celebrated.

Politically, this shift from negative freedom to positive freedom means that the role of the state moves from a minimalist one, which leaves the individual alone unless others' rights are violated, [6] to a more participatory state; here the concern is not only the absence of coercion but the presence of means or capacity necessary for the expression of freedom.[7] The shift from legal equality of personhood to equal respect for choices (affirmation and even celebration) likewise requires a more interventionist state through the development and enforcement of human rights codes and programs and policies that ameliorate inequities.[8] Thus the primary role of government has changed from enforcing basic rules and preventing people from harming each other through force or fraud (a 'night watchman' state) to promoting freedom in the sense of capacity, and ensuring social welfare (leisure, knowledge, security) and reducing differences in order to ensure that no one is prevented by others from having a chance to achieve success. The dilemma for liberalism is that the pursuit of freedom and equality are often in conflict. This conflict, both between the earlier and later definitions of freedom and equality respectively, or between the two principles themselves, is expressed through the formation of political parties which differ in their interpretation of these principles and the relative priority they assign to each.

There are two other principles characteristic of liberal democracy: limited government and the consent of the governed. The former means that there is a recognition of spheres or areas of life into which government should not intrude. One example of such a sphere is religion which is usually understood within liberalism to be a private matter. Limited government is also expressed in a commitment to freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Consent of the governed reflects an understanding that public authority resides in the people who delegate it to the

6 John Stuart Mill said, 'The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.'

7 As expressed by T.H. Green: 'When we speak of freedom, we should consider carefully what we mean by it. We do not mean merely freedom from restraint or compulsion… we mean a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others.'

8 In terms of economics, there is a shift from the enforcement of rules of property and trade within a free market to a modification of the market system to ensure the welfare of all. J.M. Keynes said; 'The world is not so governed from above that private and social interests always coincide. It is not so managed here below that in practice they coincide. It is not a correct deduction from the principles of economics that enlightened self-interest always operates in the public interest. Nor is it true that self-interest generally is enlightened: more often individuals acting separately to promote their own ends are too ignorant or too weak to attain these.'

sovereign. Taken together, the government is understood to be bound by law which is shaped by agreement among citizens.[9]

The four principles of freedom, equality, limited government and consent of the governed are not problematic for Christians. Certainly we affirm freedom and equality, and we recognize the value of democratic processes and of limits on government power. However, the liberalism described by political theorists such as John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas, is more than a set of principles. Variously described as an ideology or philosophy, I prefer to refer to it as, in the words of John Rawls, a comprehensive doctrine.[10]

Liberalism's prime commitment is to individual autonomy understood as individual self-determination. It seeks to remove any and all barriers that hinder autonomy. It is atomistic in that it understands the individual to be the locus of authority and meaning. Only individuals have ontic or moral status, and social institutions are but ideas in our minds, names and concepts given to associations that are nothing more than an aggregate of self-determining individuals who co-operate because they share a common interest or purpose. All social institutions have only a derived, and therefore tentative, contractual existence. Their authority and power over the individual is carefully delimited. Forms such as the family and the state are deemed necessary but are considered man-made and artificial entities. They are considered potential threats to the autonomy of the individual. Thus the family is merely an interacting framework for developing the rights and abilities of each family member, marriage is merely a contract which is binding as long as the participants agree, a business is an artificial entity in which economic transactions take place among freely competing individuals, and a church is something akin to an ethnic association and is formed for the private benefit of its members.

Within liberalism, society is seen as an aggregate of self-determining individuals tending autonomously and automatically toward a state of natural autonomy and the state is an instrument through which rational self-determining individuals can be assured of having their basic liberties protected. Political order exists solely to safeguard the purposes of autonomous individuals. Justice is understood to be rooted in intuitive ideas and can be identified apart from any appeal to the good. The rational person, in establishing what justice is, can distance themselves from their religious and cultural context and function as an unencumbered self who is autonomous (able

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9 As former Canadian Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson stated, 'Liberalism includes the negative requirement of removing anything that stands in the way of individual and collective progress. The negative requirement is important. It involves removal and reform; clearing away and opening up so that man can move forward and societies expand. The removal of restrictions that block the access to achievement: this is the very essence of Liberalism. The Liberal Party must also promote the positive purpose of ensuring that all citizens, without any discrimination, will be in a position to take advantage of the opportunities opened up, of the freedom that have been won.'

