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Toward an Evangelical Political Philosophy

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IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, evangelicals have had more political influence in the U.S. than at any time in this century. But we are not certain what to do with it. Unless we find out, we will squander an historic opportunity to nudge this society toward moral renewal and justice for all.

To be sure, there are many evangelical voices loudly promoting political agendas. But the voices are often confused, contradictory and superficial. Evangelicals lack anything remotely similar to Catholicism's papal encyclicals and episcopal pronouncements on social and political issues that have provided Roman Catholics with a careful, integrated foundational framework for approaching each concrete political decision. (This deficiency, as Mark

Noll points out, is one important aspect of the 'scandal of the evangelical mind'.¹) On the other hand, when evangelicals have acted politically, we have usually jumped into the political fray without doing our theoretical, theological homework. That our confused, superficial activity has had little lasting impact should not surprise us.

If that is to change, we urgently need to develop a careful systematic political philosophy to guide and sustain our activism. That, of course, is a task requiring years, indeed decades of communal work. Here, I want briefly first to illustrate some problems that arise because we lack an evangelical political philosophy; second, to outline how I try to move from a biblical nor-

¹ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994).

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mative framework and careful societal analysis to a political philosophy; and third, to point to a few ways to move forward.

Some may object to my assertion that we lack an evangelical political philosophy by pointing to the fact that Reformed, Lutheran, and to a lesser extent, Anabaptist evangelicals all have developed systematic reflection on politics. One thinks, for example, of the marvelous Kuyperian tradition of political philosophy that James Skillen articulates so well.²

Careful political reflection within each of these evangelical traditions is very helpful for our work. But I do not think it is adequate to guide evangelical political engagement today and tomorrow. Why? There are a large number of evangelicals in this country and in many countries around the world who represent a vast array of different theological and ecclesiastical traditions. The Pentecostals, Wesleyans, African-Americans—to name a few—are not about to fully embrace a Reformed political philosophy even though they are glad to learn from Abraham Kuyper. But all these evangelicals from a vast array of traditions have some common sense of identity as evangelicals and to some extent want to work together on many things, including politics, in spite of their theological differences. In order to do that effectively, they need to embrace at least a common set of principles for a political philosophy.

Present Confusion

It is not hard to illustrate the way the absence of a foundational political philosophy leads evangelical political activists to rush off madly in all directions. (In the early years of Moral Majority, according to Ed Dobson, it was often 'ready, fire, aim.')

Take the area of moral decay. Virtually all Christians, and certainly all evangelicals, agree both that serious moral decay threatens this society and also that religious communities are the only place to look for that radical spiritual conversion that transforms persons and that such communities are the primary moral teachers of the virtues that decent societies require. Some evangelicals think the solution is a constitutional amendment to restore prayer in the schools. Others want constitutional, or at least legislative, action to guarantee equal benefits to adherents of all religious views. And other evangelicals think both of the previous proposals would violate the First Amendment and destroy both church and state.

Or consider evangelical pronouncements on the role of government. Sometimes, when attacking government programmes they dislike, evangelical voices adopt libertarian arguments that would preclude almost all government activity to promote economic justice ('Helping the poor is a task for individuals and churches, not the government'). Then when the issues change to abortion, family, euthanasia, and pornography, the same people loudly demand vigorous government action. There might be a good case to be made for private programmes in the first case and legislation in the second. But if one uses argu-

2 For example, James W. Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

ments in one area that run counter to one's agenda in another, one appears confused and superficial.

The absence of a consistent ethic of life leads to absurd inconsistency. Some evangelical political voices make the sanctity of human life (up to birth and just before death) the overriding issue and neglect the way poverty and smoking destroy millions. Other evangelicals point out that racism, poverty and environmental decay all kill and yet seem little concerned with millions of abortions each year.³

Some of our superficiality and confusion result from the fact that we have seldom taken the time to work out carefully the specific policy implications of biblical faith. Too often we just assume that traditional American values or the Republican (or, less often, the Democratic) Party's platform are right. Former Christian Coalition Director Ralph Reed, for example, says that when he became a committed Christian and started attending an evangelical church, 'my religious beliefs never changed my views on the [political] issues to any great degree because my political philosophy was already well developed'.⁴ Without testing political agendas on the basis of biblical norms, Christians often uncritically endorse left-wing or (more often) right-wing ideological agendas.

