Render Unto Rawls: Law, Gospel, and the Evangelical Fallacy

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I. INTRODUCTION

Many explicitly Christian voices inject themselves frequently and regularly into the current public policy and political discourse. Though not all, many of these Christian arguments proceed in something like the following manner. X is condemned (or required) by God, as revealed in the Bible. Therefore, the explicitly-required “Christian position” on X is for the law to prohibit or limit the activity (or require it), in accordance with the advocate’s interpretation of biblical ethical standards. To be clear, I mean to discuss only those scenarios where a Christian publicly identifies a position as being mandated by Christian morality or values --- i.e., where the public is given a message that some law or public policy is needed in order to comply with the Christian scriptures or God’s will. That is, in short, this article is about explicit political communications to the public in overt religious language of what Christianity supposedly requires for law and policy. As will be seen, these voices come quite famously from the Christian Religious Right, but they come from the Religious Left as well.

Political philosophers (most famously John Rawls) have posited that pluralism and principles of liberal democracy strongly counsel against resort to such religious views in support of or against any law or public policy. That is, in opposition to this overt religious advocacy in the political realm (though, it should be noted, not necessarily taking a substantive position on the issues, per se) is the position of Rawlsian political liberalism, which states generally that, all things being equal, such inaccessible religious arguments should not be made, but rather arguments should only be made by resort to “public reason” which all find to be accessible. Christian political voices counter that this results in an intolerable stifling of their voice, of requiring that they “bracket”
their religious views from the public square, and indeed results in the complete trivialization of their religious voice in the public square.

But there is something I am interested in which has largely evaded discussion. Advocates of the “values” position for law, or the “Christian” position or the “biblical” position I have described herein, are arguably communicating something theological to the public when they so advocate, and not just political. As Cass Sunstein and others have noted, actions have meanings, including laws and advocacy therefor. This is no less true when Christian advocates seek to persuade the public to enact a law that will be enforceable against everyone regardless of religious belief. I believe, at least in part, the message unavoidably communicated is that, “One must vote for and/or comply with this advocated law in order to comply with ‘Christian’ behavioral standards of morality, and thus, presumably, to gain greater favor with God.” That this is being communicated does not seem to be seriously questioned, either by those who advocate such “values” or “Christian” legal positions, or by the Rawlsian liberals who plead for restraint from such religious advocacy. All sides of the debate seem to share the underlying premise that the “Christian/values” argument for law and policy is communicating --- whether from the perspective of the Religious Right or the Religious Left --- that compliance with its policy articulations will result in greater favor with God.

This is as tragic as it is mistaken.

I bring my voice to this issue not primarily as a political philosopher, nor a constitutional expert, nor a professional theologian, but as a citizen and a legal academic who also happens to be an evangelical Christian. Although the chorus of voices from the right and left who bring their religious views to bear on political and legal issues in public discourse arises from a variety of religious perspectives, it seems that a great many of them come from various evangelical Christian groups loosely comprising what has come to be known as the Religious Right and Religious Left, respectively. It is these voices I wish to counter, for I believe that the theological message that their political advocacy communicates – whether intended or merely incidental --- is fundamentally at odds with the actual, central Christian message of the Gospel. For the fundamental message of the Gospel, held nearly universally by Protestant, Evangelical Christians who hold to a high view of scripture as revealed in the Bible, is this. Mankind as a species is broken and in conflict with God because

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of our sinful nature. Although God has revealed the level of conduct and behavior that He requires, none of us can actually comply and please God by our behavior alone — that is, by “works.” Rather, the means of salvation that God has provided comes in the form of the person of Jesus Christ, and His sacrificial death and resurrection. Evangelical Christians believe that it is only when a person acknowledges his sinful nature, realizes that Christ’s death was necessary and on his behalf, and turns to God and repents — that is, by “faith” — that salvation is achieved, and reconciliation with God can occur.

The issue is significant. We evangelical Christians, on Sundays, profess and believe that salvation and favor with God is obtained by faith alone in Christ alone. No amount of works, or behavior, will suffice. But on Mondays, these same evangelical Christians will put on their political hats and proclaim that we need to get God back in the public square, return to our status as a “Christian nation” and enact laws that reflect our “Christian values.” But law is inherently coercive, and is thus focused only on behavior. Seemingly forgetting everything we learned on Sunday, we proclaim on Monday that favor with God can be obtained by Christians and non-Christians alike (for the law of the land applies to all citizens) if they will only comply with state-sanctioned, coercive laws promulgated and advocated for in the name of “Christian principles” or “traditional family values.” Simply put, on Sundays we proclaim (correctly) that favor with God is obtained by faith. But on Mondays we proclaim (incorrectly) that favor with God can somehow be obtained by works.

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6 See Romans 3:23 (ESV) (“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”). See also John R.W. Stott, Basic Christianity 61-80 (2d ed. 1971) (discussing the fact and nature of sin, as well as the consequences of sin); Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter VI (“Of the fall of man, of sin, and the punishment thereof”) (available online at www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/index.html) (last visited December 11, 2012).

7 Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) (“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”); see also Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XI, part 2 (“Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification. . .”) (available online at www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/index.html) (last visited December 11, 2012).

8 See Stott, supra note 6, at 81-106 (discussing the death and salvation of Christ).

9 Romans 10:9-11 (ESV) (“[I]f you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”). See also Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XI (available online at www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/index.html) (last visited December 11, 2012).

This causes me, as an evangelical Christian, genuine concern for the souls of this country, and frustration with my fellow evangelical Christians for the incorrect message they are sending about our faith.

If I am correct, Evangelical Christians on the Religious Right and Left should take a different course. John Rawls’s theory of political liberalism and public reason is not necessarily the harbinger of apocalyptic doom that some Christians suppose. In fact, Christian political advocates would do well to adhere to his prescription for public reason in political and legal debates. The reasons are practical as well as spiritual. The practical reasons are well known: religious arguments are inaccessible to those who do not share the underlying beliefs in the transcendent and the divine, they will be unpersuasive to those who do not share the belief anyway, and such argument is ultimately disrespectful to non-believing citizens in a pluralistic, liberal democracy. But I here inject the spiritual reasons as well --- coercive law has no place in the Christian witness to the nation and the world, for such a message communicates that favor with God can be obtained by works, when in fact faith alone is the only way we believe that reconciliation with God can occur for man.

Part II of this article will discuss Christian political arguments in this country, and will highlight several anecdotal occurrences of this phenomenon, both from the Religious Right and the Religious Left. It will further discuss the expressive effect of such religious advocacy in the public square. Part III will review the position advocated by the political philosopher John Rawls, that political and legal arguments should be limited to those which are supported by public reason. Part IV will set forth the explicit Christian gospel message, as historically held by Protestant and Evangelical Christians, as being based on faith and not works, and will also discuss some other implications of Christian beliefs for civil law. The recent work of the Christian sociologist James Davison Hunter will be mentioned here as well, insofar as it relates to the points I make in this section. Some anticipated objections will also be briefly addressed. Part V will offer a brief conclusion, ultimately urging that Christians keep religious arguments directed to the public out of the legal arena in their advocacy for coercive laws, and rather keep their religious witness to the cultural arena for which it was intended and where it will likely have the greatest effect.

11 See RAWLS, supra note 1, at 212-54.
12 CHRISTOPHER J. EBERLE, RELIGIOUS CONVICTION IN LIBERAL POLITICS 84-108 (2002).
13 JAMES DAVISON HUNTER, TO CHANGE THE WORLD: THE IRONY, TRAGEDY, AND POSSIBILITY OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE LATE MODERN WORLD (Oxford University Press 2010).
II. CHRISTIAN LEGAL AND POLITICAL ARGUMENTS AND THEIR EXPRESSIVE FUNCTION

In this section, I will present a sampling of the type of political argumentation to which my argument refers. These arguments are made in the current political climate over many of the familiar hot-button issues of the day, and often dominate our current political landscape. And it is these current issues that present the issue of Christian political argumentation as an ongoing and significant issue in American political culture. It is the recurrent use of explicit Christian arguments to the public regarding these issues that has motivated me to chime in. And thus, a look at the current landscape of Christian political argumentation is in order, to set up the theological and expressive claims I want to make later in the article. In the remainder of this section, therefore, I will seek to discuss the following: (1) the use of Christian political argumentation by the Religious Right, (2) the use of Christian political argumentation by the Religious Left, and (3) the expressive functioning of these Christian political arguments.

A. Religious Right Politics

According to James Davison Hunter, the Christian Right movement peaked in 2004, with the reelection of George W. Bush to his second term of office of President. However, as Hunter also notes, the movement is “far from dead.” Conservative Christians desire that the culture reflect their own preferences, and they perceive severe challenges to their views of high moral conduct, including issues of sexuality, marriage, and the sanctity of human life – the so-called “hot button” issues. Hunter notes that such conservative Christians have a “palpable” nostalgia for the “time in America and in Europe when the world more closely reflected the ideals and principles that conservative Christians hold dear.” Believing that the country is headed in the wrong direction, one narrative of the Religious Right perspective has been stated as follows:

America today is in a virtue deficit where our standards of right and wrong have become increasingly hazy. Out of this haze have arisen great problems within our society including: hostility towards organized religion, sexual exploitation, the homosexual agenda, the demise of the family, and the culture of death. Sadly, we now live in a country where children kill children, families are broken, mothers

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14 HUNTER, supra note 13, at 111.
15 Id.
16 Id.
17 Id. at 112.
have been told that allowing an abortionist to take the life of an unborn baby is simply a matter of “choice,” and where the public expression of our nation’s religious heritage is considered a crime. These are disastrous trends for our country. If they aren’t reversed, America---this great experiment in self-government---will be in jeopardy.18

The reason given for this calamitous outlook for the nation is the “growing hostility towards all things religious,” and the concomitant “secularization of our country.”19

With this bleak outlook, the Religious Right has been called to action. It is time to “preserve, protect and defend the Judeo-Christian values that have made this the greatest country in history.”20 It is time to return to a Christian America.21 They have sought to do so through a large, multi-faceted web of politicians, organizations, church leaders, and grass-roots efforts, involving, among other things, advocacy of various “morality-based” laws. Thus, James Dobson, the leader of the Christian organization Focus on the Family, has declared: “most of what those who disagree with us represent leads to death---abortion, euthanasia, promiscuity in heterosexuality, promiscuity in homosexuality, legalization of drugs. There are really only two choices. It is really that clear. It’s either God’s way, or it is the way of social disintegration.”22 As another influential Christian activist stated: “Christians can change our country . . . You and I have a tremendous opportunity to influence public policy in order to open the doors for the truth of the gospel to be communicated in all areas of our society.”23 Noted Christian activist Gary Bauer has stated that a call to action is needed and that this means “changing government policies and laws which create an environment in which

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18 Id. at 115 (citing American Values, www.americanvalues.org (accessed on 17 July 2006)). Incidentally, when I looked for this quote on the site Hunter mentions here, I did not find it at www.americanvalues.org, but I did find it at http://www.ouramericanvalues.org/culture.php (accessed December 12, 2012). This latter website is for American Values, a non-profit organization with Gary Bauer as its President.
19 Id.
20 Id. at 126 (citing Christian Coalition, www.cc.org/vision.cfm (accessed on 25 January 2008)).
21 Id. at 127.
22 Id. at 119 (emphasis added) citing Michael J. Gerson, A Righteous Indignation: James Dobson---Psychologist, Radio Host, Family-Values Crusader---Is Set to Topple the Political Establishment, NEWSWEEK, 4 May 1998).
immorality and parental neglect are allowed to flourish.”

And, in his speech to the 1992 Republican National Convention, Pat Buchanan famously stated the following:

Friends, this election is about more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe and what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America. And in that struggle for the soul of America, Clinton & Clinton are on the other side, and George Bush is on our side.

With these calls to action, and with common purpose, many organizations have accepted the challenge to advocate for morals-based laws in the name of Christian values.

To start with the first of several examples by way of anecdote, in the same 1992 speech just referenced, Pat Buchanan discussed several specific “hot-button” social policy issues, leaving little doubt in his mind where God stood on the issue of governmental intervention: “The agenda that Clinton & Clinton would impose on America: abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, women in combat units. That's change, all right. But that's not the kind of change America needs. It's not the kind of change America wants. And it's not the kind of change we can abide in a nation we still call "God's country.”

Therefore, according to Buchanan, God and His country called for civil laws denying abortion and homosexual rights, among others.

Another organization, the Christian Coalition of Alabama, states that its mission is “to advocate the application of Christian values and principles to public policy that promotes the general welfare and enhance the standard of living for all Americans. These issues include tax policy, education, environment, health care and strengthening of the family unit.” In the section of its website listing its legislative priorities, the organization states more specifically that it will “continue to advocate for any legislation that protects

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24 Id. at 120 (emphasis added) (citing Gary L. Bauer, letter, Family Research Council, 9 July 1998).
26 Id. (emphasis added).
the institution of marriage, enforces pro-life practices, and condemns homosexual lifestyles.”

Another example was given by Jim Daly in 2011. Daly, the current President of Focus on the Family (successor to James Dobson), stated in a Fox News editorial titled *Why the Same-Sex Marriage Experiment Will Not Work*, that he was “naturally, personally opposed to the legalization of same-sex marriage for the simple but profound reason that it violates and contradicts the sacred text of the Bible, which I believe to be true and inspired.” Of course, this would be one thing if it was Daly’s private conviction and reasoning, but it is important to keep in mind that he publicly broadcast his advocacy for political opposition to same-sex marriage, in explicitly Christian terms.

The Family Action Council of Tennessee states, in its mission statement, that their “belief is that healthy families and communities come about when basic values from the Bible are embraced and upheld. Even those who may not believe everything in the Bible have found it hard to overlook its long track record of providing a foundation for stable societies. Neglecting commonsense biblical values contributes to many of our nation’s current ills like crime, disease, divorce, “unwanted” pregnancies, teen suicide and academic failure.” What is interesting about this statement is its explicit separation of the behavior seemingly required by the Christian scriptures, while allowing that the faith or belief of Christianity is not of primary importance. I will have more to say about this separation in Section IV.

Another Christian organization, Ten Good Men, is a relatively new organization organized by businessman David Long. It began on October 13, 2012, with a banquet in Syracuse, New York, at which Mike Huckabee was the keynote speaker. Its stated mission is “to provide biblically based leadership training to Believers in America working to see the culture restored to her

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29 Jim Daly, *Why the Same-Sex Marriage Experiment Will Not Work*, FoxNew.com, May 24, 2011 (emphasis added) (available at [http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2011/05/24/sex-marriage-experiment-work/](http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2011/05/24/sex-marriage-experiment-work/)) (last visited on December 12, 2012). In fairness, Daly did continue by making at least some effort towards justifying the policy choice for non-Christians: “But on what basis should I expect people who don’t believe as I do to likewise oppose same-sex marriage? On the basis of logic, reason, common sense and the fact that preservation of traditional marriage is in the best interest of the common good, as evidenced by any number of factors, including reams of social science data and thousands of years of history.”


32 Id.
Christian foundations and see the blessings of God once again return to our nation. We provide inspiration, strategy development, and real hope for seeing America restored... one city at a time! They seek to achieve this influence in seven spheres of culture, including: Arts & Entertainment, Business, Education, Family, Government, Media and Religion. With respect to government, the website proclaims that “civil government is at least 70% controlled by those who routinely vote against biblical values.” Presumably, the goal is to obtain government officials who explicitly extol “biblical values” for promulgation into official government policy and law.

Probably the largest and most well-known Christian political organization, founded by Pat Robertson in 1989, is the Christian Coalition of America. Its website states that the “Christian Coalition offers people of faith the vehicle to be actively involved in impacting the issues they care about - from the county courthouse to the halls of Congress.” The Christian Coalition’s hallmark strategy is voter education. It states that it “is committed to representing the pro-family agenda and educating Americans on the critical issues facing our society. Whether it is the fight to end Partial Birth Abortion or efforts to improve education or lower the family’s tax burden, the Christian Coalition stands ready and able to work for you.” It is interesting to note that the Christian Coalition uses the language of “pro-family” and “values”, rather than explicit reference to “biblical” or “Christian” positions on laws. However, it is a poorly kept secret that “family values” and similar language is code for...