10 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia, 1994).

to choose ends) and is an individual (identifiable apart from their religious and cultural rootedness). Hence within a liberal understanding of life, while we function privately (or non-publicly) as members of families, of cultures, of religions etc., publicly we gather as citizens, leaving these other attachments behind and affirming our ability to choose our own path—described by Nietzsche in terms of 'lifestyle' and 'values'. At our core it is believed we are separable from these other attachments. It is to this core self that liberalism appeals.

As indicated above, liberalism has a spiritual or religious thrust. Eric Voegelin describes it as having a revolutionary impulse that is expressed in four areas: the political, economic, religious and scientific.[11] Politically, it is defined by its opposition to certain abuses and opposes any order based on privileged position. Voegelin says the problem is that while this attack was originally led by the liberal 'bourgeoisie' itself, the attack on privilege turns on the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary movement cannot end until society has become egalitarian. Economically, it seeks to repeal legal restrictions that set limits on free economic activity and believes there should be no principle or no motive of economic activity other than enlightened self-interest and that all barriers (including national ones) to trade and economic progress should be eradicated.

Religiously, liberalism rejects revelation and dogma as sources of truth; it discards spiritual substance and becomes secularistic and ideological. Finally, scientifically it assumes that the autonomy of immanent human reason is the source of all knowledge. Science is free research liberated from authorities, not only from revelation and dogmatism, but from classical philosophy as well. As a revolutionary movement it continues to press for reform and, according to Voegelin, it will not result in a stable condition until its goal is achieved. It continues to press towards an 'eschatological final state', characterized by true freedom and equality. Voegelin says;

> One can't get away from the revolution. Whoever participates in it for a time with the intention of retiring peacefully with a pension which calls itself liberalism will discover sooner or later that the revolutionary convulsion to destroy socially harmful, obsolete institutions is not a good investment for a pensioner.[12]

This prioritization of individual autonomy as self-determination and the accompanying rights is presumed by many liberals to be enlightened, reasonable and without bias towards most comprehensive doctrines to which citizens may adhere. It is considered uniquely public in that it is applicable to all and benefits all, and is not the product of any one comprehensive doctrine. It forms the basis for what John Rawls calls a public conception of justice that guides public life. As this view of the person and conception of justice are seen by liberals such as Rawls to be independent of any given comprehensive doctrine, they are seen as

11 'Liberalism and its History', *The Review of Politics* 36 (1974/75), pp. 504-520

12 Ibid., p. 512.

secular (non-sectarian) and political, not philosophical. They are principles to which all reasonable citizens can agree. As such, they provide a political framework able to accommodate a plurality of reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

However, this 'overlapping consensus' presumes that these liberal conceptions will guide public life and that public dialogue will be guided by public reason, that is, reasoning that is non-sectarian and accessible to all citizens. Thus while comprehensive doctrines inform non-public life, the expectation is that all citizens are expected to function publicly as liberals.[13] Religiously rooted arguments are perceived as being suspect and an indication of an attempt to impose one vision of life on all citizens. Law and public policy must be defended in terms of public reason

Liberalism is more than a commitment to certain principles. Following James Skillen, if we define religion as human convictions, presuppositions, and commitments that give fundamental direction to human actions and moral arguments, liberalism would qualify. Skillen writes, 'The deepest presuppositions of so-called secular philosophies function in the same way as do the deepest presuppositions of traditional religions.'[14] The Enlightenment and Communism, he says, 'by this interpretation are as religiously profound and comprehensive as any outlook fostered by a historical religion.... No argument about bad law or good law can proceed without reference to normative ideas of authority and freedom, of human dignity and responsibility.'

By this analysis, political liberalism, like all political/legal systems around the world, has its historical origins in a particular 'religious' vision of life. Even so-called secular approaches to political life, says Skillen, are themselves thoroughly religious in nature. The guiding spirit of liberalism is the pursuit of freedom (and equality) and entails a specific understanding of human nature, or normativity, and of knowledge. As a comprehensive doctrine, it shapes people's perceptions of themselves and societal institutions, conforming both to its understanding of truth.

Politics, the State and Religion

Religion or faith[15] is a dimension of all of life, including government and the state. As persons we are creatures of God and our lives are lived in response to the Word of God—that by which the world was created and by which the world is sustained. (Culture is an expression of this response.) As faith is an aspect of all of life, all that we do has a faith

13 A helpful resource on the themes of liberalism and pluralism is the EFC discussion paper entitled *Being Christian in a Pluralistic Society.* Available at www.evangelicalfellowship.ca.