I need not go on illustrating this basic point. Evangelical political impact today is weakened because our voices are confused, contradictory, and

superficial. We contradict each other. Our agendas are shaped more by secular ideologies than divine revelation. We have no systematic foundational framework for careful dialogue about our specific policy differences or even for successful repudiation of extremists. And, oh, how the secular media love to publicize the worst examples such as intolerant attacks on the civil rights of gay Americans or the murder of doctors who perform abortions.

Evangelicals urgently need some commonly agreed upon principles of a political philosophy. It would not solve all our political problems. But it would help.

Methodology

Here I want to sketch the methodology I seek to use in approaching political questions.

A. Jesus Is Lord

The centrepiece of all genuinely Christian politics is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that the Galilean champion of the poor and marginalized is the Creator of the galaxies, the Sovereign of the universe. Therefore all who believe in him seek to submit every realm of life—whether family, economics or politics—unconditionally to Christ the Lord.

Christians therefore reject the uncritical embrace of any and every secular ideology—whether right, left, 'Green', libertarian, or communitarian. The Christian's starting point must be the Word of God which is revealed partially in creation, more fully in the Bible, and most completely in Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word become flesh.

³ See my *Completely Pro-Life* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1987).

⁴ *Active Faith* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 23.

Founding political engagement on ideologies of left or right rather than Christ is fundamentally un-Christian.

B. Four Components

Starting with the Lordship of Christ, however, does not instantly provide detailed political guidance on specific policy issues. Nor does citing specific biblical texts instantly solve complex political questions. Serious Christian political engagement must recognize the complexity and ambiguity of political decisions. Every political judgment rests finally on a normative framework on the one hand and careful study of society and the world on the other. It is helpful to distinguish four different, interrelated components of every political decision: 1) a normative framework; 2) a broad study of society and the world; 3) a political philosophy; and 4) detailed social analysis on specific issues.

1. *Normative Framework.* If one's political activity is to be genuinely Christian, then the guiding norms for one's politics must come from the core of one's faith. Since biblical faith teaches that some sense of the true and good is embedded in the human conscience, common wisdom (call it natural law if you like) can offer some guidance. Some Christians, especially Roman Catholics, believe that it is still possible to derive major input for one's normative framework from general revelation.⁵ My own inclination is to think that since the Fall has deeply

clouded the understanding of God's law written on all hearts, general revelation by itself cannot be the primary source of the Christian's normative framework for political engagement. For clarity, therefore, I turn to the revealed truth of the Scriptures.

Discovering relevant biblical norms for specific political issues is not, however, a matter of simple proof-texting. The Bible is full of commands, stories, proverbs—in short, a wide variety of materials written over many centuries. To develop a fully biblical perspective on political issues, we need two things: a) a biblical view of the world and persons (I call this the biblical story); b) an understanding of biblical teaching related to many concrete issues—for example, the family or economic justice (I call these biblical paradigms). To develop a normative biblical framework, we must in principle examine all relevant biblical passages, understand each text according to proper principles of exegesis, and then formulate a comprehensive summary of all relevant canonical material. The most sweeping comprehensive summary would deal with the biblical story. The other comprehensive summaries (or biblical paradigms) would cover things such as the poor, the family, work, justice, the dignity of persons, etc.⁶

⁵ See John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, and J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997).

⁶ See for example my 'Toward a Biblical Perspective on Equality', *Interpretation* (April-June, 1989), pp. 156-69, where I work toward a biblical paradigm on 'economic equality'. It is obvious that developing a canonical biblical paradigm on any issue involves many different steps: detailed exegesis of all relevant biblical passages, a hermeneutical understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, etc. Disagreement can arise at any point.

2. *Broad Study of Society and the World.* By itself, however, the biblical framework is insufficient. Nothing in the Bible talks explicitly about the pros and cons of a market economy or multinational corporations or the impact of five billion people on the natural environment around them.

In addition to a normative framework, we need a broad, comprehensive study of our world. That study takes many forms. It includes reflection on the historical development of society, the economy, political systems, etc. (As finite, historical beings, we come to see some things more clearly as history unfolds.) It also includes, in principle, detailed, comprehensive socio-economic, political analysis of everything relevant to any particular political question.