33 Id.
34 Ten Good Men, “Our Message,” at http://www.tengoodmen.com/Our_Message.html (last visited on December 13, 2012). This reference to the seven spheres of society has been associated with the view of “Christian Dominionism.” Mike Lofgren, GOP Insider: Religion Destroyed My Party, SALON, August 5, 2012 (available at http://www.salon.com/2012/08/05/republicans_slouching_toward_theocracy/) (last visited on December 13, 2012) (“Christian Dominionism, a doctrine proclaiming that Christians are destined to dominate American politics and establish a new imperium resembling theocratic government. According to one profile of Perry, adherents of Dominionism “believe Christians—certain Christians—are destined not to just take ‘dominion’ over government, but stealthily climb to the commanding heights of what they term the ‘Seven Mountains’ of society, including the media and the arts and entertainment world.” Note the qualifier: “stealthily.”).  

37 Id.
38 Id. (emphasis added).
“Christian, biblical morality” in the eyes of its typically Christian advocates. As one blogger said about the label:

What do you think of when you hear the phrase "pro-family"? Or what about other political buzzwords like "pro-life" or "pro-values"? If you're like me, the first thing that comes to mind is "Christian." Christians are the pro-family and pro-values people, right?

Nor do Christian activists tend to deny this association with the “values” or “pro-family” label. One such Christian website states:

Traditional, historical American values have in the past, included a faith in God, prayer and the Bible, which has for a large part, been the foundation of other national traditions, such as: honor and respect for the family, diligent work ethics, absolute values of right and wrong, honesty in business practices, wholesomeness in leadership, respect toward authority, moderation rather than excess, marriage as a prerequisite before having sex or bearing children, a family which consists of both a father and mother, taking responsibility to provide for our own — such as one’s spouse, family and children, and so forth.

The number of organizations which espouse either an explicit mission to restore “biblical” or “Christian” values into American law, or a more benign “pro-family” or “values” approach for American law, is legion. As James Davison Hunter summarizes:

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39 See David L. Petersen, *Genesis and Family Values*, 124 *Journal of Biblical Literature* 5, 5-6 (2005) (At one point, the website of James Dobson’s organization, Focus on the Family, “identified five principles or ‘pillars’ that undergird its work of ‘helping to preserve traditional values and the institution of the family.’ In introducing those pillars, Focus on the Family offers the following statement regarding their source: ‘These pillars are drawn from the Bible and the Judeo-Christian ethic, rather than from the humanistic notions of today's theorists.’”). See also Sally Quinn, *Stephen Bloom: In Iowa, “Family Values” Means “Christian Values,”* Wash. Post, Jan. 4, 2012 (available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-faith/post/stephen-bloom-in-iowa-family-values-means-christian-values/2012/01/04/gIQAOvIBbP_blog.html) (last visited December 13, 2012) (“‘There is this disquieting phrase, ‘family values’,” he says. “It means, Christian values. It means, he’s like us…there are lots of code words like ‘eastern,’ ‘elitist,’ and ‘arrogant.’”).


There are dozens of such political organizations, some with greater longevity than others. The Moral Majority and the Religious Roundtable of the 1980s may have faded from memory, but many others have risen to take their place. Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family Action, Vision America, Priests for Life, Alliance Defense Fund, Liberty Council, the Foundation for Moral Law, Concerned Women for America, America 21, American Center for Law and Justice, Joyce Meyers Ministries, Vision Forum, Faith and Action, Traditional Values Coalition, Renew America, the Center for Reclaiming America for Christ, and Eagle Forum, are just some of the familiar names.

Overall, these organizations defend a prominent role for religion in public life, a traditional nuclear family, and traditional morality. As with the Christian Coalition, they work to identify, educate and mobilize Christians for effective political action.

As Hunter notes, his list is not complete, and many more could be added. One prominent example is the Faith and Freedom Coalition, led by the newly re-emerged Ralph Reed, who was once a key leader of Robertson’s Christian Coalition. His new organization has been described as “a 21st Century version of the Christian Coalition on steroids.” In the 2012 Presidential election, Reed’s new organization widely disseminated “Voter Guides” highlighting the respective positions of President Barack Obama and Republican candidate Mitt Romney on several issues deemed important to the Faith and Freedom Coalition, including: same-sex marriage (Obama – yes, Romney – no), “abortion on demand” (Obama – yes, Romney – no), taxpayer-funded abortion (Obama – yes, Romney – no), Defense of Marriage Act (Obama – no, Romney – yes). Yet another example of a more recent important organization would be the confederation of conservative organizations called “Champion the Vote,” which mobilized in order to advocate for many of the same policy positions as the other organizations described herein.

I have already perhaps provided more than enough anecdotes of the “Christian political” activity that I am referencing here—most likely the vast

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42 Hunter, supra note 13, at 122.
majority would accept that this occurs without needing any actual examples. But, I wish to close with two more specific examples that caught my attention during the closing days of the 2012 Presidential election. A full-page ad was purchased by the well-known evangelist Billy Graham (or, at least, his organization), in the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, USA Today, and apparently other regional newspapers, in October 2012, as part of a “Vote Biblical Values” ad campaign. The ad featured a large photo of Billy Graham holding a Bible, and contained the following text:

The legacy we leave behind for our children, grandchildren, and this great nation is crucial. As I approach my 94th birthday, I realize this election could be my last. I believe it is vitally important that we cast our ballots for candidates who base their decisions on biblical principles and support the nation of Israel. I urge you to vote for those who protect the biblical definition of marriage between a man and a woman. Vote for biblical values this November 6, and pray with me that America will remain one nation under God.47

One last example involved Mike Huckabee, the current Fox News Channel commentator, ordained Baptist minister, and previous governor of Arkansas. Huckabee was enlisted to narrate an election ad that aired a few days before the 2012 Presidential election.48 The ad, replete with an ominous soundtrack and fiery imagery, included Huckabee solemnly stating:

Christians across the nation will have an opportunity to shape the future for our generation and generations to come. Many issues are at stake, but some issues are not negotiable: The right to life from conception to natural death. Marriage should be reinforced, not redefined. It is an egregious violation of our cherished principle of religious liberty for the government to force the church to buy the kind of insurance that leads to the taking of innocent human life.

Your vote will affect the future and be recorded in eternity. Will you vote the values that will stand the test of fire? This is Mike Huckabee asking you to

join me November the 6th and vote based on values that will stand the test of fire.\textsuperscript{49}

The ad fades to black, and the message has been sent – eternity itself, and the looming “test of fire” is at stake with regard to a voter’s political choices.\textsuperscript{50} I will have more to say on this in Section II.C below, especially in regard to how this ad was interpreted by many, but for now these examples will suffice to drive home the point. The Religious Right, in today’s political culture, makes extensive and frequent use of argumentation using labels like “Christian,” “biblical,” “pro-family,” and “values” in order to argue for the various policy formulations that they advocate.

**B. Religious Left Politics**

Just as there are Christians on the Religious Right making public political arguments for law and policy in line with a religious perspective, so are there also Christians on what may be termed the “Religious Left” making similar arguments. According to James Davison Hunter, whereas the Religious Right is largely defined by behavioral morality and values, “progressives have always been animated by the myth of equality and community and therefore see history as an ongoing struggle to realize these ideals.”\textsuperscript{51} More specifically, “[t]he biblical tradition that Christian progressives appeal to is the prophetic tradition in its condemnation of the wealthy for their abuse of the poor, the weak, and the marginalized.”\textsuperscript{52} A couple of signature scriptural references, though by no means comprehensive, would be Psalm 140:12: “I know that the Lord maintains the cause of the needy, and executes justice for the poor,” and


\textsuperscript{50} Huckabee later defended the ad on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, and said it had been misconstrued as implying that a voter’s salvation was at stake in the way and the values that he voted. Rather, his intent was to refer to a scriptural passage in the book of First Corinthians Chapter 10, about testing Christians’ works and their value with fire. “Mike Huckabee Defends Christian Campaign Ad on ‘The Daily Show,’” Patheos.com, November 13, 2012, at http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2012/11/13/mike-huckabee-defends-christian-campaign-ad-on-the-daily-show/ (providing transcript of the exchange between Stewart and Huckabee on the show) (last visited on December 13, 2012). It appears that Huckabee meant to refer to Chapter 3 of First Corinthians, rather than Chapter 10. See The Erstwhile Conservative, supra note 49.

\textsuperscript{51} HUNTER, supra note 13, at 132.

\textsuperscript{52} Id. at 133.
Proverbs 31:9: “Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

As has been mentioned, some of the most notable accomplishments of the Religious Left have been political achievements from earlier in our nation’s history. We may begin with the abolition movement in the early to mid 1800s. To take just one voice from that movement, William Lloyd Garrison has been called “the nation’s most eloquent proponent of abolition.” As Geoffrey Stone has stated: “Garrison merged the evangelical belief that America stood ‘on a great precipice, ready to plunge into darkness’ with his own charge that slavery was at the very root of the American dilemma. . . . He declared slavery ‘the bell weather of America’s fidelity to its covenant with God.’”

Throughout the argument over abolition, biblical arguments were generously used, including Acts 17:26: “God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”

There are other historical Religious Left causes that could be mentioned here (women’s suffrage and labor rights come to mind), but the last key historical triumph of the Religious Left would seem to be the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, led in large part by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

To just take the text of King’s stirring “I Have a Dream” speech delivered in 1963 in Washington, D.C., consider some of the more religious-themed passages:

Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God’s children.

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53 Id.
55 Id. (emphasis added).
56 Id.
57 Michael McConnell, et al., Introduction, in CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON LEGAL THOUGHT xxi (Michael W. McConnell et al. eds., 2001). See also HUNTER, supra note 13, at 134 (“For politically progressive Christians, the salient movements of American history are abolition, women’s suffrage, the female seminary movement, child labor reform, the programs of social relief in the Social Gospel movement, the peace movement before World War I, desegregation and the civil rights movement, and the war against Vietnam. The heroic figures of this political tradition are exemplars of these struggles—Frederick Douglass, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Oscar Romero and so on.”).
58 STEPHEN L. CARTER, GOD’S NAME IN VAIN: THE WRONGS AND RIGHTS OF RELIGION IN POLITICS 20 (2000). See also HUNTER, supra note 13, at 134 (“Politically progressive Christianity achieved its apex of visibility and influence in the middle decades of the twentieth century.”).
I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which is still in existence today, states that its mission is “to bring about the promise of ‘one nation, under God, INDIVISIBLE’ together with the commitment to activate the ‘strength to love’ within the community of humankind.” And its first listed objective in fulfilling that mission is to “promote spiritual principles within our membership and local communities.” And it is clear that, just as it was in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s time, the mission of the Conference includes the enactment of law and public policy consistent with these underlying Christian principles.

Although that is the history of the Religious Left, there has been a resurgence of the movement since the turn of the 21st Century. The movement is largely led by a new group of influential, progressive evangelical Christians, including Jim Wallis, John Perkins, Sharon Gallagher, Brian McLaren, and Randall Balmer. A critical moment for igniting the current movement of the Christian Left was George W. Bush’s presidential victory in 2004. “It was only then that the Democratic Party, for many decades tone-deaf to faith, recognized that it would not mobilize the American public and win elections until it learned to use the language and grammar of faith that has always informed the values and beliefs of most Americans.” The problem was that there was a perceived “God-gap” between the Christian Right of the

59 “I Have a Dream Speech” (Text), located online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/16/i-have-a-dream-speech-text-martin-luther-king-jr_n_1207734.html (emphasis added) (last visited on December 14, 2012).
61 Id. (emphasis added).
62 Id. (listing one objective of the Conference as seeking “[t]o ensure economic justice and civil rights in the areas of discrimination and affirmative action.”).
63 HUNTER, supra note 13, at 137.
64 Id.
65 Id.
Republican Party, which was very comfortable with using religious language in public, and the Democratic Party, which had, in recent years, been more reluctant to use such language. The Religious Left movement was ready to strike back against the dominance of the Religious Right, with actions such as a full-page ad in the New York Times and other newspapers on August 30, 2004, titled “God is not a Republican . . . or a Democrat.” The sentiment gradually began to take hold, with former President Clinton remarking in August 2004, “[p]olitical involvement dictated by faith is not the exclusive province of the right wing.”

And so there has been a rapid increase in the activity and volume of the Christian Left in the last decade or so. Of course, “[e]vangelicalism never was politically homogenous, though the organizational and media success of politically conservative Christian groups made it seem so.” After the 2004 election, the Christian Left finally began gaining national attention with its message that Christian principles actually supported progressive causes, rather than conservative ones. Of course, one of the primary messages of the Religious Left has been its hostility to the activities and message of the Christian Right. But there is more to it. As Jim Wallis has stated, “the monologue [of the Christian Right] is over; a new dialogue has begun.” Of course, as James Davison Hunter correctly points out, the rise of the Religious Left is not so much a new phenomenon as it is a renewal (witness the prior discussed movements including abolition and the civil rights movement): “a renewal that is weak but perhaps only because it is in its early stages. Compared to the Christian Right, its organizational resources are meager, but it has achieved a platform that it hadn’t had for decades.”

A few examples of this current movement of the Christian Left will suffice to get a feel for its message and advocacy. One particularly influential and noteworthy organization is Sojourners, which publishes a magazine and is primarily associated with Jim Wallis. Sojourners’s stated mission is “to articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a

66 Id.
67 Id.
68 Id. (citing Mark O’Keefe, Religious Progressives See Revival, CONTRA COSTA TIMES, September 3, 2004) (noting that “Clinton made these remarks at a service in New York’s interdenominational Riverside Church on August 29, 2004.”).
69 Id.
70 Id.
71 Id. at 139.
73 Id. at 138.
74 Sojourners, at sojo.net (last accessed on December 14, 2012).
movement to transform individuals, communities, the church and the world.”

Notably, Sojourners seeks, among other things, to provide tools for effective advocacy of its championed issues at the “intersection of faith, politics, and culture.”

A joint Sojourners/Call to Renewal document entitled *From Poverty to Opportunity: A Covenant for a New America*, set forth the following agenda:

The Hebrew prophets consistently say that the measure of a nation’s righteousness and integrity is how it treats the most vulnerable. *And Jesus says the nations will be judged by how they treat “the least of these.”* (Matthew 25).

As our religious forbears declared that slavery was morally intolerable, we now insist that widespread poverty in the midst of plenty is a moral wrong we refuse to accept any longer. Poverty is the new slavery. It is time to lift up practical policies and practices that help people escape poverty and clearly challenge the increasing wealth gap between rich and poor. *The Bible condemns extremes of wealth and poverty. Across the globe, inequality is on the rise. The disproportionate impact of poverty on women and people of color is a further indictment of our society.*

Thus, as Sojourners founder Jim Wallis declared, “*God is angry with America and with the world because of the statistics of poverty.*”

Another influential member of the Christian Left is Tony Campolo. Campolo is a professor emeritus of sociology at Eastern University, and is also the founder of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education.

He also contributes to another website, a blog called redletterchristians.org.

Campolo has written generally regarding the state of American culture: “I love this country so much that I do not want to see it fall from its pinnacle of well-being into a state of disarray---which it surely will, unless it changes its ways.

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76 *Id.*


78 *Id.* at 139 (emphasis added) (citing Jim Wallis, public comments, Pentecost 2006: Building a Covenant for a New America, hosted by Sojourners and Call to Renewal, Washington, D.C., 26 June 2006).


80 *Id.* The website is presumably so named because in many versions of printed Bibles, the words of Jesus are printed in red type, rather than black.
That’s why I choose to critique America from what I believe to be a biblical perspective.”

Another Christian Left organization is Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA). ESA is a project of the Sider Center on Ministry and Public Policy at Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University. Ron Sider is the founder and president of ESA. One of ESA’s core values is that “[a]ll of life is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Our culture, economics, science, arts, social interactions, politics, etc. are all subject to His authority.” Further, ESA’s website states, in response to the issue of whether Christian should engage the political process: “Politics are not always bad or always good, but even when they are bad, followers of Christ must engage and dismantle oppression, greed, and evil wherever it is found. To do so effectively, we prayerfully and humbly engage the critical issues of politics and listen honestly to evidence supporting contrary positions. One of ESA’s goals is to equip Jesus’ modern disciples to engage in thorough analysis and dialog that works toward biblically grounded political values and results in Christ-shaped public policies.”