14 James Skillen *Recharging the American Experiment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), p. 31.

15 In public discourse, I often use the language of faith or spirituality rather than religion as I find it is more readily acceptable in general discussions than religion, which is often interpreted to connote worship and ritual and hence understood to be more narrow in application than faith or spirituality.

dimension—whether we eat or sleep, in our role as parents or in our politics. All that we do has a religious dimension. This understanding rejects the notion that part of our life is lived in the secular realm—a realm of activities that are a-religious or neutral with regard to religious belief.

Likewise all that we do has a political dimension—office politics, negotiating with a spouse and children and so on. Politics involves power, authority, coercion, influence, and conflict resolution. It involves gathering and maintaining support for common projects; it concerns disagreement and conflict as well as the distribution of good things such as wealth, safety, prestige, recognition, influence and power. These concerns are not limited to the state. All institutions or societal structures involve these political issues—family, schools, business, voluntary associations, religious institutions. The elements of politics are the exercise of power (influence, coercion, authority) and justice, and these apply to all human relations and social structures. However, it is the government and the state for which politics is the core dynamic (Romans 13). Governing is a specialized activity of individuals and institutions that make and enforce public decisions that are binding on the whole community and it has the 'power of the sword' (Rom. 13:4). While other institutions in society exercise forms of coercive power —family/parents (punishment), churches (excommunication), schools (withhold degree), business/unions (firing, strikes)—the government retains power of life and death. Governments cannot depend solely on coercive power, however, or their legitimacy will be eroded.

Stated another way, the state is a creature, an entity instituted by God and, like others such as the family or the institutional church (as distinguished from the Body of Christ), it is created and designed by God to serve God in the fulfillment of its given task. We are told that the governing authorities are God's servant to do good. It has a unique structure, different from that of the family, the church, a school or a business, and, like all of these structures, we can speak of it having a spiritual direction. A family can be a Muslim family or a Hindu family or a Christian. While the structures may be similar, the faith commitment and the spiritual orientation of the families will differ. Likewise with ecclesiastical institutions, and, I argue, with the state. All states will have executive, legislative and judicial functions. Similarly, all states will be directed by something variously described as an ethos, a vision of life, a worldview, a philosophy, or a faith perspective.

When I speak of the state as being religious or faith-directed, I am not advocating the fusion of the church and state. The church and state are distinct institutions, both of which have a spiritual direction. As institutions with different purposes and roles, they should remain separate and respect the calling of the other. The direction of the state is identified through its political creed, often found in constitutional preambles or in its various charters.

This understanding of the state

also suggests that the state cannot be 'neutral' with respect to religion and culture. For example, the official language(s) or national holidays will reflect the predominance of certain cultural or religious influences. Most modern states seek to be accommodating of cultural and religious (directional) plurality and to the degree that they can do so, they are considered secular. While describing a state as secular is usually understood to mean that the state remains neutral with respect to the various religious beliefs adhered to by its citizens, its faith perspective means it will not be without bias.

States vary in their ability to accommodate deep religious diversity. To the extent that the state is not confused with the institutional church and does not see its role as enforcing that which is properly the responsibility of the church (doctrine for example), then it will be properly secular (non-sectarian) in that it retains its separation from any one church. However, this is different from a secularist view that maintains that the state should be a-religious and denies that the state has a religious dimension. This secularist approach results in attempts to restrict religion and the religious beliefs of citizens to private life, and is often characteristic of liberal states.

Christian Approaches to the State

How then do we engage politically as Christians? There is no shared evangelical understanding of, or approach to, politics and the role of the state. In his book *Christ and Culture,* H. Richard Niebuhr presents five typologies that describe the different orientations of Christians to culture.[16] Applied to politics, the first orientation, which he labels 'Christ against Culture', entails a general rejection of culture—usually associated with the Anabaptist tradition. The church is set over and against the world and we, as Christians, are to 'come out from among them and be separate'. The church is an alternative community and the state, through its role of restraining evil, provides order and fairness. While its task is God-given, nothing about it is distinctively Christian. The gospel is about love and personal redemption, while politics is about worldly issues that are necessary but not of prime concern to Christians as Christians. The state is neutral with respect to the gospel, and sometimes in tension with the commands of Christ, but it is still a realm of possible Christian involvement.