This careful study becomes central at two stages of analysis. One's analysis of the history of economics, politics, etc., helps to shape one's political philosophy (see below). For example, as the Marxist experiment worked itself out in the course of the twentieth century, it became more and more clear not only that Marxist philosophy contradicted the biblical view of persons but also that in practice Marxism led to economic inefficiency and political totalitarianism. Similarly, it is becoming increasingly clear that substantial injustice accompanies the functioning of today's market economies. Detailed social analysis of everything relevant to a particular politician or piece of legislation is also crucial (see below).

3. *Political Philosophy.* In addition to a biblical framework and a broad study of society and the world, Christians engaged in politics also need a political philosophy. It is simply

impossible, every time one wants to make a political decision, to spend days (actually years) reviewing the mountains of relevant biblical material and complex studies of society. We need a framework, a road map, a handy guide—in short, a political philosophy. But we dare not adopt our political philosophy uncritically from some non-Christian source. It must emerge from our normative biblical framework and painstaking, extensive socio-economic, political analysis.

4. *Detailed Social Analysis on Specific Issues.* Even after a Christian has a political philosophy shaped by both a normative biblical framework and careful study of society and the world, one still needs to do painstaking, detailed social analysis on everything relevant to a particular legislative proposal or a specific election. Two people could, in principle, have identical normative frameworks, identical historical analyses of modern society and identical political philosophies and still disagree on whether or not, for example, to raise the minimum wage. Why? Because they rely on different economic analyses of the actual effects of raising the minimum wage. The only way to make progress on settling such a disagreement is to go back together and do further detailed economic analysis. Careful detailed social analysis of all the available information relevant to any specific political judgment is the fourth essential ingredient of any responsible Christian political engagement.

C. Other Introductory Points

1. *Complexity and Political Necessity.* The method just described is com-

plex—in fact, far more complex than I have been able to suggest here. Every one of the four steps intersects with all the others. Our reading of history shapes the questions we put to the Bible as we seek to develop a normative framework. That framework in turn shapes everything else.

In real life, we cannot wait to make political decisions until we have completed all the study that is desirable. We must make decisions based on our best current understanding and then keep open to further insight and information.

2. *Cooperation and Humility.* The kind of study required for faithful Christian political engagement is far too complex for any one individual. We need communal activity, teams of scholars and activists, and organizations and networks working together to develop a common vision and agenda. For successful Christian political engagement, then, we need groups of Christians who can integrate a normative biblical framework, study of society and world, a political philosophy (derived from the former two ingredients) and detailed social analysis as they all approach every major issue of contemporary political life. That means working out concrete public policy proposals on everything from welfare reform to family policy to peace-making in Bosnia.

Knowing the complexity of such political judgements and the possibility of mistakes at every step, we must always hold our specific political conclusions with great humility and tentativeness. But we should dare to advocate boldly for specific policies because we have sought to ground our specific conclusions in a biblical framework

and responsible social analysis even as we invite friend and foe alike to help us improve our analysis of both the Scriptures and society at every point.

3. *Resolving Disagreements.* It would help immensely to reduce political disagreements among Christians if we would be more precise about where we disagree. It is unhelpful to confuse a disagreement over the proper interpretation of Matthew 25 with lack of compassion for the poor or disagreement over the relative merits of more or less government intervention in market economies. To the extent that we can be precise about exactly where we disagree, we can make more progress in overcoming our differences.⁷

4. *Common Language.* In a pluralistic society one additional crucial step is essential. Many citizens have no interest at all in political proposals advocated on the basis of a biblical framework. Therefore we must develop a common language grounded in the common good of all citizens when we take our specific proposals into the public realm. We must try to develop reasons for our policies that are intelligible and convincing to all people, not just Christians.

5. *The Starting Point: The Christian Community.* It is absolutely crucial, however, that Christians first articulate and develop their political agenda and concrete proposals within the Christian community on the basis of biblical norms. If we do not, we will end up adopting secular norms and values and their corresponding political ide-

⁷ See my further comments on this in my 'A Plea for More Radical Conservatives and More Conserving Radicals,' *Transformation* (January-March, 1987), pp. 11-16.

ologies. The result will be a compromised, often fundamentally un-Christian, political engagement.