To come back to Jim Wallis, probably the longest-running and most influential voice of the Christian Left, his 2005 book God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong, and The Left Doesn’t Get it, has been incredibly important to this movement. Here are some of the policy prescriptions from his book, that he says are mandated by biblical standards:

Governmental budgets and tax policies should show compassion for poor families rather than reward the rich. Foreign policies should include fair trade and debt cancellation for the poorest countries. (Matthew 2:34-40, Isaiah 10:1-2).

Policies should protect the creation rather than serve corporate interests which damage it. (Genesis 2:15, Psalm 24:1).

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81 HUNTER, supra note 13, at 139 (citing TONY CAMPOLO, SPEAKING MY MIND 169 (2004)).
82 Evangelicals for Social Action, at http://www.evangelicalsforstataction.org (last accessed on December 14, 2012).
83 Id.
85 Id. at http://www.evangelicalsforstataction.org/faqs/ (last accessed December 14, 2012).
Policies in the name of citizens should respect international law and cooperation in responding to global threats rather than in preemptive wars of choice (Matthew 5:9).

Governments should tell the truth in justifying war and in other foreign and domestic policies. (John 8:32).

National officials should foster change in attitudes and policies which led to the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners.

National officials should drop the dangerous language of righteous empire in the war on terrorism which confuses the roles of God, church, and nation. They should be alert to perceiving evil in our actions rather than only in our enemies (Matthew 6:33, Proverbs 8:12-13).

Policies on abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, weapons of mass destruction, HIV/AIDS---and other pandemics---and genocide around the world should obey the biblical injunction to choose life. (Deuteronomy 30:19).

In framing the issues in this manner, Wallis leaves no doubt about his Christian position --- to violate these mandates is to govern “unbiblically.”

As James Davison Hunter points out, what Wallis and his allies on the Christian Left propose:

may be a more compassionate civil religion than what one finds in the American mainstream, but it is just a different expression of the same phenomenon, not something different from it. Both Right and Left, then, aspire to a righteous empire. Thus, when [Wallis] accuses Falwell and Robertson of being “theocrats who desire their religious agenda to be enforced through the power of the state,” he has established the criteria by which he and other politically progressive Christians are judged the same.

Of course, Wallis is not alone. Many, if not most, on the Christian Left desire the same. To close the illustrations here, the left-leaning National Council of Churches has concurred, stating that “[o]ur values must be reflected in our nation’s public policies.”

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87 HUNTER, supra note 13, at 145-46 (citing WALLIS, supra note 86, at xxiii-xxiv, and also noting that these statements “accompany a list of beliefs published in a newspaper petition [presumably by Wallis]).
88 Id. at 146 (citing WALLIS, supra note 86, at 250).
89 Id. at 147 (emphasis added).
90 Id. at 147 n.71 (citing www.faithfulamerica.org).
C. Expressive Effect of this Argumentation

All actions are expressive, as Cass Sunstein has noted.\footnote{Sunstein, supra note 5, at 2021.} They all have meaning, from the clothing we wear, to the language we use in every day conversation, and beyond.\footnote{\textit{Id.} at 2021-2022.} And, as Sunstein pointed out in his 1996 article, \textit{On the Expressive Function of Law}, “[w]hat can be said for actions can also be said for law.”\footnote{\textit{Id.} at 2022 (emphasis added).} That is, “there can be no doubt that law, like action in general, has an expressive function.”\footnote{\textit{Id.} at 2051.} In that regard, one thing that Sunstein argued was that if “legal statements produce bad consequences, they should not be enacted even if they seem reasonable or noble.”\footnote{\textit{Id.} at 2025.}

As an evangelical Christian, I have been motivated to write this article based on the expression that I believe occurs when my fellow evangelical Christians engage in the type of political argumentation described in this section. I believe it is the expression of a critically incorrect theological message to the public – and thus, from a Christian standpoint, I conclude that this wrong message is a “bad consequence” of the expressions, in Sunstein’s terms. I will shortly explore in section IV what I believe is the (shared) correct theology of the Gospel, and thus why the messages of both the Religious Right and Religion Left described herein are incorrect and harmful. But before I do so, it is necessary to first state here what I believe that message being communicated is, or at least what I believe that it arguably includes.

The message I believe that is being conveyed by both the Religious Right and Left is an inevitable result from the mixture of law and religion---and more specifically law and Christianity---into a single message of political advocacy. I say law because the political argumentation described in this section is nearly all concerned with implementing its Christian principles, in some form or fashion, into law or public policy. Law, of course, is the body of rules of conduct or action prescribed as binding and enforceable by a controlling authority -- in this case, the federal government of the United States or the individual States of the Union.\footnote{“Law,” defined by Merriam Webster online, at \url{http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/law} (last accessed on December 17, 2012).} And law is of course inherently coercive, and focused only on behavior.\footnote{See Ekow N. Yankah, \textit{The Force of Law: The Role of Coercion in Legal Norms}, 42 U. RICH. L. REV. 1195 (2008).} Thus, when the public receives messages advocating for new or different laws and policies, everyone instinctively understands that what is being advocated is a requirement of
behavior, which will (at least theoretically) be enforced by the full power and machinery of the government.

Mixed with this message of law advocacy, is identification with religious, and more specifically, “Christian” principles. That is, both the Religious Right and the Religious Left, in the political argumentation described in this section, are touting their prescriptions for law and policy as the appropriate “Christian” ones.98 Because I am concerned here with the message that is being expressed by the advocacy of the Religious Right and Left, I must also consider what message is sent to the public by packaging the advocacy as “religious” and “Christian.”

In other words, what meaning is conveyed by adding the “Christian” label to the advocated positions? That is, what is Christianity? What is religion? Or at least, what is the general public understanding of it? Simply put, most of the world religions try “to answer the questions of how individuals should relate to God and how human beings should relate to one another, in order to be in harmony with God and the Ultimate Purpose of life.”99 That is, religion is a lens through which we as humans try to make sense of our existence, and to be in a right relationship with God, or the Higher Power (to the extent the religious view accounts for such a presence).

One very important aspect of this proper relationship with God – if not for many the defining and central aspect of the relationship --- is salvation. Salvation has different connotations in different religious traditions, but it tends to mean deliverance from the effects of sin; more generally, it means preservation from destruction, or at least “deliverance from danger or difficulty.”100 Thus, the goal of many, if not most, religions is “salvation or the achievement of some ultimate good or well-being.”101 For many, this is the main point of religion.102 A related aspect to most religions is the claim of divine favor for its adherents – salvation being an obvious type of favor bestowed by God.103 Therefore, the main point of most of the major religions--

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98 See supra parts II.A and II.B.
100 “Salvation,” defined by Merriam Webster online, at http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/salvation (last accessed on December 17, 2012).
101 Peter Byrne, Religion and the Religions (Chapter 1), in THE WORLD’S RELIGIONS: THE STUDY OF RELIGION, TRADITIONAL AND NEW RELIGIONS (page 16 of e-book) (Peter Clarke and Stewart Sutherland, eds. 1991 ed.).
including Christianity—is obtaining a proper relationship with God, divine favor, and ultimately, redemption and salvation for one’s soul.\textsuperscript{104}

I have just discussed law and Christianity (as a type of world religious belief) as definable labels in public political advocacy. To restate, law is rules of conduct enforceable by the coercive power of the state.\textsuperscript{105} Religion generally, and Christianity specifically, is about a proper relationship and favor with God, as most commonly realized in salvation of the person.\textsuperscript{106} Both the Religious Right and Left are often making arguments, described in this section, for laws to be passed based on biblical “Christian” principles.\textsuperscript{107} A plausible—even likely—interpretation of these messages is this: \textit{if I behave according to the proposed “Christian” principles being advocated for, I will obtain greater favor with God.} Why do I say this? Arguments are being made for law—behavioral standards. Arguments are being made that these standards are required by biblical “Christian” precepts. How could one not, in the absence of theological knowledge or belief to the contrary, at least consider that what is being argued is that one would obtain favor with God, if he or she only complied with the behavioral precepts being advocated for by either the Religious Right or Left? As another fellow Christian in the legal academy, Samuel Calhoun, put the point over two decades ago: “\textit{Using force to compel compliance with God’s standards . . . perpetuates the [impression] that righteous conduct is the road to a restored relationship with God.}”\textsuperscript{108} Put a slightly different way, using law to compel “Christian principles” expresses the message that obeying such law will please the God of the Christian scriptures. Put more simply, good behavior equals divine favor. This is the expressive function of the religious/Christian political argumentation of the Religious Right and Left, as described earlier in this section.

The Mike Huckabee political ad in the 2012 Presidential Election described at the end of part II.A illustrates this expressive phenomenon with unusual clarity. As discussed earlier, the ad implores voters to vote in favor of traditional marriage and pro-life positions, warning that voters’ choices on these issues will be subject to the “test of fire.”\textsuperscript{109} There were many reactions in

\textsuperscript{104} See, e.g., RAWLS, supra note 1, at xxi, xxiii (describing Christianity as being a “religion of salvation”).

\textsuperscript{105} See supra notes 96-97 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{106} See supra notes 99-104 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{107} See supra parts II.A and II.B.


\textsuperscript{109} “Did Mike Huckabee Really Say That You Will Go to Hell if You Vote for Obama?”, \textit{The Erstwhile Conservative: A Blog of Repentance}, October 31, 2012, at
the press and media that interpreted the ad to mean that Huckabee was implying that voting for President Obama, or any other candidate (likely from the Democratic Party) who did not hold the appropriate position on issues such as marriage and abortion, would be recorded by God “in eternity” and if incorrect would fail the “test of fire.” More bluntly, an article in Slate bore the headline: “Huckabee Says Christians Will Go To Hell If They Vote Obama.”110 The article noted that “Huckabee [had] resorted to the oldest trick in the book, threatening [voters] with damnation.”111 Another headline in the Huffington Post trumpeted: “Mike Huckabee Warns Christians: Obama Vote Will Crumple in Hell’s Fire.”112 Yet another blog entry stated: “Mike Huckabee: Vote Against Equality and Choice or You’ll Go to Hell.”113 The blog noted that “Mike Huckabee is the latest political talking ahead to threaten voters’ very souls if they do not make the “right” choice at the polls this year.”114

After the ad came out, and the election was over, Huckabee appeared on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart in order to discuss the election, and to defend and discuss the ad.115 After introducing the ad, and playing excerpts from it, the following exchange ensued between Stewart (JS) and Huckabee (MH):


111 Id.


113 Zack Ford, Mike Huckabee: Vote Against Equality and Choice or You’ll Go to Hell, THINK PROGRESS, October 30, 2012, at http://thinkprogress.org/lgb/t/2012/10/30/1109591/mike-huckabee-vote-against-equality-and-choice-or-youll-go-to-hell/?mobile=nc (last accessed on December 17, 2012).

114 Id.

JS: … when I look at that I go “Are you saying that if you vote for the Democrats, you’re going to hell?!”
MH: No! Jon!
JS: ’Cause it sure looked like hell. I mean . . . . my point is, can you understand how someone can watch that and go, “So wait, if I disagree with you about gay marriage, I’m going to hell?”
MH: If they’re biblically illiterate, they would. But if they knew 1 Corinthians 10, the whole metaphor of the Christian gospel they would… (*audience moans*)
JS: (to audience) Settle down, guys, this is not… we’re talking.
MH: Listen to me! Seriously, that whole metaphor is about that your works are tested by fire and that biblical passage is one that every believer — every New Testament believer — is gonna understand what that means.
. . . .
JS: I would say it is not an unreasonable interpretation of that commercial that if you vote for gay marriage or for a pro-choice candidate, God is writing it down, and he gon’ getcha. . . . . 116

From this exchange, it clearly appears that Stewart (and perhaps his audience as well) agreed with the interpretation of the above-cited press and blogs. That is, that God’s favor—indeed, possibly salvation itself—was at stake in whether one voted with the correct values (in this case, those championed by the Religious Right). Huckabee’s explanation was that the ad referenced a biblical doctrine that referred only to the actions of Christians, and did not implicate salvation.117 Putting aside whether Huckabee was correct in his application of the doctrine from First Corinthians, the larger point for my thesis here is simply that (whatever Huckabee’s actual intent) the expressive effect of the Huckabee ad was much simpler — vote for the Christian values championed in the ad (traditional marriage, pro-life on abortion) and enjoy God’s favor. Vote against them, and risk God’s wrath. And note that, Huckabee basically admits that those who do not profess Christian faith (the “biblically illiterate,” as he says)

116 Id. (emphasis added). It appears Huckabee actually meant to reference Chapter 3 of First Corinthians, and not Chapter 10. See The Erstwhile Conservative, supra note 49 (citing 1 Cor. 3:10-15, which states: “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”).

117 Id.
would likely interpret the ad in the manner Stewart suggests. I believe that most political argumentation by the Religious Right and Left alike for election of candidates and implementation of laws based on “Christian” or biblical values – although admittedly less dramatically portrayed than the Huckabee ad --- potentially harbors this same expressive effect. Because law is being advocated, the audience sees that what is sought is certain coerced behavior. Because the advocacy is animated by Christian religious principles, the audience receives the message that compliance may result in greater favor with God. Failure to heed, on the other hand, would thus logically have the opposite result – God’s displeasure or, worse, His wrath.

III. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY’S RESPONSE: RAWLSIAN “PUBLIC REASON”

Thus far I have been discussing the overtly religious, Christian political argumentation of both the Religious Right and the Religious Left. My purpose has been to identify the existence of such actual argumentation, including a clear demonstration of its purported Christian, religious character, and also to observe the expressive functioning of such argumentation, especially with respect to the perception of the non-Christian citizenry.

In this section, I wish to briefly identify a dominant line of liberal democratic political philosophy which addresses the propriety of such public religious argumentation in the first place. I will not be addressing here any Constitutional limitations or protections for such religious arguments, nor does anything in this article even suggest that legal or constitutional limitations should be placed on religious citizens to argue for whatever laws they want to advocate, by resort to whatever reasons they wish. Rather, I will be discussing various strains of ideal democratic restraint advocated by various political philosophers, in the name of fairness and civility. After I have discussed this line of secular, political philosophy, I will then turn in the next section to a discussion of what I believe to be a near universally shared Protestant evangelical theology of the gospel of Jesus Christ. My ultimate aim is to show that the correct Christian theology of the gospel coheres with conventional political philosophy on the propriety of religious arguments, and is at odds with the typical political argumentation effected by most Religious Right and Left groups today.

A. Rawls and Public Reason

In John Rawls’s 1993 book Political Liberalism, Rawls in part took up the issue of: “What are the fair terms of social cooperation between citizens
characterized as free and equal yet divided by profound doctrinal conflict?" Doctrinal conflict and profound differences in worldview between citizens have not always been present. In fact, ironically, as Rawls notes, "the historical origin of political liberalism (and of liberalism more generally) is the Reformation and its aftermath, with the long controversies over religious toleration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries." Before the Reformation, "the ancient world did not know . . . the clash between salvationist, creedal, and expansionist religions." What is new and significant about this tension, Rawls, notes, is "that it introduces into people’s conceptions of their good a transcendent element not admitting of compromise." This ultimately helps define what for Rawls is the "problem of political liberalism," which he says is: "How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?" And, for the religious (including Christian) adherent, Rawls put the question even more sharply: "How is it possible for those affirming a religious doctrine that is based on religious authority, for example, the church or the Bible, also to hold a reasonable political conception that supports a just democratic regime?"

Rawls starts the articulation of his theory with a discussion of the attributes of a political conception of justice, and emphasizes that in a pluralistic, democratic society it must be "primarily concerned with the reasonable, not the true." That is, citizens will have a multitude of worldviews (including religious beliefs) that make truth claims, but in a pluralistic, liberal democracy no single one of these can generally triumph. "Holding a political conception as true, and for that reason alone the one suitable basis of public reason, is exclusive, even sectarian, and so likely to foster political division." Thus, Rawls opposes such comprehensive doctrines proclaiming truth, holding that it is perfectly consistent to abstain from seeking to coercively enforce such a doctrine via the mechanism of the state, while simultaneously affirming it as true. The democratic goal to

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118 RAWLS, supra note 1, at xxv.
119 Id. at xxiv.
120 Id. at xxv.
121 Id. at xxvi.
122 Id. at xxv.
123 Leslie Griffin, Good Catholics Should be Rawlsian Liberals, 5 S. CAL. INTERDISC. L.J. 297, 299 (1997) (citing JOHN RAWLS, POLITICAL LIBERALISM xxxix (paper ed. 1996)).  Note that here Griffin is citing the paper edition of POLITICAL LIBERALISM, which apparently included a revised or new introduction than the 1993 hardback edition I have cited earlier. Id. at 299 n.3.
124 Id. at 303.
125 RAWLS, supra note 1, at 129.
126 Griffin, supra note 123, at 304.
which Rawls aspires is instead that of an “overlapping consensus” as to matters of justice and public policy. Thus, he envisions citizens who adhere to different comprehensive doctrines of truth and yet jointly consent to law and policy formulations based on points of discovered commonality.  