The second orientation, 'Christ and Culture in Paradox', characteristic of many evangelicals identifies with the tension of being in the world but not of it. Politics and government deal with earthly pursuits that are part of the human condition. We try to keep our minds on 'spiritual things'. In this view the things of Caesar are different from the things of God. Yet the spiritual can influence the natural or material, and Christians can offer moral guidance to the government. However, the

16 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

things of this world are not of prime concern. Being a missionary or pastor is a higher calling than that of a lawyer or politician. We engage politically out of concern for 'moral issues', implying that matters of the economy and budgets, for example, are not 'moral issues'.

The third, 'Christ above Culture', is a characteristic Catholic synthesis where Christ adds a moral or spiritual dimension to life—grace added to nature. We are by nature social beings and 'society is impossible on the human level without direction in accordance with law. Beyond the state is the church, which not only directs men to their supernatural end and provides sacramental assistance, but also as the custodian of the divine law it assists in the ordering of the temporal life; since reason sometimes falls short of its possible performance and requires the gracious assistance of revelation, and since it cannot reach to the inner springs and motives of action'[17] The state is essentially a good one if it provides an orderly society that is compatible with the free practice of the Christian faith and the protection and enhancement of family and church life.

The fourth, 'Christ of Culture', often associated with a Lutheran/Anglican perspective, is characterized by accommodation. Culture is understood to be basically Christian. Politics and government are in need of redirection and redemption and this need guides Christians in their dealings with government. (Consider a situation where the head of state is also the head of the church.)

The fifth and last, 'Christ transformer of Culture', is a characteristically reformed approach where the goal is the reconciling of all things to Christ, including the political. The Christian task is to bear witness to Christ in all areas of life, as Christ is Lord of all.

There are several problems raised by this analysis. First, while these typologies are helpful and do capture some of the orientations different Christian traditions have held, the problem is that they are characterisations. It is difficult to fit anyone neatly into one category. Second, most prefer to see themselves as transformers of culture and cast others into other categories. A key question is, what are the means of transformation: individual action, church action, and/or advocacy through Christian organizations? The characteristic Reformed approach, for example, can involve the formation of Christian schools, unions, and political parties. While these are ways of participating in education, business and politics in a distinctively Christian way, setting up alternative Christian institutions can also be interpreted as a retreat from the world. Is this the case, or is it simply a matter of a different way of being 'salt'? Third, the opposition of Christ and culture is a false and misleading one. We were commanded in the Garden of Eden to be fruitful and to subdue the earth. Is our culture not our answer to that command? Culture is itself a religious expression, an

17 Ibid, p. 136.

ordering or basic pattern of living shaped by our basic beliefs.

I have found elements of these five orientations to be present in the way evangelicals engage politically. Depending on the issues, Canadian evangelicals sometimes get frustrated with the progress of secularization and say we should give up on politics—we have lost the war and we should retreat and focus on evangelism. Some may consider our legal system to be fair and principled and thank God for our Christian heritage, while others seem to think a Christian witness hinges on whether the Lord's prayer is recited at the opening of public meetings. In general, while many evangelicals experience the tension of the Christ and Culture in Paradox orientation, when seeking to participate in public debates they reflect elements of the Christ against Culture, Christ above Culture or the Christ Transformer of Culture orientation. In the next part of this paper, I will focus on these three, the Anabaptist, Catholic and Reformed approaches, using representative authors to explore each position and then compare them.

Anabaptist

John Howard Yoder, in *Christian Witness to the State,*[18] begins with the presumption that the state's main purpose is to sustain the social order by restraining evil through exercising its power of the sword. While this is the state's God given mandate, Yoder's pacifist position means that a Christian cannot threaten or take away the life and liberty of another; thus a Christian will find it difficult to participate in governance. He describes two ages that coexist but differ in terms of direction. The present age is characterized in terms of sin and the coming age is the redemptive reality where God's will is done. The task of the church is to point forward as the social manifestation of the ultimate triumph of God's redemptive work.

States are used by God to maintain order and to punish one another. The state maintains peace so that the church can fulfil its task of evangelism. The basis of the church's witness to the state is its understanding of the state function within the redemptive plan. The witness is indirect through the example of the church, an alternative society which demonstrates what love means in social relations. The direct witness of the church involves voicing concerns to the statesman. In speaking, Christians are mindful that most rulers are not committed Christians and that there is an incompatibility between non-resistance on the one hand and responsibility for normal government process on the other.