That is exactly what has happened with many Christians in politics. Too many Christians have uncritically adopted left-wing or right-wing politics. The result has been a sub-Christian religious right that correctly championed the family and the sanctity of human life, but neglected economic justice for the poor, uncritically endorsed American nationalism, ignored environmental concern for God's creation, and neglected to struggle against racism. Equally sub-Christian has been a religious left that rightly defended justice, peace and the integrity of creation but largely forgot about the importance of the family and sexual integrity, uncritically endorsed Marxism, the sexual revolution, and almost everything championed under the banner of gay rights, overlooked the fact that freedom is as important as justice, and failed to defend the most vulnerable of all, the unborn and the very old.

This essay is written first of all for the Christian community. Therefore, it first outlines a normative biblical framework, and then sketches a political philosophy. Little attention is given to developing the common language for advocating these policies in the larger pluralistic society—although that is also an essential task.

Normative Biblical Framework

A. The Biblical Story.

The biblical story provides an essential framework for Christian political

thought. The entire created order is good and precious because it comes from the hand of a loving God. Persons created in the image of God are called to a servant-like stewardship of the rest of the Creator's handiwork. Tragically, humanity rebelled against God and the result is selfish persons, twisted social relationships and institutions and even a groaning, disordered creation. Unwilling to forsake fallen humanity, however, the Creator began a long historical process of salvation to restore a right relationship among God, persons, and the creation around them. At the centre of that redeeming grace is Jesus Christ, Nazarene Carpenter and Eternal Word, who models perfect humanity, atones for our sins, and rises from the dead to break the power of evil. History is moving toward the Risen Lord's return when all things will be restored to wholeness.⁸ This biblical story provides a foundation for thinking about the nature, dignity, and destiny of persons, the status of the non-human world, the importance of the historical process, and the ultimate meaning of all things.

From this biblical story as well as all the other relevant biblical material, we can develop comprehensive biblical summaries or paradigms of specific topics that are especially relevant to politics. The following are some of the most important.⁹

⁸ This is not to argue for universalism (i.e., the salvation of every person).

⁹ Note: In principle one would need to examine every relevant biblical passage using appropriate exegetical tools, understand the trajectory of biblical revelation on that issue, and then formulate a comprehensive canoni-

B. Biblical Paradigms.

1. *The Special Dignity and Sanctity of Every Human Being* Every person—and only human beings—is made in the image of God, called to stewardship of the non-human creation, made to find fulfilment only when rightly related to God, neighbour, the earth, and self, summoned to respond in freedom to God's invitation of salvation, and invited to live forever in the presence of God.

We must act on the belief that from the moment of conception, we are dealing with human life. No extended biblical passage explicitly teaches that; none denies it. A number of texts use words for the unborn that are normally applied to those who have been born. For nineteen centuries, the Christian church has been overwhelmingly opposed to abortion. Modern science now demonstrates with astounding detail that from the moment of conception, a genetically distinct human being with a continuous biological development exists. If one is uncertain whether this developing foetus is a human being, one should adopt this as a working assumption. To do otherwise would be like shooting blindly into a darkened theatre with the justification that we cannot know whether we

will hit empty seats or murder innocent persons. The directly intended taking of innocent human life—whether in abortion or euthanasia—is wrong.

2. *Freedom of Belief.* Throughout biblical history, God gives persons enormous freedom to respond in obedience or rebellion, unbelief or faith to God. Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares shows that God chooses to allow this freedom to persons until the final judgement. Therefore, religious freedom is an essential element of a good society.

3. *The Family.* Strong, stable families (persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption) are essential for a good society. Keeping marriage vows, accepting God's design that sexual intercourse be reserved for a man and a woman united in life-long marriage covenant, and valuing singles in the extended family are all important aspects of strengthening the family.

4. *Justice.* The two key Hebrew words for justice (*mishpat* and *sedaqah*) are used both to call for just courts and just economic arrangements.

Fair courts require honest witnesses and impartial justice which is not biased toward rich or poor. Fair economic arrangements¹⁰ require—as the Old Testament treatment of the land (the basic capital in an agricultural society) shows—an arrangement

cal paradigm in each specific area. To develop each such paradigm requires a lifetime of exacting scholarship. Here I can only sketch in the briefest fashion what I believe would be the result of that kind of task. Undoubtedly, of course, my understanding is only partial. Wherever better exegesis and more faithful integration of all canonical material requires modification of the following brief parts, I eagerly agree to change them.