The key to Rawls’s hope to achieve the overlapping consensus is the use by all citizens of public reason in democratic deliberations and advocacy. By public reason, Rawls means that political decisions in the overlapping consensus are made based on “reasons that appeal to all citizens,” as part of a reciprocal “duty of civility” to one another. Public reason, therefore, is a demanding concept, especially for those that adhere to comprehensive doctrines such as religious beliefs. As Leslie Griffin explained Rawls’s reasoning:

It "means that in discussing constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice we are not to appeal to comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines---to what we as individuals or members of associations see as the whole truth...." Instead, public reasoning should rest on more "widely accepted, or available" arguments. "[E]ach of us must have, and be ready to explain, a criterion of what principles and guidelines we think other citizens (who are also free and equal) may reasonably be expected to endorse along with us.”

Rawls therefore urges citizens (as well as government officials) to employ public reason in all political advocacy conducted in the public square – that is, to utilize the types of reasons, bases, and underlying premises which all citizens might plausibly be able to endorse. And, in its ideal Rawlsian form, appeals to public reason – by definition – exclude any resort to comprehensive doctrines, notably religious beliefs. This is for the obvious reason that not all citizens share such beliefs --- i.e., that there is a God, that He is described in Christian scripture, that the Bible is reliable --- and thus it is not appropriate to appeal to them in a pluralistic, democratic society. Although this presents demands on religious citizens, Rawls is optimistic that commonality can be found through the use of public reason, and that religious citizens can participate reasonably in a democratic society.

The Rawlsian approach to public reason and a pluralistic conception of the common good has been widely, if not universally, accepted, and has had notable public adherents even before Rawls’s famous articulation of it in 1993’s Political Liberalism. One articulation of similar reasoning was in a speech by then-Governor of New York Mario Cuomo, who said:

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127 Id. at 305 (citing RAWLS, supra note 1, at 126, 133-72).
128 Id. at 310 (citing RAWLS, supra note 1, at 137, 253).
129 Id.
130 Id. at 310-11 (emphasis added) (citing RAWLS, supra note 1, at 224-26).
131 Id. at 317.
No law prevents us from advocating [our own personal religious beliefs in support of law or public policy]. I am free to do so. So are the Bishops, and so is Reverend Falwell. In fact, the Constitution guarantees my right to try. And theirs. And his.

But should I? Is it helpful? Is it essential to human dignity? Does it promote harmony and understanding? Does it divide us so fundamentally that it threatens our ability to function as a pluralistic community? When should I argue to make my religious value your morality, my rule of conduct your limitation? What are the rules and policies that should influence the exercise of this right to argue and promote?

Let me try some answers.

Almost all Americans accept some religious values as a part of our public life. We are a religious people, many of us descended from ancestors who came here expressly to live their religious faith free from coercion or repression. But we are also a people of many religions, with no established church, who hold different beliefs on many matters.

Our public morality, then, the moral standards we maintain for everyone, not just the ones we insist on in our private lives, depends on a consensus view of right and wrong. The values derived from religious belief will not, and should not, be accepted as part of the public morality unless they are shared by the pluralistic community at large, by consensus.132

While acknowledging the inherent limitations such a requirement of public consensus placed on religious adherents, Cuomo noted the principles of religious liberty which also animated the ideal of public consensus: “I protect my right to be a Catholic by preserving your right to believe as a Jew, a Protestant or non-believer, or as anything else you choose. We know that the price of seeking to force our beliefs on others is that they might some day force theirs on us.”133

Another much more recent reiteration of a commitment to Rawlsian ideals of public reason came from President Barack Obama, in his 2006 autobiography:

What our deliberative, pluralistic democracy does demand is that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals must be subject to argument and amenable to reason. If I am opposed to abortion for religious reasons and seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or invoke God’s will and expect that argument to carry the day. If I want others to listen to me, then I have to explain why

133 Id. at 16 (emphasis added).
abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.

. . . [I]n a pluralistic democracy, we have no choice. Almost by definition, faith and reason operate in different domains and involve different paths to discerning truth. Reason—and science—involves the accumulation of knowledge based on realities that we can all apprehend. Religion, by contrast, is based on truths that are not provable through ordinary human understanding—the “belief in things not seen.”

President Obama here nicely encapsulates the Rawlsian view that political advocacy should be made in terms of publicly accessible reasons, reasons and premises that are amenable to all of the citizenry and subject to engagement and debate on those terms. Such Rawlsian public reason seeks to leave explicit religious, sectarian beliefs out of public political advocacy, aspiring instead to reasoning which is accessible to all in various degrees, such that an overlapping consensus in matters of public policy may be reached by a plurality of the populace.

**B. Religious Objections and Further Concessions**

Quite unsurprisingly, Rawls’s ideal of public reason has brought sustained criticism from some quarters as being too thoroughly secular, and concomitantly too discriminatory against religious beliefs. As a purely religious and moral issue, of course it is understandable that some religious believers would object to the requirement of public reason. They believe in the actual truth of their convictions and thus a pluralistic overlapping consensus is less than ideal for their conceptions of the good. “Some believers in the truth of their comprehensive doctrines will prefer to lead others to the truth, to overcome the pluralism of conflicting views, to fight conflicting comprehensive doctrines in order to achieve agreement on the truth.”

But the objections to Rawlsian public reason also come on a more sophisticated, democratically participatory level, as Leslie Griffin summarizes:

To its critics, public reason is too restrictive; it excludes religion from public life. Society’s discourse is impoverished by the banning of religious language. Biblical narratives, religious imagery, or theological claims nourish moral insight, and so should be a central part of public discourse. The historical insight of religious communities may be neglected. Religious voices

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135 Griffin, supra note 123, at 297.
136 Id. note 123, at 297.
137 Id. at 301.
138 Id.
are "privatized" by the requirements of public reason when our culture needs the public voice of religion. Moreover, public reason discriminates against religion; it allows secular voices to dominate political discussion. Once again, its criteria may exclude the truth. Religious adherents thus become unequal participants in their society, their critical perspectives silenced, their theories of justice suppressed, their moral claims ignored.  

Many voices have joined the chorus of objections. Stephen Carter has protested that the Rawlsian approach “trivializes” religious belief in law and politics. Kent Greenawalt observed that citizens whose worldviews are primarily secular suffer less of a burden from the dictates of public reason than similarly situated religious believers. E.A. Goerner states that “Rawls’s new theory imposes second-class citizenship on most religious believers.” There is also the charge that public reason requires religious believers to “bracket” their cherished beliefs from the rest of their selves, undermining their psychological well-being and integrity. Michael Perry has gone so far as to suggest that such bracketing “annihilates” the believer, by requiring him to deny his true self. Michael McConnell more recently has agreed that “it is not reasonable to ask citizens who hold such beliefs to adhere to the principle of public reason.”

In response to the concerns about minimizing the convictions of religious citizens, Rawls eventually conceded a limited role for religious beliefs in public debate. His ideal position is the “exclusive view,” where personal religious reasons are completely excluded, and he believed that this view would suffice for a well-ordered society. However, Rawls conceded that an “inclusive view,” which allowed for some injection of religious beliefs, might be appropriate for a less than perfectly well-ordered society. Rawls allowed that this would be proper, with one proviso: “[c]itizens may speak on the ‘basis

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138 Id. at 311-12 (citations omitted).
141 E.A. Goerner, Rawls’s Apolitical Political Turn, 55 REV. POL., 713, 715 (1993).
142 Griffin, supra note 123, at 315 (citations omitted).
143 MICHAEL PERRY, MORALITY, POLITICS & THE LAW 72-73 (1988) (“To bracket [her moral and religious beliefs] would be to bracket, indeed, annihilate herself. And doing that would preclude her-the particular person she is-from engaging in moral discourse with other members of society.”).
145 Id.
146 Id.
147 Id.
of political values rooted in their comprehensive doctrine, provided they do this in ways that \textit{strengthen the ideal of public reason itself}.\textsuperscript{148} Rawls saw this inclusive view as a way to serve the ideal of public reason, by having advocating citizens “explain in the public forum how one’s comprehensive doctrine affirms the political values’ of democratic society.”\textsuperscript{149} In fact, Rawls believed that the inclusive view had already played a role in two significant events in American history --- abolition and the civil rights movement.\textsuperscript{150} Although Rawls conceded that the use of Christian and religious language in these two political movements would fail his ideal “exclusive view,” they comported with his “inclusive view” because the nonpublic religious reasons “supported the clear conclusions of public reason.”\textsuperscript{151} But, Rawls was unwilling to abandon the ultimate requirement that religious advocates nevertheless adhere to public reason as the central, uncontested basis for law and policy.\textsuperscript{152} That is, religious and theological arguments must be translated into public reason.\textsuperscript{153} And the requirement of public reason may also foster “critical moral independence in religious and comprehensive doctrines.”\textsuperscript{154}

Rawls’s concession of a more inclusive view (allowing for some religious belief as long as it was supported by, or translated into, public reason), but rejection of an “open” view (“anything goes and all constraints are removed”),\textsuperscript{155} is of course still not enough for many. I have mentioned the objections that continued maintenance of this view of public reason is seen as a marginalization of religious believers.\textsuperscript{156} Public reason is seen by these as resulting in a pervasive secularity which is harmful to religious believers, who see no reason why they should have to refrain from overtly religious rationales.\textsuperscript{157} As stated with forceful eloquence by Michael McConnell:

\textsuperscript{148} Id. (citing RAWLS, supra note 1, at 247).
\textsuperscript{149} Id. (citing RAWLS, supra note 1, at 249).
\textsuperscript{150} RAWLS, supra note 1, at 249-50.
\textsuperscript{151} Id. Rawls later subtly expanded his “inclusive” view, to a “wide” (but not open) view. Griffin, supra note 123, at 321-22. As Leslie Griffin explains: “In the ‘wide’ view, Rawls expands the inclusive exception: ‘[i]n public political discourse citizens (though not judges and other government officials) may freely introduce their reasonable comprehensive doctrines, with one crucial proviso: namely, that in due course they support the political measures they propose in terms of the principles and values of a public political conception of justice.’” Id. at 321.
\textsuperscript{152} Griffin, supra note 123, at 321-22.
\textsuperscript{153} Id. at 322.
\textsuperscript{154} Id. at 324. Such critical moral independence from within Christian traditions appears to have been what occurred in the abolition and Civil Rights movements. Id. (citations omitted).
\textsuperscript{155} Griffin, supra note 123, at 319-22 (citations omitted).
\textsuperscript{156} See supra notes 135-144 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{157} Griffin, supra note 123, at 359.
[Rawlsian public reason] is faulty and its results perverse . . . I contend there is no persuasive "democratic reason" to accept the idea that citizens whose conceptions of public justice are informed by their understanding of God's will are somehow ineligible to deliberate in the formation of public policy. When it comes to political activism, religious citizens and groups are no different from other ideologically oriented citizens, for good and for ill, and are properly subject to no limitations on democratic participation that are not equally applicable to others.' As Michael Walzer says, "A democratic society can't inquire into how or where the political views of its citizens are shaped, and it can't censor the doctrinal or rhetorical forms in which those views are expressed." It would be a deep and fundamental violation of democratic principle to "keep out of politics" any citizens on the basis of their religious, philosophical, epistemological, or moral standpoints.158

Thus, the line has been drawn fairly clearly in the sand for some time now. On one side is the ideal of Rawlsian public reason, and on the other side is the insistence on utilizing overtly religious arguments regardless of other citizens’ adherence (such as those of both the Religious Right and Left which were discussed at length in Part II). Both sides appear to agree on the underlying definition and premise of what a “religious” or “Christian” argument is, but simply differ on the propriety of using them. Next, I will turn to a discussion of how incorrect this shared premise is, and its implications for Christian principles in political argumentation and public reason.

IV. THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN GOSPEL:
A WORLD APART

As I discussed in Part II, Christian political advocates on both ends of the political continuum frequently make reference to Christian and biblical principles in support of the laws and public policy they advocate.159 I have argued that one of the expressive effects of such argumentation is that the combination of advocacy for law (behavioral standards coercively enforced by the state) and claiming support from Christian “values” (signaling the effect of pleasing God), is unavoidably that if one complies with the law or policy advocated it will result in greater favor with God.160 On the other hand, as discussed in Part III, the ideal of Rawlsian public reason is that such explicit appeals to religious belief should either not be made in political advocacy at all, or if they are made they should be secondary and only if otherwise in

159 See supra Parts II.A and II.B.
160 See supra Part II.C.
supplemental support of the public reasoning. Christian political advocates insist that this is unacceptable, and demand a “place at the table” for overt Christian argumentation in the public, political sphere. Anything less is claimed to be a marginalizing trivialization of Christian beliefs.

Like Rawls and his adherents, I believe that the Christian political advocates – on both the Right and the Left --- are making a mistake in their use of overt Christian argumentation in the public, political sphere. I find the political and democratic reasons given for the ideal of public reason compelling, including primarily respect for non-believing citizens. However, I have decided to add my voice to this debate to note a theological reason for the disagreement. I believe that it is a theological point that virtually all within the wider Evangelical, Protestant community will unequivocally share. And it is no mere ancillary point of theology, but rather one that is at the absolute center of our Christian faith. I have decided to add my voice to this debate, neither as an expert in liberal political philosophy, nor as a law and religion expert, nor as a theologian, but rather as an Evangelical Christian who shares the same religious tradition as the advocates described in Part II. Because I am part of the community, and share the same faith as the participants in this debate, I feel an obligation to share my dissent from within and plea for a return to the pure mission of the Evangelical Christian church – the mission of sharing the Gospel of Christ.

Before proceeding with this Part, I wish to address two threshold issues. One is to clarify what I mean by “Evangelical” or “Protestant” Christian, and why I limit myself to this line of the Christian faith. David Smolin defined “Evangelical Protestantism” as follows:

(1) Adherence to classic Christian orthodoxy, and hence to monotheistic Trinitarian theology, as reflected in ancient creedal statements such as the Apostle’s and Nicene Creed.
(2) Acceptance of the Protestant Old Testament and New Testament canon as inspired scripture and the preeminent source of religious authority, with such scripture regarded as reliable and true (i.e. infallible/inerrant).
(3) An emphasis on a personal relationship between each individual believer and God, expressed as a relationship of trust and faith in Christ, which involves the individual turning away from sin and toward God (personal repentance).
(4) An emphasis on “evangelism,” based on a biblical mandate to spread the Christian faith to persons of every national, ethnic, and cultural group. Thus,

161 See supra Part III.
162 See supra Part III.B.
163 See supra Part III.
evangelicals believe that the Christian faith represents universal truth and the way of salvation applicable in every culture.\textsuperscript{164}

Though it is difficult to claim perfect accuracy, this definition would seem to encompass the following: Baptists (including Southern Baptists), Fundamentalists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, many “non-denominational” Christian churches, and many (if not all) of the members of the mainline Protestant denominations including Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians.\textsuperscript{165} I certainly cannot possibly claim to speak with authority on behalf of these groups, as their beliefs and attitudes splinter on many subjects in many different areas.\textsuperscript{166} But, as one who was raised in the Southern Baptist denomination, and professed faith in Christ as a child, and has attended and served the church as a lay member in the South for his entire life, I believe I have a reasonable grasp of the evangelical Christian mindset.