There are two ethics at play—the ethic of discipleship relevant for believers, and the ethic of justice which is concerned with self-preservation and maintaining a stable social order. This second ethic is all one can ask of the broader society. Christian witness is expressed in terms of specific criticisms concerning specific problems and these, if followed, would lead to another set

18 John Howard Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, Institute of Mennonite Studies No. 3. (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life, 1964).

of more demanding criticisms. For example, Christians do not call for the establishment of the perfect society but rather for the elimination of visible abuses. Christians ask that the least violent and the most just action be taken. However, of all the alternatives presented to the statesman by the Christian, none will be good in the Christian sense—they will only be less evil. The Christian works towards a minimum level of wrong. All communication is addressed to individuals and is in the form of a call for an individual response. The prior concern is for the welfare of the statesman as a person. All communication is in a sense pastoral. What the Christian addresses is the gospel in relation to the present situation of the statesman. The task is to call the statesman to an act of obedience that may cause him to re-evaluate his position and choose to make a step of faith.

Catholic

Jacques Maritain is a Catholic thinker who participated in the drafting of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In his book, *Integral Humanism*[19], he describes Christian engagement in terms of three planes of activity. The first is the spiritual where we act as members of the mystical body of Christ. This plane concerns the things of God and includes liturgical and sacramental life, work of virtues, and contemplative action. It is the plane of redemption, the plane of the church itself. On the second plane, we act as members of the terrestrial city and are engaged in affairs of terrestrial life. This is the realm of the things of Caesar, that of the intellectual, moral, aesthetic, social, and political. These two planes are distinct but not separate as all things submit to the power of Christ. There are, however, two common goods—spiritual and temporal.

On one level we act as Christians as such, on the second we act as Christians engaging in the world. The third plane is intermediary—the spiritual considered in connection to the temporal. In this zone, truths applicable to the temporal are connected to the revealed truths that the church has as a deposit (custodian). This is the plane that joins the spiritual and the temporal. On this plane the Christian appears before men as a Christian as such. This is the plane of Catholic action in collaboration with the apostolic teachings of the church. To defend religious interests in the temporal, Catholic civil action intervenes in political things. It would, however, be contrary to the nature of things to demand in the second plane a union of Catholics or a Catholic political party. In the political realm they do not function as Catholic politicians, but as politicians who are Catholic.

In both the Anabaptist and the Catholic views, there is a presumption of dualism. Both identify two realms in which the role of the church and the individual differ depending on which realm they are engaging. Here distinctions are maintained between the sacred and

19 Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom*, [1936. translated by Geoffrey Bles in 1939 as *True Humanism*].

the secular, between the spiritual and the temporal. Politics concerns the latter, the mundane. There is no distinctive Christian vision for politics. Politics is at best a neutral area of Christian participation, like that of business, and at worst it is a worldly affair, one in which it is difficult to maintain an effective Christian witness. Being a Christian politician means you bring an ethic to your work, just as being a Christian student or a Christian business person means you are honest and trustworthy. The political is not something that you understand differently from other politicians (or citizens for that matter).

Reformed

Within the reformed approach, the believer is fully participative and fully engaged in redemptive work in all areas of life. There is no one realm or one set of activities that are more spiritual or more holy. The book *God and Politics*, edited by Gary Smith, brings together essays of supporters defending four approaches to reformed politics operative in the United States: Christian America, National Confessionalism, Theonomy and Principled Pluralism.[20] For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the two that have most influence in Canada, the first and the last.

In the *Christian America* (Canada) perspective, the Christian heritage of the country is emphasized and the task of Christians is to revitalize it. Christian principles and values are understood to have shaped the laws and practices of the country. A Christian consensus shaped the structure of society and Christianity was granted special status under law. Secularization and humanism have eroded this heritage and actions should be taken to restore the explicitly Christian convictions in the government. The model for this position is Rome under Constantine. Laws need not conform to the laws of the Old Testament (the Theonomist position), but instead biblical principles and the Ten Commandments should inform and serve as the basis for law. This view entails a notion of a Christian commonwealth: a society structured to provide for the general welfare, taking Christian standards for what constitutes welfare and as the guide for attaining welfare. It is the role of a civil government to establish and promote biblical standards in legislation and law enforcement. Through democracy legislation is not imposed, rather Christians seek to persuade. Other religions would be tolerated and permitted to worship freely but public blasphemy would be illegal. In sum, Christians persuade society as a whole to adopt laws that are consistent with basic biblical principles.[21]

Principled Pluralism rejects isola-

20 Gary Scott Smith, ed., *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*. (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1989. The main representatives of the four positions are Harold O. J. Brown, William Edgar, Greg Bahnsen and Gordon Spykman respectively.