¹⁰ See an extended treatment of this issue in Stephen Mott and Ronald J. Sider, 'Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm', in David P. Gushee, ed., *Towards a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), Chapter 1.

where all families and persons have access to the productive resources needed to earn a decent living and be dignified participating members of society. Sometimes, of course, wrong personal choices rightly result in the loss of these productive resources for a time, but God does not want that to continue forever. Frequently, too, according to the Bible, powerful oppressive people seize these resources from the poorest. Justice requires restoration of equitable arrangements where all have the opportunity to work and thus obtain a generous portion of the necessities of life. In addition, those who are unable to work and provide for themselves must be cared for by their family and the larger community.

5. *A Special Concern for the Poor.* Hundreds of biblical texts declare God's special concern for the poor and demand that God's people imitate God's concern. One crucial measure of how obedient people judge societies and policies is by what they do to the poorest, weakest and most marginalized. This special concern to strengthen the poorest is not a bias toward the poor but rather a concern for equal justice for everyone.

6. *Work.* Work is essential to the dignity of human beings who are called to be co-shapers of history with God. Every able person has the responsibility to work and people have the obligation to structure society so that every person can work in a way that respects human dignity and earns a decent living.

7. *Peacemaking.* Christians look forward to the time when 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war anymore'. Until the Lord returns, unfortunately, per-

sons persistently resort to wars and rumours of wars. Many Christians believe they should, as the lesser of two evils, engage in just wars for the sake of preserving some order and peace. Other Christians believe that killing is always contrary to the teaching of Christ and that he calls us to overcome our enemies with suffering love rather than the sword. But all agree that Jesus' words 'Blessed are the peacemakers' are urgent in our time.

8. *Individuality and Community.* Biblical faith holds together both the inestimable value of each person and each person's freedom to shape their own life and also the fact that persons are made for community and achieve wholeness only in right relationship with others in the family and the larger society.

9. *Rulers.* God ordains rulers both to restrain evil and promote good. In biblical thought, the justice which God calls the king to do (Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14) includes nurturing both fair courts and economic systems that strengthen the poor.

God stands far above every political ruler. No politician or government has ultimate authority. The story of Naboth's vineyard demonstrates the rights of individual families over against the king. When the king defied God's law, the prophet challenged and condemned them. Everyone and everything, including rulers and government, have only a limited authority which is subordinate to the Divine Sovereign.

Political Philosophy

The Bible does not prescribe any par-

ticular political philosophy. Political philosophies emerge as people in community over a period of time integrate a normative framework and careful study and reflection on historical experience. As long as we understand our political philosophy as a useful guide (to be improved by further normative reflection and social analysis) rather than an unchanging dogma, it can be a helpful tool for navigating complex political decisions.

The following components of a political philosophy are, I hope, consistent with biblical revelation and rigorous social analysis.

A. Democratization and Decentralization of Power

There is both a positive and a negative reason for decentralizing all forms of power. Each person is called to exercise her creation mandate and become a co-worker with God in shaping history. If a small elite makes most decisions, the majority cannot exercise their God-given mandate. Negatively, as Lord Acton pointed out, power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely. Sinful people in a fallen world will almost always use unchecked centralized power to benefit themselves unfairly and oppress others. Therefore to avoid totalitarianism and injustice, power must be decentralized.

The principle of subsidiarity in Catholic social teaching rightly stresses that other things being equal, activity should be undertaken by a lower level of government or by a smaller societal institution rather than a higher. At the same time, it must be clearly recognized that some things can only be

done (or at least done well) in a more centralized way. Careful analysis is needed in each situation.

B. Democracy

A concern for human rights, individual freedom, and the decentralization of power all lead to a democratic political order. When freedom of speech, secret voting and universal suffrage exist, people—at least in theory—have the political power to shape society for the benefit of the majority. Separating legislative, administrative and judicial functions and balancing national, state and local governmental realms also decentralize power.

C. Non-Governmental Institutions

A large group of institutions intermediate between the individual and government decentralize power and provide smaller contexts for human communities to flourish. These include the family, the church, the media, the schools, the economy, and a host of smaller voluntary associations. These intermediate centres of power provide a check on governmental power and thus are a significant foundation of freedom.

D. Private Ownership and a Market Economy

The history of the twentieth century has shown clearly that when the state owns and controls most of the economy, economic and political power is so centralized that totalitarianism is almost guaranteed. Genuinely decentralized private ownership, on the other hand, nurtures free individuals

and serves as a counter balance to political power. Determining prices and production via supply and demand has also proven to be far more efficient than central planning.