So with the definition of Evangelicalism out of the way, a follow-up point. Why limit the discussion to Evangelical Christianity? One easy (and truthful) answer is that is what I am, and so that is what I understand. Another answer is that many, if not even most, of the Christian political advocates described in Part II come from the evangelical Christian community---they are certainly the group that receives much of the attention (witness the public reaction to the name Jerry Falwell, or Pat Robertson). Another answer is that the dominant group omitted by this definition --- the Catholic Church --- has significant differences in theology even with respect to the points I am making in this article, not to mention a formidable (and, to the newcomer, intimidating) body of centuries of teaching on social justice (from Augustine and Aquinas, to John Courtney Murray, and beyond). Therefore, although obviously the Catholic Church is an immensely respected community of faith, morality, and social justice, and has much to say on issues of politics and law, I am leaving uniquely Catholic thought aside for another day. The reason is simply that my message is to my fellow Evangelical Christians, and pertains particularly to a specifically evangelical theology.\textsuperscript{167}

The second threshold issue is, why should non-Christians care about this explicitly Christian theological discussion? My thesis is that my fellow evangelical Christians are making a missional and theological mistake, based on scriptural understandings from within our own tradition. So why does


\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Id.} at 100-01.

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Id.} at 101-02.

\textsuperscript{167} I hasten to add, of course, that the Catholic faith and the Evangelical Christian faith have an immense degree of commonality as to many, if not even most, of the essentials of the Christian faith.
anyone else care? Or, as William Brewbaker has characterized the possible reaction from non-Christians: “Who cares? Why bother?”168 Perhaps the main response is that I think there is some value in simply airing this “in-house” debate in public. The Christian argumentation described in Part II has already been aired in the public square for public consumption, and presented as though it is “the” Christian position on the various issues.169 Therefore, any necessary corrective ought also to occur in the public square, so as to correct any misimpressions of the faith. This point is actually raised by many in the Rawlsian debate on public reason. So, for instance, Rawls essentially left it up to each religious tradition to reconcile its tenets with the ideals of public reason.170 And in fact, Rawls stated that in the event of an intra-religion conflict as to public reason, a value would be served by the opposing groups presenting “in the public forum how their comprehensive doctrines do indeed affirm those values.”171 Such affirmation in the public square by a religious perspective, Rawls noted, “surely strengthens mutual trust and public confidence; it can be a vital part of the sociological basis encouraging citizens to honor the ideal of public reason.”172 Another reason non-Christians should care was raised by Kent Greenawalt: “it informs them of the implications of one important religious and cultural perspective in our society; by introducing a perspective that varies from their own, it may enrich their sense of the significance of their own perspective and of alternative possibilities.”173

And finally, there is a sense in which it is more legitimate, and perhaps more amenable, for a member of the same Christian community to suggest opposing viewpoints for political engagement. When the “other” group – say secular political philosophers – tells Christians they should not engage the public square with explicit Christian political argumentation, there is a sense of drawing lines in the sand, of cultural battle. But, if there is an in-house debate among members of the same Christian community, hopefully there is a chance of greater possibilities of constructive change. Thus, as David Smolin has recently observed: “The real limitations on religious persons acting politically must come from within their own religious traditions, or from the practical necessities of operating within a religiously pluralistic society with certain traditions on such matters.”174 It is to such a limitation from within Evangelical Christianity that I now turn.

169 See supra Parts II.A and II.B.
170 See Griffin, supra note 123, at 322.
171 RAWLS, supra note 1, at 249.
172 Id.
174 Smolin, supra note 164, at 106.
A. The Explicit Christian Gospel: Faith Alone

Politics and law aside, there is a danger of misunderstanding and false teaching even within the church itself. Theologian D.A. Carson has stated “that a church is never more than three generations from losing the gospel: one generation to believe it and proclaim it, a second generation to assume it, and a third generation to lose it.”175 Ironically, John Rawls himself, in his recently discovered undergraduate thesis which discussed some of his theological views at the time, remarked: “Although Christianity is said by all to be a very simple religion, it is surprising how few people understand it.”176 One way that many evangelical leaders in the church today believe that the historical Christian gospel message is being lost within the church is by subtly teaching instead what has been called “Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”177 “The idea behind moral, therapeutic deism is that we are able to earn favor with God and justify ourselves before God by virtue of our behavior.”178 This moralistic deism, although a somewhat “Christian”-sounding mode of thinking, is about behavior — being good and avoiding bad — and tends in practice to be more about a kind of self-actualization than about an explicit theology of right standing before God.179 This shift — where the church has deemphasized (perhaps assumed) the historical gospel and instead focused on behavioralism — has prompted a recent book by evangelical pastor Matt Chandler entitled The Explicit Gospel, setting forth the explicit, central gospel message as accepted by historical Christianity in the evangelical tradition.180 As Chandler states, I want “to make sure that when we use the word gospel, we are talking about the same thing.”181 In setting forth the evangelical Christian “gospel on the

178 Id. (emphasis added).
179 Id.
180 Id. at 15-16.
181 Id. at 19.
I will draw on Chandler’s presentation as set forth in his recent book, but will also show throughout that it is consistent in the essential points of doctrine discussed with the range of major Protestant Evangelical views in the United States.

Chandler divides his presentation of the historical Christian gospel into two parts: the gospel on the “ground,” and the gospel in the “air.” In “The Gospel on the Ground,” “we will trace the biblical narrative of God, Man, Christ, Response.” This refers to individual salvation for man. By “The Gospel in the Air,” Chandler is referring to the greater picture of the fall of creation, and God’s redemptive plan for the reconciliation of the wider creation and the plan to “make all things new.” Although both are obviously of immense importance to the evangelical Christian faith, I will only focus on Chandler’s account of “The Gospel on the Ground,” as it relates to man’s individual salvation, and I believe is more directly related to the issues of behavioralism and the law that I wish to discuss.

At the end of each of the four subsections of the evangelical Christian gospel presentation set forth herein in this Part IV.A – God, Man, Christ, and Response --- I will reference doctrinal statements from the following denominations representing a large percentage of evangelical Christianity in the United States today (in no particular order): the Southern Baptist Convention, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Calvary Chapel, and the Episcopal Church in the United States.


The doctrinal statement I will use for the United Methodist Church is “The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church,” available online at http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwl4KnN1tH/b.4846073/k.6B5F/Our_Doctrinal_Standards.htm (last visited January 2, 2013) (hereinafter “Articles of Methodist Church”).

The doctrinal statement I will use for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the Westminster Confession of Faith, as contained and modified in the Book of Confessions as published by the Presbyterian Mission Agency. See “Statement on Theology,” available online at http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/101/theology/ (last visited January 2, 2013) (“Presbyterians confess their beliefs through statements that have been adopted over the years and are contained in The Book of Confessions.”). The Book of Confessions is available in downloadable pdf form at http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/boc.pdf (last visited January 2, 2013) (hereinafter “Presbyterian Westminster Confession”).
1. God

The gospel begins, as it must, with God. “The work of God in the cross of Christ strikes us as awe-inspiring only after we have first been awed by the glory of God.” In the book of Romans Paul writes of the glory of God:

Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How searchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor? Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid? For from Him and though Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

Deuteronomy 10:14 provides that “to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.” God’s creativity is vast and expansive, and far beyond us. He simply knows everything. He “is incomprehensibly immense, exceedingly expansive, and eternally powerful.” In response to Job’s questioning of His ways, God responded: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? . . . Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.”


The doctrinal statement I will use for Calvary Chapel is the “About” page of its website, available online at http://www.calvarychapel.com/about/ (last visited January 2, 2013) (hereinafter “About Calvary Chapel”).


Id. at 23-24 (citing Romans 11:33-36 (ESV)). All scripture references throughout will be to the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise noted.

Id. at 26 (citing Deuteronomy 10:14).

Id. at 27.

Id. at 29-30 (describing God’s infinite knowledge, including: every book that will ever be written, the temperature of the stars, the oceans’ depths, every event of history and the future, the velocity of a butterfly’s wings).

Id. at 31.

Id. at 31-32 (citing Job 38:2-4).
more, God is perfectly self-sufficient. As the passage from Romans above-cited states, “who has given a gift to God that he might be repaid?”\footnote{191} This means that you cannot put God into your debt, and God owes nothing to any man.\footnote{192} And since everything belongs to God, we have nothing with which we can negotiate or bargain with Him.\footnote{193}

God also has an ultimate glorious self-regard. He is the most excellent thing that exists, and so it only makes sense that He values Himself above all things.\footnote{194} “From beginning to end, the Scriptures reveal that the foremost desire of God’s heart is not our salvation but rather the glory of His own name. God’s glory is what drives the universe; it is why everything exists.”\footnote{195} Although the scriptures contain many ethical teachings, that is not the primary point, and neither is the salvation of man – rather, the meta-narrative of the scriptures is the glorification of God in His infinite perfection.\footnote{196} It is unavoidably and pervasively the overall theme of scripture.\footnote{197} The scriptures provide that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”\footnote{198} This is why the champions of the Reformation proclaimed “soli Deo Gloria (glory to God alone.)”\footnote{199} Thus, the story of the Bible is not man, but rather “God and God alone, God’s name and namesake alone. The point of everything is God’s glory alone so that to God alone will be the glory.”\footnote{200} Or as theologian and pastor John Piper put it: “The

\footnote{191} Id. at 34 (citing Romans 11:35).\footnote{192} Id.\footnote{193} Id. at 35.\footnote{194} Id. at 36-41.\footnote{195} Id. at 38 (emphasis added).\footnote{196} Id. at 38-39.\footnote{197} Id. at 39-40 (“According to Scripture: for the sake of His name, God did not destroy Israel in the desert (Ezek. 20:5-9); God saves men for His name’s sake (Ps. 106:8); Pharaoh’s heart was hardened for the glory of God (Ex. 14:4, 18); The beginning of the Israelite monarchy was about the glory of God (1 Sam. 12:19-19-23); Solomon dedicated the temple for the glory of God (1 Kings 8); Israel became great and powerful among the nations because God was ‘making himself a name’ (2 Sam. 7:23); God did not destroy Israel when it deserved to be destroyed, because he did not want his name blasphemed among the nations (Isa. 48:9-11); God decided to destroy the Israelites because they would not lay it in their heart to give glory to his name (Mal. 2:2); Jesus’s life and ministry was about the glory of God (John 7:18, 17:4); The cross of Jesus is about the glory of God (John 12:27-28); You and I are saved to the praise of his glorious grace (Eph. 1:3-6); The Christian life is about the reflection of the glory of God off of our lives into the universe (Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 4:11); The second coming is about the consummation of the glory of God (2 Thess. 1:9-10); The consummation of all things is that God might be praised (Rev. 21:23).”\footnote{198} Id. at 40 (citing Habakkuk 2:14).\footnote{199} Id.\footnote{200} Id.
further up you go in the revealed thoughts of God, the clearer you see that
God’s aim in creating the world was to display the value of his own glory.”
This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith begins by biblically
answering the question of the meaning of existence: “The chief end of man is to
glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” This enjoyment is another way of
saying “worship”:

Worship is the attributing of ultimate worth to something. When this
ultimate worth is attributed to anyone or anything other than the one, true
trithe God of the universe, it is idolatry. The root of Christian worship,
then, is acknowledging, submitting to, and enjoying the supremacy of
God’s glory. In all things.

The scriptures teach that we should glorify God and worship Him in all things.
“The heavens declare the glory of God.” Therefore, Paul admonished the
church in Corinth that “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all
for the glory of God.” There is substantial agreement across American
Christian evangelicalism in regard to the supreme significance of God and His
ultimate worthiness for worship. Unfortunately, the scriptures reveal that the
current natural state of man is not one of worship and attribution of glory to
God. It is to that state that the gospel narrative next takes us.

201 Id. at 41 (citing JOHN PIPER, GOD’S PASSION FOR HIS GLORY: LIVING THE
VISION OF JONATHAN EDWARDS 32 (Crossway 1998)).
202 Id. at 39 (emphasis added).
203 Id. at 41.
204 Psalm 19:1.
205 1 Corinthians 10:31.
206 See Sec. II, God, in Baptist Faith and Message, at
http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php#article1_2; Article I, Of Faith in the
Holy Trinity, Articles of Methodist Church, at
http://master.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=1817; Secs. 6.011-6.013, Of God, and
of the Holy Trinity, Presbyterian Westminster Confession, p. 124b of pdf available at
http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/boc.pdf; Sec. 2, The One True God,
Assemblies of God Statement, p. 1 of pdf available at
first and third “We Believe” statements, About Calvary Chapel, at
http://www.calvarychapel.com/about/; God the Father, Episcopal Catechism, p. 846 of
pdf available at
.pdf.
207 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 43.
2. Man

Although Evangelical Christians believe that man was designed for the worship and glorification of God, the scriptures reveal that we do not naturally do so. As C.S. Lewis once colorfully stated:

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

So we were designed by God for worshipping and treasuring Him above all things. “But what happens when instead of using that gift of worship from God for God, we terminate our worship on the stuff God made? What happens when we attempt to hijack God’s story about himself and rewrite it with ourselves at the center? This is insurrection. It is infernal mutiny.” Evangelicals believe that this is the state --- fallen sinfulness --- of all humanity in its natural state. This has been the case ever since the Fall of man, since the first rebellion against God in the garden – the initial sin of Adam and Even created a rupture in the creative order, and in man’s relationship with God. The scriptures reveal that the universe itself shudders in horror at man’s rebellion and idolatry in failing to give God the worship and glory to which He is entitled. This is because we are guilty before God – everyone in the human race now is born into this rebellious state. As David said in the Psalms, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

Therefore, in the book of Romans Paul states to “[n]ote then the kindness and severity of God.” God’s kindness – themes of love, grace, healing and forgiveness --- is absolutely pervasive and correct and worthy of worship. However, God’s severity is not nearly as popular (nor politically correct) of a concept. Although it is unpopular, and often ridiculed and minimized as a fundamentalist concept out of touch with enlightened,

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208 Id. at 44.
210 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 44 (emphasis added).
211 See id. at 129-57 (describing the Fall generally).
212 See id. at 45. See also Jeremiah 2:11-12: “Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate.”
213 Id. at 99 (citing Psalm 51:5).
214 Id. (citing Romans 11:22).
215 Id. at 46.
modernist thinking, there is no escaping the evangelical Christian adherence to the concept of God’s severity in response to man’s rebellion against attributing ultimate worth to God. A couple of key scriptures noting God’s severity in relation to man’s rebellion (sin) are Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death,” and Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”\textsuperscript{216} Thus, the scriptures reveal that man is deserving of God’s perfectly just wrath for our infinite treason against the God of the universe, and twelve times in the four gospel accounts Jesus uses the word \textit{Gehenna} as a description of God’s forthcoming wrath --- a Greek word translated as “hell.”\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Gehenna}, or hell, is described in the scriptures as the absence of God, or anything good or joyous – it is described as a place of gnashing of teeth, and eternal torment.\textsuperscript{218} Many, perhaps most, get no further than this in hearing the Gospel narrative – God should be love, they say, and people are mostly good. “The punishment does not fit the crime.”\textsuperscript{219} “But to discount the enormity of God’s severity, as if we aren’t really that bad and really deserve mostly kindness, is to discount the enormity of God’s holiness.”\textsuperscript{220} Or, as John Piper has said, hell “is a just and righteous recompense to all who sin. And for that to be true, how infinitely valuable and worthy must be the glory of God that sin belittles and scorns! In other words the horror of hell is an echo of the infinite worth of God's glory.”\textsuperscript{221} Thus, “to seek our benefit outside God’s glory demands the response of eternal fire.”\textsuperscript{222}

Evangelical Christians believe that our deserving of God’s wrath for rebellion against Him is true information, and thus very good and monumentally important to know.\textsuperscript{223} But, even realization of hell cannot create worship --- “misunderstanding this reality is historically how the doctrine of hell has been abused and misused by so many men in the name of God.”\textsuperscript{224} People cannot be scared into salvation – they can perhaps be scared into acting morally (and such activity is often mislabeled “Christian”), but cannot be scared into loving God.\textsuperscript{225} So what is the point of discussing it in the context of the gospel narrative? “Because you can’t understand the cross of Christ

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{216} Id. at 49 (citing Romans 3:23).  
\textsuperscript{217} Id. at 48.  
\textsuperscript{218} Id. at 49-50 (citing Matthew 8:12; Mark 9:48, Revelation 14:11).  
\textsuperscript{219} Id. at 50-51.  
\textsuperscript{220} Id. at 50.  
\textsuperscript{222} HANDLER, supra note 177, at 54.  
\textsuperscript{223} Id. at 56.  
\textsuperscript{224} Id.  
\textsuperscript{225} Id. at 57.}
without understanding the weight of the glory of God and the offense of belittling His name and what the due punishment is for that offense. What Christ did on the cross will not be revelatory in transforming love until we see that the cross is revelatory also in the depth of the offense of sin.” 226 Or, as Thomas Watson put it: “Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.” 227 And, as Chandler puts it near the conclusion of his chapter on the state of Man: “We have to feel the weight of God’s severity, because without feeling the weight of his severity, we won’t know the weight of his kindness, and we won’t be able to worship him and him alone.” 228 And on the sinful state of man and his need for redemption there is substantial agreement across American Christian evangelicalism. 229 It is at this point of the gospel account, and man’s state of utter hopelessness, that the cross of Christ intervenes.