21 *National Confessionalism* is somewhat similar. It argues that all nations should declare allegiance to Jesus Christ in public documents and devise political structures that honour God.

tionist, accommodationist, dualist and dialectical positions in favour of one that is transformative. We live in a network of divinely ordained life-relationships and we fulfil our callings within a plurality of communal associations. Scripture presents universal norms that are applicable to all aspects and activities of life. These norms guide how we structure culture and our institutions such as the state, the family and the church. As Christians we seek to reform the state in accordance with biblical norms. The task of the state is to promote public justice in society. Justice is defined in terms of office: the state should safeguard the freedom, rights and responsibilities of citizens in the exercise of their offices. Every human has the right to a just and equitable share in the rich resources of God's creation: to life, liberty and a responsible exercise of their office. The state must also avoid partiality, and serves as the public defender of the poor and the powerless, and it safeguards religious freedom for all citizens. Principled pluralists reject the view that the origin of the state lay only in the redemptive purpose of God or that it lay in the order of preservation in which the task of the state is essentially negative. Rather, the state is located in the normative order of creation. The state is limited in its scope and its responsibility.

The four reformed approaches agree that a Christian view must not be imposed. They also agree that there is an integral relation between Christianity and politics and that God requires civil officials to conduct their affairs as his servants. Christians should promote biblical principles in political life through persuasion and all agree on the toleration of all faiths and on the positive role of the state. However, they disagree on the biblical view of justice –is it the Mosaic code (Theonomy), rights and responsibilities to exercise office, or enforcing the Ten Commandments? These reformed positions provide four models: Israel, Constantine, the Puritan and the pluralist.

The Anabaptist, Catholic and Reformed approaches differ in the understanding of the role of the state and the nature of Christian engagement in the political realm. They do, however, agree that the task of the church is to call the state to adhere to biblical principles. Their goal is to persuade government officials of the benefit of policy that is consistent with biblical norms.

Christian Political Engagement

Understanding the Context

When engaging politically, it is important to identify and understand the philosophy that has shaped and currently directs the political/legal foundation of your country. Canada is a very tolerant and peaceful society, yet it is one of the most ethno-culturally diverse countries in the world with its multicultural character enshrined in the Canadian constitution. While Canada, like European countries, was deeply influenced by the Christian tradition, it is becoming increasingly secularized and, particularly with the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* enacted in the early 1980s, directed by a decidedly liber-

al ethos. The religious nature of liberalism drives individual autonomy (self-determination) and equality through what Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor calls the 'politics of recognition', or what I characterize as a third impulse of liberalism, the move from freedom through equality to fraternity. Individual autonomy, the equality of all persons and the recognition (and affirmation) of difference guide the interpretation of the guarantees of life, liberty and the security of the person found in the Canadian *Charter*.

For example, in 1988, former Justice Wilson of Canada's Supreme Court wrote in a case about abortion, 'The theory underlying the *Charter* (Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*) is that the state will respect choices made by individuals and to the greatest extent possible, will avoid subordinating these choices to one conception of the good life.' Thus the goal of the *Charter* is to maximize a person's autonomy. Note that this argument implies that this view of self-determination is not itself tied to any one conception of the good. It is presumed to be neutral with respect to competing visions of the good life. Ten years later, the majority of the Supreme Court, in a case about the inclusion of sexual orientation into a provincial human rights code, wrote;

> The concept and principle of equality is almost intuitively understood and cherished by all. It is easy to praise these concepts as providing the foundation for a just society which permits every individual to live in dignity and in harmony with all. The difficulty lies in giving real effect to equality. Difficult as the goal of equality may be it is worth the arduous struggle to attain. It is only when equality is a reality that fraternity and harmony will be achieved. It is then that all individuals will truly live in dignity.

The Court not only wants to maximize autonomy, but it also affirms that true equality demands the acceptance of the dignity of others, not just in their personhood but also in the choices they make. This affirmation of all choices is what toleration is now understood to entail.

Interpreting freedom and equality in terms of individual autonomy as self-determination results in a privileging of critical choice, the ability of the individual to choose between visions of life, an over-expressive freedom, and the ability to fully express one's religious beliefs.[22] This emphasis is not only on the ability to choose, but also the capacity to move one's adherence from one comprehensive doctrine to another—with the attendant implications for the integrity of religious communities and the task of public education. As well, policies that are shaped or influenced by religious arguments are rejected. Thus in Canada, provincial legislation titled 'the Lord's Day Act was struck down by the courts while similar legislation titled 'One Days Rest In Seven' was deemed acceptable. And when Canada's Supreme Court upheld the sanctity of human life, the Court noted that it meant this in a 'secular' sense. Public arguments must be sec-

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22 See William Galston 'Expressive Liberty. Moral Pluralism, Political Liberalism: Three Sources of Liberal Theory', *William and Mary Law Review* 40 (1999), pp. 869-907.

ularized to be considered and religion is relegated to the private sphere.