Huge privately-owned corporations, of course, can also become centres of enormous economic power. When the same corporations own the media and provide most of the funding for election campaigns, economic and political power is again dangerously centralized.

A concern for justice and freedom demands a continuing vigilance against all forms of centralized economic power and constant effort to strengthen smaller centres of economic life including family-owned farms and businesses, cooperatives, and widespread home ownership.

E. Religious Freedom and Church/State Relations.

In the United States, the first amendment's prohibition against the government's establishing any official religion or preventing its free exercise is a crucial aspect of a society that truly respects human dignity and individual freedom. Religious freedom is a gift from God, not the state. Government can only acknowledge and defend it.

Avoiding established religion, however, does not mean that religious expression is banished to the private sphere. Everyone, including religious people, should be free to develop and state the implications of their deepest convictions for public policy. Faith-based institutions have a long and venerable history of engagement in education, health care, and social welfare. When government adopts programmes

to enable the voluntary sector to serve the public good in these areas, there should be no discrimination in eligibility on account of religion, nor should there be exclusionary criteria that force these providers to engage in self-censorship or to otherwise abandon their religious character.

F. Human Rights

The right to life and freedom are inalienable because they come from God, not government. Government should recognize and protect freedom of religion, speech, and political activity.

G. Family

Government rightly recognizes and favours the family (those related by blood, marriage and adoption) and especially the nuclear family (wife, husband and children) with its larger circle of extended family (grandparents, etc.) as an essential element in a stable society. The family, not government, has the primary responsibility for raising children. Religious institutions can do far more than government to strengthen the family, but government should do what it can. That includes discouraging (although not preventing) divorce and sexual promiscuity and recognizing that children are best served when they live with both of their parents. It also includes not broadening the definition of marriage to include gay partners and not defining family as any two or more people cohabiting. Government rightly offers tax and other benefits that favour marriage rather than cohabitation or divorce.

H. Care for Creation and a Sustainable Planet

Responsible care for creation flows from a biblical worldview. We face a long-term environmental crisis. Utilitarian attitudes must be balanced by a recognition of the intrinsic worth of all God's creation and human responsibility to act as God's faithful stewards. Human beings have far more worth than plants or animals. But very seldom, if ever, do we have to choose between taking a human life and destroying an endangered species. Usually it is a choice between growing affluence and obliterating the handiwork of the Creator.

We must aim to develop sustainable economic practices that reduce the stress on natural systems and make it possible for us to pass on a lovely, sustainable planet to our descendants. The needs of the poor and most vulnerable must be central in all environmental decisions; the rich must pay the major cost of reducing environmental damage. We must encourage alternative sources of energy that decrease our reliance on non-renewal sources. We must balance the needs of workers and the environment.

I. The Role of Government

Government should both restrain evil and promote the common good. Nurturing an economic order where everyone, especially the poorest, has the resources to earn a decent living is a central concern of good government. Government is responsible for providing the legal and social framework in which the other institutions in society can flourish. Government should carefully strengthen rather than replace

society's intermediate institutions when they experience trouble.

What should be legislated and what not? Why should there be laws against something like racial discrimination in the sale of housing and not against an act of adultery? The following considerations are relevant: 1) Individuals should normally be free to harm themselves (e.g., get drunk regularly at home) but not be free to harm others (drive while drunk); 2) laws must be enforceable in a way that does not undermine other important values (e.g., even if it were good in spite of the first principle, to have a criminal penalty for adultery, it would be impossible to enforce such a law without the kind of police state that would destroy freedom); 3) laws have a teaching function—to some extent people think (wrongly) that what is legal is moral.

J. Work and Workers

Since work is essential to human dignity, every able-bodied person should have the opportunity to work at a job that pays a living wage that can support a family. An unemployment rate that denies the dignity of work to people other than those properly in transition from one job to another is immoral and socially destructive. Conversely, people who can work have an obligation to do so in order to earn their living. Welfare policies should assist those who cannot care for themselves but dare not discourage work and responsibility.

Workers have a right to safe working conditions, a living wage and reasonable job security. The legal right of workers to organize unions counterbalances corporate economic power,

encourages justice, and nurtures dignity and self-respect.