3. Christ

Thus far the scriptural account has been that God is infinitely glorious and worthy of worship, but that man is fallen, rebellious, and falls well short of the glory of God – choosing instead to elevate man and things over God. 230 Because God is infinitely deserving of our worship, and He is perfectly just, our failure to worship and glorify Him is correspondingly deserving of infinite wrath. 231 “The problem is that . . . there is a chasm between God and us, and the problem compounding that problem is that not only does our sinfulness cause this chasm, but our sinfulness prevents us from being able to bridge the chasm ourselves. . . . We have dug ourselves into a grave too deep to climb out.

226 Id.
227 Id. (citing THOMAS WATSON, THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE 63 (1988)).
228 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 58-59.
230 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 61.
231 Id.
We need radical intervention.”

God’s salvation offered to man is done through the miraculous person of Jesus Christ:

The place the gospel holds out for us is where God’s kindness and his severity meet. This place is called the cross, and it is where grace and wrath intersect. It is at this place of shame and victory that God, in the form of the man Jesus of Nazareth, the long-expected Messiah, offered in his death the blood atonement necessary to satisfy God’s justice and secure our salvation.

The cross of Christ is God’s response to man’s belittlement of His name. The scriptures teach that Jesus was God Himself, supernaturally incarnated into the flesh of man, offering Himself as the only possible perfect sacrifice to satisfy the wrath of God for the sinful nature of mankind.

Probably the most universally cited gospel verse is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Romans 5:8 provides that “Christ demonstrated his own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was an amazing display of love – Christ said: “No one takes My life from Me. I lay it down.”

The concept of the removal of sin by blood sacrifice had been established by God thousands of years earlier in the system of Mosaic law with the Israelite people. “The sacrificial system was instituted under the established truth that to dwell in God’s holy presence requires perfection.”

The author of the book of Hebrews later ties the Old Testament system of sacrifice to Christ’s sacrifice: “[w]ithout the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” The former was a shadow and precursor of the latter. The animals sacrificed under the Old Testament system represented the need for satisfaction of God’s wrath for the Israelites’ sin, an act that was ultimately and completely finalized in Christ’s perfect sacrifice. Hence the “Lamb of God” title given to Christ by John the Baptist, connecting the old system of Jewish sacrifices with the new covenant instituted through Christ’s sacrifice:

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232 Id.
233 Id.
234 Id. at 63.
235 Id. at 63-66.
236 John 3:16.
237 Romans 5:8.
238 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 67 (citing John 10:18).
239 Id. at 69.
240 Id.
241 Id. at 62 (citing Hebrews 9:22).
242 Id. at 71.
“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”243 It was part of God’s predetermined plan for the ages, and the “cross now stands as the central tenet of all we believe about salvation.”244 And not only that Christ died, but that he resurrected three days later in victory over death – thus, Paul recounts the simple, unadulterated gospel in his first letter to the church at Corinth:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.245

On the historical sacrifice and resurrection of Christ for man’s sin there is of course consistent agreement across American evangelicalism.246 The only thing then that remains to discuss in this account of the evangelical Christian gospel is man’s response to Christ’s sacrifice on man’s behalf.

4. Response

Evangelical Christians maintain that “[t]he gospel is news, not advice or instruction, but it nevertheless demands a response.”247 What response? Faith.

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243 Id. at 72.
244 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 67.
245 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (emphasis added).
247 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 100.
As cited above, John 3:16 provides: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”248 Belief—namely, faith—is the simple response God desires. In another scripture, the apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans provides: “If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”249 God desires man’s faith in His provision of salvation on our behalf. “Believing the news that God is holy, that you are a sinner, and that Christ has reconciled you to God by his life, death, and resurrection is what justifies [i.e., saves] you. This is our foundation, our root.”250 As Chandler further states:

The gospel is such power that it necessitates reaction. Jesus Christ has worked such an outrageous wonder that he demands response, whether hatred or passion. Anyone ambivalent about what Christ has actually done just isn’t clear on the facts. To present the gospel, then, is to place a hearer in an untenable position. The heart of the hearer of the gospel must move, either toward Christ or away from him. Pastor Chan Kilgore puts it this way: “True gospel preaching always changes the heart. It either awakens it or hardens it.”251

Thus faith, and faith alone, is the only response to Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf which results in a reconciled, restored relationship with God. Man’s only response is simple, even childlike,252 belief in God’s provision of Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection as atonement for our sin and the means of a reconciled, restored relationship with God. Conversely, the natural response of man to this is, quite simply, that it is absolute nonsense—complete, utter foolishness: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”253 Another scripture from the book of Proverbs perhaps echoes this same mystery: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”254 Nevertheless, faith and faith alone is the only response called for by God which will result in justification (i.e., salvation), according to the historic, evangelical gospel, and continuing as

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248 John 3:16 (emphasis added).
249 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 101 (emphasis added) (citing Romans 10:9).
250 Id. at 98.
252 See Matthew 18:2-4 (“And calling to him a child, he [Jesus] put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”).
253 1 Corinthians 1:18 (emphasis added).
254 Proverbs 14:12.
a shared tenet across American evangelicalism. Of course, Christian theology is thick with additional implications beyond the initial act of faith, but none matter until that initial threshold is crossed --- the “explicit gospel, by virtue of its own gravity, [simply] invites belief.” As Jesus told his followers in the book of John: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

**B. The Mistake of Works-Based Moralism**

As has been seen, the unadulterated Christian gospel is faith alone in the atoning sacrifice of Christ and resurrection. There is nothing we can do besides trust in God for this method of reconciliation. “[B]ut one of our biggest problems is mistaking the gospel for law.” This mistake is one that is as old as God’s dealing with man as recounted in the scriptures. As discussed earlier, the scriptures reveal that God, in a shadow designed to point toward Christ’s eventual sacrifice, commanded the Israelites to perform animal sacrifices to make atonement for their sins. God appears to have meant for this to produce repentant hearts, but instead too often the performance of the rituals were perceived as the end result – a passage from the prophet Isaiah is indicative:

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom!
Give ear to the teaching of our God,

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256 CHANDLER, *supra* note 177, at 73-74.

257 John 6:29 (emphasis added).

258 CHANDLER, *supra* note 177, at 73-74 (emphasis added).

259 Id. at 78 (“Hebrews 10:1 tells us the law is just the shadow of the good things to come.”).
you people of Gomorrah!

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of well-fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.
When you come to appear before me,
who has required of you
this trampling of my courts?”

As Chandler translates: “God is saying, ‘I don’t need your bulls. I don’t want your goats. You’re missing the point. I’m trying to communicate to you how disgusting and how horrible and how costly your sin is before me. And instead of feeling the weight of that and actually repenting, you just keep doing what you’re doing, all the while bringing me goats and bulls like that’s what I really want.’” And as Chandler further states, “[t]he same thing plays out even to this day. Christ’s work demands the response of faith, but we want to make donations. It is astounding how many evangelicals are not doing Christianity at all; they’re doing the Levitical priesthood.”

The faith vs. works error was also made by some first century Christians, and is actually the primary subject of the book of Galatians (Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia). The new Christians in Galatia, although they had recently professed faith in Christ, had fallen back into behavioral-based works of the Mosaic law as a supplemental way to continue to earn God’s favor. Paul opened his letter by saying: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” Later in the book he expressed the same sentiment: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? . . . Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” Paul corrected them in the accurate understanding of the Christian gospel by admonishing the Galatians: “we know that a person is not justified [saved] by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

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260 Id. at 74-75 (citing Isaiah 1:10-12).
261 Id. at 75.
262 Id.
264 Galatians 1:6-7 (emphasis added).
265 Galatians 3:1-3.
266 Galatians 2:16 (emphasis added).
This issue of law (works) vs. faith was also a central issue in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. That is, Luther initiated a break from the Roman Catholic Church over the very issue of whether faith alone was sufficient for salvation, or whether some form of works were also necessary:

[Martin] Luther held that man was justified (saved) by faith alone: the words sola fide came to be the watchword and touchstone of the Reformation. Man could do nothing by his own works—whether works of edification like prayer, fasting, mortification, or works of charity—to compel justification. But if he believed, God of His grace would give him the gifts of the Holy Spirit—salvation and eternal life.

Thus, the relationship of the law and gospel was one of Luther’s central concerns that eventually brought about the Reformation. At bottom, this aspect was concerned with man’s tendency to misperceive that his own behavioral efforts were in part necessary in order to gain favor with God.

The same thing that was true of the Old Testament Israelites, and the first century Christians in Galatia, and the Christians of the sixteenth century in Luther’s day, is still unfortunately prevalent in the evangelical Christian community today. The response to Christ’s sacrifice is simple faith and trust, but people in their supposed wisdom believe they can improve upon God’s prescription, and offer up their good works as well. “Christ’s work demands the response of faith, but we want to make donations. . . . [People are] trying to offer God good behavior so he’ll like them.” This system of favor with God because of good works that we do makes innate sense to our human sensibilities, and “[w]hen someone [instead] dares to insert the unadulterated gospel into this religious mess [i.e., salvation by faith alone], we get discombobulated.” Of course, it is true that the scripture is filled with codes of behavior and works, largely in the Mosaic law, but this was all part of the shadow pointing toward Christ who became the fulfillment of the law---it turns out that the law was given by God not to provide man a way to gain favor with God, but rather ultimately to convict men of their sin and inability to serve the law.

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268 Id. (citing G.R. ELTON, REFORMATION EUROPE 1517-1559, at 16 (Fontana 1963)).
269 Id. See also Joshua Mitchell, Legal Teachings of the Protestant Reformation (book review), 52 EMORY L.J. 953, 954-55 (2002). On my omission of Catholic theology from this paper, see supra note 167 and accompanying text.
270 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 75 (emphasis added).
271 Id.
sufficiently please God by their works no matter how hard they try.273 By the law alone no one would obtain salvation, because “no one does good; no, not one.”274 As the book of John puts it: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”275

The mistake of law-based moralism gets two things --- salvation through faith, and righteous works --- confused as to their ordering with respect to reconciliation with God. It is no doubt true in evangelical Christian theology that a person’s profession of faith in Christ should not be the last event in a person’s life of devotion to God. James in fact tells us that faith, unless accompanied by righteous works, is dead.276 And Christians actually believe that when they place their faith in Christ, they are supernaturally empowered more and more to do such righteous works by being imbued with the righteousness of Christ Himself277 (albeit such righteousness still wars with the flesh – i.e., the person’s natural sinful tendencies).278 Thus, it is no doubt true that a genuine, believing Christian should be spiritually spurred on to good works, such as helping their fellow man, or engaging in more moral behavior. However, this is a result, and not a cause, of favor with God, as theologian D. A. Carson has noted:

The kingdom of God advances by the power of the Sprit through the ministry of the Word. Not for a moment does that mitigate the importance of good deeds and understanding the social entailments of the gospel, but they are entailments [i.e., results] of the gospel. It is the gospel that is preached.279

Man’s efforts to be righteous absent faith are therefore worthless to God – the prophet Isaiah states that they are basically nothing but “filthy rags” in God’s sight.280 As Chandler states: “The religious, moralistic, churchgoing evangelical who has no real intention of seeking God and following him has not found some sweet spot between radical devotion and wanton sin; he’s found devastation.”281

273 Romans 7:7-12.
274 Romans 3:10-12 (“as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’”).
275 John 1:17.
277 2 Corinthians 5:21 (“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”).
278 Romans 7:13-25.
279 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 97 (citing D.A. CARSON, SCANDALOUS: THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS 105-06 (Crossway 2010)).
280 Isaiah 64:6.
281 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 81 (emphasis added).
Thus, rather than moralistic works, faith is the only hope – indeed, the scriptures state that “without faith it is impossible to please God.”\textsuperscript{282} Whereas man tends naturally to think that he must act righteously in order to gain favor with God, in fact it is the reverse: “the shadow of good works ought to proceed from the light of the good news. . . . The gospel of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, then, is not an invitation to moralism; it is an invitation to real transformation. \textit{Our works don’t work. ‘For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law,’ Paul writes in Romans 3:28. The only acceptable response to the gospel is nothing less than a heart of faith.}”\textsuperscript{283}

\textbf{C. Christian Political Argumentation = Works-Based Moralism}

By now, it should be clear that the essential complaint I have with the “Christian” political argumentation illustrated in Part II is that the \textit{expressed message to the public about the Christian gospel is wrong.} When political advocates – from either the Religious Right or the Religious Left ---- champion some candidate or law or policy based explicitly on the fact that a vote for him (or her or it) is \textit{required} by “Christian” principles or “values,” this is an absolutely incorrect theological message from the evangelical Christian perspective. Law is about inherently coerced standards of behavior, backed and enforced by the violence of the State.\textsuperscript{284} Christianity is understood by the public (even by Rawls!) as making a salvationist claim – that is, a claim that adherence and subjection to its principles will result in favor with God and indeed, salvation of their souls.\textsuperscript{285} Cass Sunstein has astutely noted that laws carry unavoidably expressive meanings.\textsuperscript{286} When groups or citizens from either the Religious Right or the Religious Left tell the public that a vote for them is necessary for compliance with “Christian” values, the message is that the \textit{acts} or \textit{works} of their vote – and their compliance with any law once enacted on the books – will result in favor with God by virtue of the “Christian-ness” of such works.\textsuperscript{287} This is communicating a works-based moralism, and it is just as incompatible with the historic evangelical Christian gospel for current society as it was to the first-century Galatians, and the sixteenth-century church in Luther’s day. Such works-based argumentation is completely at odds with the simple evangelical Christian message that “[b]elieving the news that God is

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{282} Hebrews 11:6.
\item\textsuperscript{283} \textsc{Chandler}, supra note 177, at 78-79 (citing Romans 3:28).
\item\textsuperscript{285} \textit{See, e.g.,} Rawls, supra note 1, at xxi, xxiii (describing Christianity as being a “religion of salvation”).
\item\textsuperscript{287} \textit{See} supra Part II.C.
\end{footnotes}
holy, that you are a sinner, and that Christ has reconciled you to God by his life, death and resurrection is what justifies [saves] you." It is completely at odds with the evangelical message, consistent from the time of Luther, that salvation comes by faith alone.

In his book, Chandler observes the tendency of confusion that occurs when the simple gospel message of faith is mixed with other messages: "If we confuse the gospel with response to the gospel [i.e., good works resulting after a salvation experience], we will drift from what keeps the gospel on the ground, what makes it clear and personal, and the next thing you know, we will be doing a bunch of different things that actually obscure the gospel, not reveal it." This is what I fear occurs when advocates from the Religious Right or Left make their explicit appeals to Christian values in order to persuade their fellow citizens. They are obscuring the true gospel message of salvation by faith alone. They are obscuring it with an injection of law and works-based morality being tinged with appeals to Christianity. Samuel Calhoun echoed a similar sentiment in 1992 in his discussion of the works of Kent Greenawalt and David Smolin and their appeals to allow Christian thought to be injected into democratic deliberation of law and policy:

Christianity teaches that each person has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, despite the outward "righteousness" of one's conduct. . . . The heart of the Christian message is that the only way to righteousness before God is through faith in Jesus Christ, who on the cross paid the penalty for sin. Emphasis upon human law as the road to righteousness perpetuates a cruel delusion, like the story of Scrooge at Christmastime. Both direct people's attention to their own conduct as the avenue to acceptability before God, when in truth acceptability lies only in trusting Jesus Christ as Savior. Conduct is important, not as the avenue to God, but as the response of a grateful heart to God's provision of the only way to Him-Jesus Christ.