The Role of the Church

Christian political engagement can be expressed individually, through the participation of the institutional church, through advocacy organizations and Christian political organizations and movements, or through political parties. For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on the engagement of the church. Here I am speaking of the church as an institution, not the church as the body of Christ.[23] As an institution, the church has a specific calling. While this calling will have a public and specifically a political dimension, the church is not primarily a political organization when understood in terms of government and public policy. In terms of the institutional church's political task, the church has several roles—such as the prophetic, the teaching and the reconciling roles. I will focus on its prophetic role.

The church, motivated by its understanding of scripture, calls the state to its task of public justice and encourages the state to govern in a way consistent with biblical principles. In this role, the church can remain non-partisan in that it does not lend public support to a specific political party nor to specific candidates for office. Similarly, when the church supports or opposes legislation, it targets the principles of the legislation, not the government or public officials that sponsor the initiative. And when commenting on court decisions, the focus is on the decision and not the judges.

While there may be situations when the church may need to become partisan, a non-partisan approach keeps the church's participation focused on principles. This focus on principles is an approach consistent with the Anabaptist, Catholic and Reformed view of the role of the church in politics. The church is not attempting to mobilize votes for or against parties or candidates, but rather to persuade elected officials, judges, civil servants and citizens in general of the merits of public policy being rooted and shaped by biblical principles. This approach is fitting for political participation in a religiously pluralistic society. While the principles articulated by the church are biblical, many of these principles are shared by other faiths and often undergird law and public policy. A difficult question is in determining the extent to which the church in its articulation of principles can seek to recommend specific policies such as, for example, proposing penalties for crimes or appropriate levels of funding for social programs.

EFC's Approach to Public Policy

Political engagement of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada can generally be clustered under four themes: the sanctity of human life, care for the vulnerable, family integrity and

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23 In my view, as the body, followers of Christ have a variety of gifts and callings and are involved in all areas of life. The church is not a community separate from society, but the body of Christ expressed ecclesiastically. The members of the body worship in churches and participate in all aspects of societal life, seeking to bear witness and call everyone to a commitment to Christ, and to reform all institutions into conformity with Christ.

religious freedom. Under the sanctity of human life we address issues such as abortion, reproductive and genetic technologies and euthanasia. Under care for the vulnerable we address poverty and homelessness, refugee issues, as well as child pornography and prostitution. Family integrity involves definitional issues (marriage, family) as well as questions concerning the role of the state in supporting the institution of the family. Religious freedom focuses on the religious freedom of individuals and the freedom of religious organizations, in particular, their ability to self-define. Many of the issues we address under these last two themes involve protecting these areas of life from encroachment from the state. As indicated above, the principled approach seeks to identify the biblical principle, show how it has been recognized in law, and explain the implications if violated. I will illustrate this with an example in the area of euthanasia.

The pro-euthanasia and assisted suicide movement is growing quickly in Canada. Recent polls indicate that the majority of Canadians now favor legalizing assisted suicide when the patient is terminally ill. The arguments for changing the law invoke the freedom of the individual to control their own life (self-determination). In the case of assisted suicide, some disabled or terminally ill persons have argued that since suicide is not a criminal offence, and since disabled persons do not have the ability to kill themselves the way able bodied persons do, the law against assisted suicide prevents them from doing what able-bodied persons can do. Religious arguments advanced to oppose euthanasia are rejected as an imposition of one's beliefs on another and as unsuitable for sustaining law and public policy.

When appearing before a Parliamentary committee on these issues, we began by arguing that Canada was founded on and shaped by a vision of life which is characterized by specific values and rooted in certain moral principles. We argued that our legal system is not morally neutral, that it reflects a vision of life and an understanding of right and wrong, and how it is we should live together as a nation. We substantiated this with quotes from various non-religious bodies such as the Law Reform Commission which wrote:

> In truth the criminal law is a moral system. It may be crude, it may have faults, it may be rough and ready, but basically it is a system of applied morality and justice. It serves to underline those values necessary and important to society. When acts occur that seriously transgress essential values, like the sanctity of life, society must speak out and reaffirm those values. This is the true role of criminal law.