K. The Priority of the Poor

Poverty has many causes. Those who are poor because they are unable to provide for themselves should be given a decent living by their family and/or other non-governmental groups where possible and the government where necessary. Those who are poor because of personal irresponsibility should suffer appropriate consequences. Those, however, who are poor—whether through accident of birth, or the neglect or oppression of others—because they lack the education and the capital to be productive, self-sufficient members of society should be empowered by both private institutions and government.

Justice at least demands that every person has equal opportunity to acquire the basic capital (whether land, money or education) that will enable that person to earn a decent living and be a dignified participating member of society. Strengthening the poor by providing such opportunity should be a central concern of government. Every significant governmental decision should be judged by its impact on the poorest.

L. A Consistent Ethic of Life

The first and most basic human right is the inviolable right to life of every human being. The first and most basic responsibility of civil law is to ensure that this right is recognized and protected.

Abortion involves the direct, intentional and violent taking of human life.

No law which legitimizes the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion can be just. Therefore, we must work for the legal protection of the unborn, and oppose all public funding of abortions.

At the same time, we must develop a wide range of alternatives to abortion—both to reduce the evil of abortion and also in recognition that two people are directly involved, not just one. A caring society will surround women with unwanted pregnancies with love and concrete support including financial assistance and better adoption alternatives.

Euthanasia—the direct killing of the aged and infirm either with or without their consent—is wrong. That does not mean that it is immoral to refuse or withhold extraordinary medical treatment when death is imminent or inevitable. But we dare not blur the distinction between on the one hand *allowing* a person to die and on the other *killing* a person.

Concern for a consistent ethic of life does not end with abortion and euthanasia. Life does not begin at conception and end at birth. Tens of millions of people die unnecessarily each year of starvation and malnutrition. Tobacco kills millions of people prematurely each year. Capital punishment kills human beings. We should seek to protect the sanctity of human life wherever it is threatened and violated.

That is not to deny a significant moral difference between abortion and death from lung cancer caused by smoking. The direct, intentional taking of innocent human life in abortion, euthanasia, and genocide is morally more grave than the indirect, unintentional taking of human life in starva-

tion or death from smoking. But all are wrong and all reflect disregard for the inestimable value of human life. Respect for human life is a seamless garment. A consistent ethic of life opposes and seeks to reduce not only abortion and euthanasia but also capital punishment, starvation and cigarette-induced cancer.

M. Peacemaking

Those who threaten society, from within or without, must be restrained. Historically, that has usually been done through lethal force as a last resort. Historically, too, it is true both that vast numbers of people have been killed and also that a variety of non-violent methods of conflict resolution have successfully replaced lethal force. The courts, for example, replaced duelling. In the twentieth century, Gandhi, King and a host of others successfully used non-violent techniques to end oppression and seek justice.

Christians today disagree over the extent to which non-violent models of conflict resolution can successfully replace most or all use of lethal force. But all agree that the search for non-violent alternatives must be greatly strengthened. Wherever possible, non-violence must replace lethal force.

Towards an Evangelical Political Philosophy

I have tried to sketch, very briefly, my own developing understanding of some of the principles for an evangelical political philosophy. But I am not content simply to have individual thinkers work on this in their academic and pro-

fessional colloquia!

I think evangelical leaders in this country need to come together and try to hammer out a declaration—let's call it 'Principles for an Evangelical Political Philosophy'—that could be endorsed across a broad range of evangelical traditions. I think the same needs to happen in every country where substantial numbers of evangelicals exist and are engaged in politics. It also needs to happen at a global level so that people from other countries can help us overcome our one-sidedness and blind spots.

How might we arrive at such a declaration that would help us? It would be foolish to try to sketch a detailed process for developing a document on principles for an evangelical political philosophy widely embraced by a broad cross section of evangelicals in the United States. The venture is enormously difficult. Success can come only at the end of a lengthy journey that will inevitably involve detours and land mines. Pilgrims on the journey will need to improvise at each stage.

However, three things, at least, seem clear to me. The process must include a wide range of evangelical voices; the goal should be limited; and the engagement of major evangelical gatekeepers is indispensable.

If the result is to be of any lasting significance, then we must involve a *wide range of evangelical voices*. I could sit down today and sketch an evangelical political philosophy that many members of Evangelicals for Social Action would largely endorse. Gary Bauer could do the same for Family Research Council. What would help, if it could be developed, is a broad framework that both Gary and I, plus a wide

cross section of people who identify as evangelicals, could embrace as a guide for our concrete political engagement.