Thus, as Calhoun correctly observed, "[h]uman coercion can play no role in another's decision to become a Christian," and implying otherwise through Christian political argumentation that effectuates an inaccurate and imprecise conflation of secular law and the Christian faith "perpetuates the 'cruel

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288 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 98 (emphasis added).
290 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 98-99 (emphasis added).
delusion,’ at odds with the Christian Gospel, that righteous conduct is the road to a restored relationship with God.”

As an evangelical Christian who was lived his entire life in the southern United States (specifically for me, Texas), where evangelical Christianity is culturally dominant, there is an obvious realization of the pervasiveness of this works-based moralism. It is perpetuated (especially in these parts, by the Religious Right) by many well-meaning Christians who long to see a more righteous, more moral, and better life for all the citizenry, but I believe it has a devastating effect on the gospel message which ironically is the only means for the true conversion of culture. My personal experience of what happens when these arguments are made, whether in a church setting or a political setting, is further illustrated by Chandler:

One of my frustrations living in the Bible Belt is that the gospel and its ancillary truths have been so divorced from actual living that a lot of beautiful theology has become cliché. There is a sentimentalization of the faith that occurs when you sanitize the gospel of Christ crucified or sift it from the substance of the Christian religion. The result is a malleable Jesus, a tame Jesus. The result is, as Michael Spencer says, “a spirituality that has Jesus on the cover but not in the book.” When we dilute or ditch the gospel, we end up with an evangelicalism featuring special appearances by Jesus but the denial of his power.

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292 Samuel W. Calhoun, Misreading the Judeo-Christian Tradition and the Law: A Response to Professor Smolin, 15 U. DAYTON L. REV. 383, 397-98 (1990) (emphasis added). I should note that Professor Calhoun has engaged over the ensuing years in a very thoughtful development of his views on the propriety of Christian political argumentation in the public square, and has now decided that such advocacy should not be discouraged, but rather that Christians should have an equal place at the table in any political debate. See Samuel W. Calhoun, May the President Appropriately Invoke God? Evaluating the Embryonic Stem Cell Vetoes, 10 RUTGERS J. OF L. & RELIG. 1 (Fall 2008); Samuel W. Calhoun, The Politics of Virtue: Is Abortion Debatable?, 16 J.L. & RELIGION 405 (2001). Of course, I agree that there is a right of free speech to all citizens protected by the Constitution, but rather am arguing about the propriety of such communication when considered from a theological perspective, and possible ideals of restraint. Although we disagree on the desirability of making explicit appeals to Christian rhetoric in public political arguments, I am immensely grateful for Professor Calhoun’s assistance in my thinking about these issues.

293 CHANDLER, supra note 177, at 84 (citing MICHAEL SPENCER, MERE CHURCHIANITY: FINDING YOUR WAY BACK TO JESUS-SHAPED SPIRITUALITY 51 (2010); 2 Timothy 3:5).
When this sort of dilution of the gospel message occurs, “what you have are people that have been conformed to a pattern of religious behavior but not transformed by the Holy Spirit of God.”

This should not be what Christians are after. We should desire to spread the correct message of the Christian gospel – that salvation is needed for sinful rebellion against God, and that it is only possible by faith in the provision of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf. Injecting law, or politics, into a discussion of the Christian faith only serves to send the wrong message: “Liberals [i.e., many on the Religious Left] want to make social justice the center. Fundamentalists [i.e., many on the Religious Right] want to make moral behavior the center. (Their motto is “Do, do, do,” but the cross screams out “Done!”) All of these things are good things, biblical things. But to make any of them the center of the Christian faith, the grounds of our hope, is to disregard the only power of salvation—the message of the cross.”

This is the wrong message – it is the wrong gospel. Jesus said that we Christians should spread the gospel news far and wide – in the Great Commission we are urged to go forth to all the world with the gospel message and its implications.

But it should be the correct message. Paul gave strict warnings against misstating the correct gospel message, and condemned any who preached a contrary message.

This is a sobering warning, and should cause Christians to earnestly desire to only communicate correct public messages about Christian truths.

Thus, the message could not be clearer. We Christians – as the church – should preach the correct gospel message to the world. Salvation is through faith in Christ alone, and not by works or law. When we communicate incorrectly we are hindering, rather than assisting, the cause of Christianity. Thus the correct evangelical Christian theology is actually to leave the secular, civil law out of it. Arguments about the law in our society should be made in the Rawlsian manner of public reason – overt reference to Christian principles should be left aside. This is not only out of adherence to principles of liberal democracy and respect for fellow citizens, but to avoid the danger of sending an incorrect theological message about the sacred gospel message of faith alone being the way to salvation. In our churches and in our neighborhoods and in our culture generally we should preach faith in Christ, but in our political argumentation for coercive law we should argue in terms of public reason.

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294 Id.
295 Id. at 69.
296 Matthew 28:16-20.
297 Galatians 1:8-9.
D. Some Corroborating Observations

My primary thesis is that evangelical Christians can fully comply with Rawlsian public reason in their political argumentation, and that when they instead attach the “Christian” label to their political advocacy, they not only violate the ideals of liberal democracy but they also tragically communicate an incorrect message about the Christian gospel and the way to find ultimate favor with God. I have a handful of other observations about the mixture of Christian political argumentation which serve to further buttress the point that such argumentation is inappropriate.

1. Misrepresentation and Dilution

As stated in Part IV.C, my primary thesis is that explicit Christian argumentation to the public is undesirable from a Christian theological standpoint because it has the potential for confusing the gospel message of faith in Christ alone. The argument rests in large part on the risk that the political argumentation will confuse non-Christian public recipients of such political messages, as to the means to find favor with God. There may be a counter-argument that such risk is minimal. However, even if that were true, I believe that the message is harmful for two additional reasons: (1) misrepresentation, and (2) dilution.

By misrepresentation, I simply mean that an arguably false representation of the means for favor with God is being presented. Just to be clear, such a false message is counseled against in scripture, regardless of the likelihood of confusion on the part of the hearing audience. Perhaps the clearest picture of this is Paul’s admonition to the church in Galatia, regarding the false message of the requirement of works in compliance with the Mosaic law as needed for salvation, in addition to faith in Christ. Paul confronted Peter over acquiescing in this process, clearly rebuking him in the presence of the Galatians and sending a clear corrective message about the proper gospel message of salvation by faith alone, and not of works. 298 And, of course, the Old Testament is also filled with God’s displeasure directed at false prophets inaccurately purporting to bring word from God. 299

My other point on dilution simply concerns the number of messages that Christians send to the public. Clearly, all Christians agree that the gospel of Christ should be proclaimed. This should in fact be of paramount importance. As Paul states in his first letter to the church at Corinth, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”300 But,

298 See Galatians 2:11.
299 See, e.g., Deuteronomy 18:20.
300 1 Corinthians 2:2.
when Christians spend as much or more time in the public sphere insisting on political gains by explicit reference to Christian principles, there is a risk that they dilute and obscure the gospel message which is paramount above all else. An evangelical pastor recently observed this phenomenon when he reported that “the average person in our country now thinks Evangelicalism is primarily a social and moral movement with no connection to the Evangel—good news.”

This cannot be viewed as a success for the evangelical Christian church charged with spreading the message of the gospel of faith in Christ.

2. The infeasibility of codifying all Christian moral precepts

Aside from the fact that legislating “Christian” principles sends the wrong message about the evangelical Christian gospel of salvation by faith alone, is the fact that codifying all biblical concepts of morality is completely unworkable in any event. Randall Balmer has noted that there is a tendency to only focus on a handful of “Christian issues” from the scriptures, while ignoring the rest. Thus, for instance, the Religious Right tends to focus on abortion and homosexuality as their key issues, while virtually ignoring issues of, say, divorce. And this is in spite of the fact that Jesus sternly said about divorce: “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” And yet few in the evangelical Christian community are championing stricter laws for divorce in the United States, being instead content with the current state of “no-fault” divorce.

This is not to say that I would support such a move on the part of the Christian political community. No-fault divorces would seem to be the overwhelming democratic will of the citizenry, giving their overwhelming applicability in the United States. And this is in spite of the fact that allowing such divorces would appear to be strictly against the stern morality Jesus preached. The issue appears to concern a balancing of the desire for moral codes on the one hand, with some concession for realistic human ability to conduct behavior on the other hand. This concession to certain realistic human frailties was even, it might be added, apparently a principle of the Old Testament theocratic Jewish state instituted by God himself. We know this because divorces had been more widely permitted by Mosaic law, and Jesus acknowledged this in his preaching and explained why this had been allowed:

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301 See infra note 330 and accompanying text.
303 See id.
304 Matthew 19:9-5.
“Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”\textsuperscript{305} Thus, apparently even in a theocratic state instituted by God Himself, as a practical concession to some allowances for the imperfection of humans, God allowed the Israelites to divorce their spouses more than a perfect Christian morality would presuppose.

This is not to mention other types of extreme Christian morality which are conveniently left aside in the political argumentation by both the Religious Right and Left. For instance, Jesus stated that not only was murder a sin, but anyone who became angry with another was similarly guilty.\textsuperscript{306} He also stated that not only was adultery a sin, but that anyone who looked at another woman with lust in his heart was similarly guilty.\textsuperscript{307} We are told in the Ten Commandments that we should not covet, that we should not bear false witness (lie), that we should keep the Sabbath.\textsuperscript{308} Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that if anyone strikes you, to turn the other cheek to him as well.\textsuperscript{309} And if anyone asks for your tunic, let him have your cloak, too.\textsuperscript{310} The rich man was told to sell everything he had and give it to the poor.\textsuperscript{311} No one – not even the most militantly political evangelical Christians – seriously believes that the above should be codified into public, secular law. It is far too high of a moral standard to expect people to comply. This is why, at least in part, that Bill Stuntz and David Skeel wrote that Christian principles should result in a much more modest secular rule of law.\textsuperscript{312} With regard to God’s moral standards on the one hand, and secular legislation on the other, they wrote: “The solution to this seeming inconsistency is the rule of two kinds of law: one for hearts and minds, and the other for code books and courtrooms. Only God’s law is fit for the former purpose. Law that operates in the latter territories must have more humble ambitions.”\textsuperscript{313}

\textsuperscript{305} Matthew 19:8.
\textsuperscript{306} Matthew 5:21-22.
\textsuperscript{307} Matthew 5:27-28.
\textsuperscript{308} Exodus 20:8, 14, 16-17.
\textsuperscript{309} Matthew 5:39.
\textsuperscript{310} Matthew 5:40.
\textsuperscript{311} Matthew 19:21.
\textsuperscript{313} Id. at 812.
3. The Pauline prohibition on judging unbelievers

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he expresses distress about some of the sexual practices being condoned by the members of the church there. He admonishes them to address the sinful conduct wrongly being tolerated within the church — that is, being committed by some Christians and tolerated by other Christians. However, he does something interesting, and makes a distinction between the church members (i.e., the believers) and those outside the church (i.e., the unbelievers):

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.

By this, Paul appears to have been instructing the Corinthian church on how to handle flagrantly sinful conduct within the church — that is, by seemingly Christian believers (“anyone who bears the name of ‘brother’”). But he makes special note of the fact that this same approach should not be used in relation to “outsiders” — those outside of the church; that is, nonbelievers. Paul instructed the Corinthians not to “judge” these outsiders, but rather to leave that to God. I think that the Christian “moralizing” and political argumentation of both the Religious Right and Left is potentially subject to the characterization of “judging” the nonbelieving citizenry in the manner that Paul here instructs against. To take an example, if the Religious Right argues that “Christian” principles dictate the refusal to allow same-sex marriage, is this not possibly a violation of Paul’s instruction not to judge some nonbelievers?

I want to be careful here, because I do not wish to be seen as arguing that the church should not take prophetic stands against moral failures in the culture, or that it should not communicate to the public its sinfulness and need for reconciliation with God through faith in Christ. However, to spend such effort on one or two selectively chosen biblical principles, to the exclusion of many other moral precepts, has the appearance of “picking on” a discrete group

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314 1 Corinthians 5:1 (“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.”).
315 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (emphasis added).
of citizens – that is, “judging” them specifically and leaving others alone. It replaces the truth about the extent of man’s rebellion – a sinful nature in its entirety – with the false message that man’s only problem is committing a small handful of “issue” sins that the Christian political group chooses to selectively advocate. I do not think this is a proper role for Christians to play in the political sphere. We are all sinful – no one does good, not one.\textsuperscript{316}

4. The two kingdoms

My final corroborating observation is one that overlaps the other discussion to this point. Power and the Christian gospel are not an appropriate mix, at least not yet in this life. When Jesus was being questioned by Pilate, the Roman governor who would shortly thereafter sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion, he asked Jesus whether he was King of the Jews.\textsuperscript{317} Jesus responded: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over [to be crucified.] \textit{But my kingdom is not from the world.}\textsuperscript{318} Thus, Jesus can be read as saying that there are two kingdoms --- one of the current world, and one presumably spiritual, eternal kingdom not of this world. And in fact the “two kingdoms” view has been prevalent throughout centuries of Christian thought.\textsuperscript{319} But the voices of the Religious Right – and, it must be said, of the Religious Left as well --- too frequently confuse the two kingdoms. The civil, secular rule of law is of course necessary to have an orderly society, and to keep life from being, according to Hobbes, “nasty, brutish and short.”\textsuperscript{320} But in no way should it be confused with a divine, spiritual standard of holiness. To do so profanes that which is holy, and confuses the two kingdoms.\textsuperscript{321}

That this was Jesus’ view is further corroborated by at least one other exchange documented in the scriptural accounts of His earthly life. Jesus was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{316} Romans 3:10.
\item \textsuperscript{317} John 18:33.
\item \textsuperscript{318} John 18:36 (emphasis added). It is also significant that, early in His ministry, Jesus rejected Satan’s attempt to tempt him with earthly political power. Matthew 4:8-10.
\item \textsuperscript{319} \textit{See, e.g.}, David Vandrunen, \textit{The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms}, 46 J. CHURCH & ST. 503 (2004).
\item \textsuperscript{320} David A. Skeel, Jr. and William J. Stuntz, \textit{Christianity and the (Modest) Rule of Law}, 8 J. CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 809, 815 (2006) (“Government is essential to avoid lives that are, in Hobbes’ famous phrase, ‘nasty, brutish, and short.’”) (citing THOMAS HOBBES, LEVIATHAN 96 (A.P. Maninich ed., Broadview Literary Texts 2002) (1651)).
\item \textsuperscript{321} \textit{See} HUNTER, \textit{supra} note 13 , at 175 (“The tragedy is that in the name of resisting the internal deterioration of faith and the corruption of the world around them, many Christians ---and Christian conservatives most significantly---unwittingly embrace some of the most corrosive aspects of the cultural disintegration they decry.”).
\end{itemize}
asked by the Pharisees (the religious Jewish leaders of the day) whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar (the secular political leader of the Roman government at the time). After noting that Caesar’s image was on a coin, Jesus famously responded: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Although the meanings of this passage have been pondered for the millennia since Jesus’ life, it appears obvious that Jesus is again alluding to the fact that are two planes or spheres of existence—an earthly political kingdom (Caesar’s), and a spiritual kingdom (God’s). One could easily map this onto the Rawlsian debate on religious arguments, and apply it so that the Christian is counseled to “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s” (proper democratic participation in a liberal democracy under dictates of public reason), and “render unto God what is God’s” (professed faith in Christ and subjection to God’s ultimate spiritual authority). This is corroborated further still by Paul’s instruction to the Roman church to be subject to the civil authorities, i.e., the civil government, noting it had been instituted by God. This is an acknowledgment of the “kingdom of Caesar” Jesus was alluding to.

There is also the sociological point that Christian political activism has not been historically very effective anyway. This conclusion has recently been made by James Davison Hunter in his 2010 book To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World. Hunter observes that power is inherently corrupting, even when Christians have obtained it in the past. Moreover, he notes, Christians have achieved mixed results in effecting significant cultural change by means of political advocacy. Hunter has therefore similarly proposed that Christians undertake to “decouple” the church’s public role from political activity—in short, to cease engaging in politics as such. Instead, Hunter suggests that Christians instead turn toward a “faithful presence” in the midst of an unbelieving culture. In the parlance of some, “let the church be the church.” This is an attitude that is gaining some traction with evangelical Christianity. Billy Graham recently remarked that he regretted his involvements in politics.