Having argued that there are certain principles that undergird our legal system, we said that it is vital that we as a nation continually examine and affirm those principles and values that give shape to, and provide grounding for, our society. We argued that the identification and interpretation of these principles is a task in which all Canadians can participate. Acknowledging that various communities in our society will bring their own perspective to bear in this discussion, we said religious communities have a unique contribution to make.

We then identified four relevant principles: the sanctity of life, the stewardship of life, the compassion for life, and communal responsibility. In each case we explained our biblical understanding of the principle and then attempted to show how this principle has been reflected in Canadian law and public policy. Thus for the principle compassion for life we quoted from scripture (Love your neighbour as yourself—Leviticus 19:18, Luke 10:27) and said the following:

> As we believe human life is created in the image of God and the object of God's love and grace, life is something that we should cherish and care for. We should love others as we love ourselves. In both the Old and New Testaments, the people of Israel and the followers of Jesus were commanded to care for the alien, the widow, the orphan, and the poor.
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> It is this principle which is also reflected in our society's concern for the poor and the vulnerable, for those who are unable to care for themselves. It is reflected in our refugee programs and in our private and our governmental relief and development programs overseas. It is also reflected in the myriad of voluntary associations and programs that care for a variety of human needs here in Canada.

We went on to discuss the life-affirming ethos that has shaped Canadian policy in health care and after reviewing the current law, explained how the legalization of assisted suicide or euthanasia would undermine this ethos and place vulnerable persons at risk. We also explained the implications for health care providers and the health care system. We concluded as follows:

> Euthanasia and physician assisted suicide are essentially killing those who are terminally ill or elderly. These are the very people most deserving of respect and protection in our society. We would strongly urge you to resist those who are calling for legalization of these forms of killing. We turn instead to an affirmation of the 'death with dignity' afforded by palliative care professionals.
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> Our concern is that the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia will undermine the life-affirming ethos which currently shapes our legal system. We will legitimize suicide by implying that in some situations it is acceptable. We will be saying that murder is permissible even when the victim poses no threat to anyone else. It will imply that sometimes a choice for death is legitimate and that it is sometimes permissible in our society for one person to compassionately murder another. It will suggest that life is at times optional and that our society at times sanctions the choice for death.

When we subsequently appeared before Canada's Supreme Court, our argument followed the same lines. We intervened jointly with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) as the argument focused on the sanctity of human life, a principle to which both EFC and the CCCB subscribe. We were the only parties in the case to promote the sanctity of human life and in a split decision, the majority grounded its decision to uphold the law on the importance of recognizing the sanctity of human life in Canadian law. Even though the law against assisted suicide was found to violate the section of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom* that guarantee life, liberty and the security of the person, the court ruled that this infringement was justified due to the state's interest in preserving the sanctity of human life.

Conclusion

There are several outstanding issues

that still need to be addressed. One is finding agreement on the proper role of the state. In Canada, the voting patterns of evangelicals display support for parties across the political spectrum, in numbers quite proportionate to that of the general population. While there may be consensus on the need to alleviate poverty, there is significant difference on what the role of the state should be in addressing poverty. Should the state redistribute wealth through taxation and spending on social welfare programs, or should it reduce taxes, enabling the business and private sectors to redirect their spending and provide incentives for addressing social needs through individual or corporate charitable efforts? These differences manifest themselves in support for various political approaches to the issue. As James Skillen argues in his book *The Scattered Voice*[24], identifying the proper role of the state is a critical issue for Christian engagement.

Other issues that Christians grapple with are the appropriate place and influence of a dominant religion in a pluralist society, identifying appropriate limits, if any, to religious freedom and religious expression and, as mentioned earlier, the degree of specificity that is appropriate for churches to make in recommending policy alternatives.

The good news is that I rarely hear Christians say we should not be involved politically. If it is expressed, it is more a result of frustration or exasperation than a manifestation of a view of engagement. Whereas ten years ago there was some resistance to EFC intervening before Canada's Supreme Court, it is now expected that we will intervene in the important cases. Through developing consensus on a variety of issues and articulating our perspective in a way that is acceptable to the community we represent, we are able to place new issues on the table for discussion, issues for which there is no as yet obvious point of consensus. It is a hard process yet it forces us to confront our ideological preferences with the teaching of Scripture, which is what the renewing of our minds is all about.

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24 James Skillen, *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).