Second, our goal must be *limited*. Not even this raving optimist supposes that we could agree on a detailed, full-blown evangelical political philosophy across the range of views that exist within the evangelical community. For example, we do disagree, however incoherently, about the proper role of government. Therefore a comprehensive, common statement on the role of government would be impossible. But would it not help if a broad range of evangelical voices could together reject both libertarianism and socialism and then together define some general criteria for when and how government should and should not intervene in market economies?

The same would be true in a variety of areas. It would be helpful if we could agree together on the basic parameters of a consistent pro-life position, on how to balance the free exercise and non-establishment clauses of the First Amendment, and so on. If from the beginning we agree that our goal is a limited, incomplete evangelical political philosophy that different groups can develop further in divergent ways, we might at least be able to state a basic framework that would help us overcome some of our naiveté, confusion, and disagreement.

At first glance, our task appears to be nearly impossible. Evangelicals do not have a pope or bishops who can, with some authority, articulate an evangelical political philosophy. Instead, we have a confused Babel of more or less influential *gatekeepers* whose words are respected within their larger or smaller constituencies.

Thus, the project will succeed only if leaders representing this broad spectrum within the evangelical community endorse the process and sign the resulting document.

I have no illusions that most evangelical political disagreement would disappear even if multiple miracles produced a widely accepted set of principles for an evangelical political philosophy. Finite sinners that we are, we would still argue about its implications for specific public policy proposals. A common framework, however, would help in several ways.

First, agreement on a basic framework would help us identify more common ground on specific issues, which could help us have a greater impact.

Second, only if we develop a common vision that can sustain evangelical political engagement over the long haul will we produce any lasting political change.

Third, if evangelical Protestants (I include African-Americans and theologically orthodox Christians in the older Protestant denominations) developed even the beginnings of a common political philosophy, we would be in a better position to cooperate with Catholics in shaping public life. Few potential political developments are more important. If evangelicals and Catholics learn how to cooperate, this majority could significantly reshape American politics.

That brings me to my last point. I think one of the most urgent political tasks for American Christians is for white evangelicals, Catholics, African-American and Latino Christians to discover how to work together politically around a pro-life and pro-poor, pro-family and pro-racial justice agenda. A well

organized coalition of those groups could significantly reshape our public life for the better.

I see the beginnings of this kind of new coalition in several quarters. From the liberal side, the Call to Renewal and from the conservative side the signers of 'We Hold These Truths' have formally embraced this four-part agenda. In practice, of course, conservatives still tend to major on pro-life and pro-family issues and liberals still emphasize economic and racial justice. These one-sided approaches need to end.

I think the approach that I have sketched in this paper could help that happen. If a wide cross section of evangelical leaders prayerfully, thoughtfully sought to listen to what the Bible and historical experience tells us about principles for an evangelical political philosophy including the kind of balanced political agenda that reflects the full range of God's concerns, then I believe we might be able to overcome some of our differences and work together in a way that could bless this society and the world.

More Than a Methodist: The Life and Ministry of Donald English

Brian Hoare and Ian Randall

The death of Donald English on 28 August 1998 inflicted a heavy loss on world Methodism. An outstanding Methodist preacher, his gifts were used in local church ministry, overseas missions and at many significant large-scale events.

But Donald English was more than a Methodist. From his early period as a Christian leader he identified with the wider Christian world and was increasingly recognised as an evangelist who was able to serve within ecumenical contexts. *More Than a Methodist* pays tribute to the varied aspects of Donald's career. Beginning with his early life in the north-east of England, this biography traces Donald's time as a university student and his progression into theological teaching through to his period of missionary service in Nigeria, and then beyond; to his roles as General Secretary of the Methodist Home Mission Division from 1982 to 1995, and his two periods as

President of the Methodist Conference. There are also chapters analysing his ecumenical contributions, international role and personal qualities and attributes.

'Donald English was one of the greatest men of God I have ever known. His arms were wide open to the fellowship of all believers, whatever their denominational background.

There are very few men in the ministry of any denomination that I looked up to and wanted to emulate like Don English. He was an evangelist at heart, as well as a great teacher and pastor.'

Dr Billy Graham

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