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323 Mark 12:17 (emphasis added).
324 Romans 13:1.
325 See JAMES DAVISON HUNTER, TO CHANGE THE WORLD: THE IRONY, TRAGEDY, AND POSSIBILITY OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE LATE MODERN WORLD 123 (Oxford University Press 2010).
326 Id. at 99.
327 Id. at 185-86.
328 Id. at 197-286.
evangelical pastor Tullian Tchividjian, stated in the final days of the 2012 presidential campaign:

When it comes to engaging and influencing culture too many Christians think too highly of political activism. As Vern Poythress has pointed out, the political arena is not the most strategic arena for cultural influence: “Bible-believing Christians have not achieved much in politics because they have not devoted themselves to the larger arena of cultural conflict. Politics mostly follows culture rather than leading it. A temporary victory in the voting booth does not reverse a downward moral trend driven by cultural gatekeepers in news media, entertainment, art, and education. Politics is not a cure-all.”

After decades of political activism on the part of Evangelical Christians (so much so that the average person in our country now thinks Evangelicalism is primarily a social and moral movement with no connection to the Evangel—good news) we’re beginning to understand that the dynamics and complexities of cultural change differ radically from political mobilization. Even political insiders recognize that years of political effort on behalf of Evangelical Christians have generated little cultural gain. 

Note that not only did Tchividjian observe that Christian political argumentation has been largely ineffective in achieving the aims sought, but that he believes the decades of recent political advocacy have sent a confusing message to the public and obscured the true gospel message of the Christian church! This is, of course, my central point, and it would appear that I am not alone.

If we go back in time, we would find a surprising ally for this point of having the church “simply be the church” and to stay out of the public political spotlight – Jerry Falwell! In 1965, long before he organized his Moral Majority in the 1980s as a potent force in the culture wars, a younger Falwell preached the following in a sermon entitled “Ministers and Marchers”:

[A]s far as the relationship of the church to the world, [it] can be expressed as simply as the three words which Paul gave to Timothy—“Preach the Word.” This message is designed to go right to the heart of man and there meet his deep spiritual need. Nowhere are we commissioned to reform externals. We are not told to wage war against bootleggers, liquor stores, gamblers, murderers, prostitutes, racketeers, prejudiced persons or institutions or any other existing evil as such. Our ministry is not reformation, but transformation. The gospel does not clean up the outside but rather regenerates the inside.

While we are told to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” in the true interpretation we have very few ties on this earth. We pay our taxes, cast our votes as a responsibility of citizenship, obey the laws of the land, and other things demanded of us by the society in which we live. But at the same time, we are cognizant that our only purpose on this earth is to know Christ and to make him known. Believing the Bible as I do, I would find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and begin doing anything else—including fighting Communism, or participating in civil-rights reforms.331

The sermon was given, of course, in the heat of the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and it is impossible to view this statement by Falwell without this historical context. But nevertheless, it is highly interesting that Falwell made such a statement at any time (he later recanted it as “false prophecy,” around the time he instead began urging American Christians to become politically active against the “moral decay” of the day).332

E. Anticipated Objections

I anticipate a few possible objections to my central thesis herein. Here I wish to very briefly mention a few such objections, and just a few brief thoughts in response.

1. Historical Uses of Christian Arguments

One cannot get very far in a debate about the appropriate use of explicit reference to Christian principles without encountering some very well-known instances in which such arguments were used to effect positive change in law and policy. Abolition333 and the Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr.334 are perhaps the two biggest examples. There are certain things that could be said. For instance, Christians are known to have been on both sides of the abolition argument – both for and against – and so this undercuts to some degree the use of these illustrations as perfect examples of the opposition to the

331 Gary DeMar, The Old and the New Jerry Falwell, AMERICAN VISION, May 21, 2007, at americanvision.org/1288/old- jerry- falwell/#.UEEnEGiMBJg (last accessed on December 31, 2012).

332 Id.


argument I am making. John Rawls has actually also argued that the actions of Christians in the abolitionist movement, as well as the civil rights movement, ultimately supported the ideals of public reason.

But I suppose the more intellectually honest response is that, in fact, to the extent that overt appeals to Christian rhetoric were made in the arguments for abolition, and the arguments for advancement of the civil rights movement, these ran afoot of my thesis. To state it more clearly, for example, if a political message was sent to the public in the 1850s and 1860s that Christian moral principles demanded that a non-Christian slaveowner cease owning slaves, he was given incorrect information if he understood that doing so would increase God’s favor on him absent faith in Christ. The same would be true for anyone who was told in the 1960s that ending discrimination against African-Americans was required by Christian moral principles, such that his doing so absent faith in Christ would result in reconciliation with God. Although society overwhelmingly now agrees with the good of these policies (as of course do I), it is still true that external behaviors in compliance with them confers no greater favor with God than any other works-based behavior absent faith in Christ. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” This is not in any way to say that I would not readily agree that these much-needed reforms were very much for the good of society. But I would not have wanted to send a false message about the Christian gospel message in doing so.

2. God’s Judgment on Nations vs. Individuals

Another possible argument is that the appeal to Christian principles is not for purposes of individual salvation, but rather for the continued blessings and favor of God for the nation of the United States as a whole. As Timothy Hall has observed, “[p]redicting the ruinous consequences of dissent is a favorite pastime of the orthodox.” To use an extreme and infamous example from the Religious Right, it is well known that Pat Robertson and the late Jerry Falwell publicly pointed to the terrorist attacks of September 11 as God’s

335 See Stone, supra note 333, at 1322-24 (“The issue of slavery sharply divided nineteenth-century evangelicals. During the Revolutionary era, some churches condemned slavery as immoral and inconsistent with the word of God. But once the idealism of the Revolution had played itself out, the nation turned its attention to economic and commercial expansion. By the turn of the nineteenth century, slavery had become so central to the Southern economy that all but its staunchest opponents came to regard it as a necessary, if regrettable, part of the economic life of the nation.”).

336 See RAWLS, supra note 1, at 249-51.


judgment on America for its practices with respect to abortion and sexual promiscuity.339 Other Religious Right advocates claim similarly that if America’s policies permitting abortion, homosexual conduct, and the demise of the family are not curtailed, America itself will be in jeopardy.340 Even Jim Wallis, on the Religious Left, believes that God is angry with the United States and the rest of the world because of its poor treatment of indigent people.341

My initial reaction is that, even if the subjective intent of the Christian political argumentation is directed at this intended purpose --- advocacy of more moral laws to keep the nation as a whole in good standing with God --- the danger of sending the false gospel message I have argued against is still present. Non-Christian hearers of these political arguments may possibly conflate God’s alleged favor with the nation as a whole, with God’s favor with them individually if they comply with any such advocated laws or policies. And so even to the extent that the advocates may intend to be seeking God’s favor for the collective nation and not individual salvation, I nevertheless think that the potential for mixed messages is present. In so doing, I agree with Timothy Hall who observed that “[t]his renewed allegiance to a ‘Christian America’ in which Christian values predominate is . . . harmful to the cause of Christ.”342

Beyond the potential for miscommunication, another question altogether is whether or not God’s favor on a nation as a whole is something which can actually be obtained in this way. I confess I have not yet thought too deeply about this point (and space does not permit in the present article), but I have a few initial observations. I have already shown that the evangelical Christian gospel requires faith in Christ in order to gain favor and reconciliation with God, and that works absent faith are ineffective. My instinct tells me that this is no different with respect to how God would treat a nation collectively, if indeed He does do so. Of course, I hasten to add: “God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases.”343 But I wonder why an individual’s mere external behavior absent faith would be unacceptable to God, but an entire nation of individuals merely complying with coercively enforced laws, absent faith, would appease God’s wrath? In other words, even assuming God does in His absolute sovereignty judge entire nations, is it likely that merely passing civil

340 See HUNTER, supra note 13 at 115.
341 Id. at 138.
343 Psalms 115:3.
legislation is the means to appeasing him? I think there is serious reason to question that conclusion. God is not fooled by mere outward behavior, but rather He looks into man’s heart.\textsuperscript{344}

I am also reminded of the account of the eighteen men who were killed when the Tower of Siloam fell. Jesus responded: “[D]o you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”\textsuperscript{345} In short, I will not presume to say that God does not judge nations, but I strongly suspect that the best way for Christians to seek to avoid such an outcome is to proclaim the pure gospel message boldly in the hopes that many people will come to genuine faith in Christ, not to argue for laws to be passed by the legislature.

I will follow up this last observation with another illustration from scripture, which is perhaps illustrative of the mystery of how the gospel message is supposed to affect the public culture. In the 19\textsuperscript{th} chapter of Acts, the scriptures indicate that the apostle Paul traveled to the city of Ephesus and began preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to the city.\textsuperscript{346} Paul stayed in the synagogue and preached continuously for three months, and many were persuaded “about the kingdom of God.”\textsuperscript{347} And based on this gradual conversion of the citizens of Ephesus, an interesting thing occurred --- the business of manufacturing idols to the god Artemis dropped precipitously as the people of Ephesus began converting to Christianity.\textsuperscript{348} This caused such a drop in the idol manufacture that some in the business of making the idols --- including, notably, a silversmith named Demetrius --- began to riot (ostensibly in defense of the great god “Artemis of the Ephesians,” but of course surely also to protect their livelihoods).\textsuperscript{349} The thing I want to note in closing is that an evil --- the manufacture and worship of idols --- was largely diminished in the city of Ephesus. But it was not carried out by Paul and his fellow believers by pushing for political policies or city ordinances banning their sale. To the contrary, the change in the Ephesian culture was accomplished not by political activity, but rather by the conversion and salvation of the people by faith in the gospel message, which changed their hearts first, and which then resulted in their changed behavior.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnote}{344} 1 Samuel 16:7 (“For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”).\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}{345} Luke 13:4-5.\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}{346} Acts 19:1-8.\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}{347} Acts 19:8.\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}{348} Acts 19:23-27.\end{footnote}
\begin{footnote}{349} Acts 19:23-34.\end{footnote}
\end{footnotesize}

Finally, I would like to respond to the objection of this theological argument having the effect of unduly restricting Christians in their political participation in the democratic processes. I mainly want to do so by clarifying what I am not suggesting. First, I am not arguing that Christians should not vote for candidates, policies, and laws according to their conscience, including the influence of what they believe to be morally the best conception of the public good for society. And I am not saying here that they should not be influenced in large part by what they believe to be the teachings of Christ or the scriptures. I am suggesting, however, that Christians should weigh carefully their public use of Christian language or requirements in doing so. So, to take an example, let’s say that a person is a Christian, and feels strongly that no-fault divorce is immoral and it instead should only be granted— as Jesus said—in the grounds of adultery of the other spouse.350 My thesis would suggest that she should not say, to a public audience, “Please vote for this new divorce law because it is consistent with Christian values and morality, or because this is God’s law.” The reason is that this arguably communicates to a non-Christian that if they vote for, and comply with, this law in the future doing so will earn God’s favor. But, as I have argued, that is a tragic miscommunication. Instead, I would suggest—in any public advocacy—that the person instead say, for instance, “Please vote for this new divorce law because it will help marriages stay together longer, which will result in more stable families, giving children more security in which to be successfully raised.” Perhaps the audience knows that the advocate is a Christian, but of course I am not suggesting that that is enough of a reason to keep silent. I would simply urge that the public message not miscommunicate anything about the Christian gospel. I realize this is arguably further than even Rawls would go with his proviso, but then again unlike me Rawls is utterly unconcerned with theological miscommunication.351

On a related point, what about Christians talking to other Christians? Of course, my concern about possibly false and confusing messages about the gospel being misrepresented are, in theory, not as great here (assuming the Christians hearing the message are well-grounded in a proper theological understanding of the gospel). But there are at least a couple of very strong caveats. First, non-Christians (those who have not placed their faith in Christ) attend churches and meetings of Christians all the time. I would think that it would be just as tragic (if not more so) for a false message about the gospel to be communicated to a non-Christian inside the church, as outside in public advocacy. Second, these messages which are only “from Christians to Christians” have a way of getting out and being perceived by the public, as was

351 See supra notes 145-154 and accompanying text.
shown by the Huckabee ad described earlier. Thus, even with “internal” messages between Christians, great care should be taken that the wrong message about the gospel is not sent, and that the target audience is appropriately limited and identified.

V. CONCLUSION

The degree of overt Christian political argumentation has proliferated from both the Religious Right and Left. The public political messages by these groups conflate advocacy for law with advocacy for “Christian principles or values.” The expressive effect of these messages is unavoidably, in at least large part, that agreeing with the law, and later complying with the law, is tantamount to compliance with the “Christian” religion and therefore, presumably, will result in favor with God.

John Rawls and others have argued that such religious argumentation is inappropriate in a liberal democracy, since not all citizens share the underlying religious belief that is being advocated. But there is a corroborating reason from within evangelical Christianity to refrain from such political argumentation. The arguments of the Religious Right and Left communicate behavior-based moralism, but this expresses a tragically mistaken view of the evangelical Christian gospel message. That message is that we can obtain divine favor by works (or law). “Human beings are natural-born moralists, and moralism is the most potent of all the false gospels. The language of ‘values’ is the language of moralism and cultural Protestantism.” However, evangelical Christians universally instead profess that salvation and reconciliation with God comes only by faith alone in the provision of Christ’s sacrifice in atonement for our sinful condition. This has been the correct theological view of the gospel of evangelical Christianity since the Reformation, and it remains the orthodox, evangelical Christian view today.

I wish to add, near my conclusion, that I am not arguing that Christian citizens in the United States do not have every right to come to their political decisions by making full use of their faculties, reason, and their belief in transcendent realities including a view of what is ultimately the best conception of the good. Such a view may well include an unshakeable conviction in the justice or morality of any number of political issues or choices, based on a view of divine morality. And, certainly, I could not possibly presume to argue that we are not all fully supported by our constitutional protections to engage in any

352 See supra notes 48-50, 109-116 and accompanying text.
such speech in this regard as we should choose. That is, legal rights to speak as the Religious Right and Left do are not what is at stake here.

Instead I am arguing for a Christian communicatory ideal. I am arguing that as Christians, we should take very seriously the fact that in making public political “Christian” argumentation, we may be misleading the public about the way in which they can obtain favor with God, to the tragic hindrance of the church’s actual gospel mission. In doing so, such political advocates are also selectively choosing which Christian moral precepts to emphasize, they are engaging in arguably inappropriate judgment of select unbelievers by focusing on only a few “issue sins,” and they are mistaking the two kingdoms Jesus clearly recognized during His ministry. Skeel and Stuntz are especially prescient here:

Christians could stand to learn the . . . lesson [that Christian moral precepts make for poor secular law]. The New Testament makes abundantly clear that law cannot save souls: salvation must come through other means and from another Source. In the apostle Paul’s letters, law is not the mechanism of salvation; rather, law shows the need of it. Paul repeatedly warns Christians about the dangers of converting their faith into a moral code, just as Jesus condemned the Pharisees for doing the same thing to their own faith and thus weighing down the people with burdens too heavy to carry. One might expect professing Christians to be especially attuned to the dangers of legal moralism. Judging from contemporary culture-wars debates, we are not. The heart of the problem is a tendency to confuse God’s law with man’s. Those of us who believe in a divine moral law are regularly tempted to try to write that law into our much-less-than-divine code books.354

In short, Christian political advocates effectively communicate a reversed order of salvation and works, seemingly sending a message that works and law are a means to achieve reconciliation and favor with God. However, the scriptures teach that salvation is obtained by faith in Christ alone, and not works.355 Evangelical Christians agree that good works (i.e., behavior pleasing to God) do follow as an increasing consequence of faith, but they are properly seen as a result of such faith and not a cause of it.356 To try to reverse the scriptural order of these is a fool’s errand, and causes unneeded consternation in the political processes of a liberal democratic republic such as ours, not to mention obscuring the very gospel message that Christ gave to the church. As Christians, we know that in many if not most instances the gospel will be

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355 Ephesians 2:8; Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16.
356 James 2:14-17; Galatians 3:5; Philippians 2:13; Romans 6:22.
offensive to those who do not believe, but as Christians we should also take great care to make sure when it offends that it does so for the right reason, and not by misusing the “Christian” label for political purposes.

357 Romans 9:33.