

“What we really have here is a lonely thinker who longs for the truth of a better city that he cannot find on either side of the Atlantic. He lampoons the cherished political idols that dominate our political landscape. I couldn’t suppress chortles of laughter, alongside shocks of disdain and disagreement, all the while admiring Trueman’s unmasking of the well-camouflaged foolishness on all points of the political spectrum. This historian-turned-pundit, with all the force of a prizefighter’s left jab and right hook, leaves the left, right, and center (or *centre*) reeling on the ropes. Therefore, I heartily recommend that you read this book, but you do so at your own peril. Its intensity, as well as its pointed, provocative, and persuasive prose, will force you to look at the Vanity Fair of politics from a pilgrim’s perspective. It’s just possible that you, too, will begin to yearn for a better city.”

—**Peter Lillback**, President of the Providence Forum

“Carl Trueman has, with this book, broken the ammonia capsule under the noses of every starry-eyed conservative Christian, in the thrall of Republicans, capitalists, Fox News, and a gospel of mere self-interest. Here is a gauntlet that will land heavily on the toes of any who dare to take it up and read. *Republocrat* slices open the pretensions of conservative American Christianity, but not to eviscerate. His purpose, sanely and boldly argued, is to call Christians to a more carefully reasoned and biblically sound pursuit of the kingdom of God. This is a pastoral book from one who is serious about the church and earnest on behalf of the business of our King.”

—**T. M. Moore**, Dean of the BreakPoint Centurions Program

“As Carl Trueman points out in his witty, provocative, and deeply well-informed way, the alliance of conservative Christianity with conservative (neoliberal) politics is a circumstance of our own context in U.S. politics—neither historically nor logically necessary. Tie the faith too closely to right-wing politics, and it’s no wonder that younger Christians think they have to check out of orthodoxy when they move left of center politically. Regardless of one’s own views, this book will delight, frustrate, and encourage healthy discussions that we have needed to have for a long time.”

—**Michael Horton**, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California

“The disturbing alliance of conservative theology and right-wing politics is faced head-on in this timely and brave treatment by renowned historical-theologian and social commentator Carl Trueman. Even if readers disagree with Dr. Trueman’s conclusions, the sharpness of his critique should disturb the most entrenched political consciousness, particularly if the foundations of conviction are shown to have little or no biblical support. Writing in a predictably provocative and forthright manner, Trueman pulls few, if any, punches. *Republocrat* is a timely and robust assessment of a vitally important issue and a cri de coeur for a reappraisal of the conservative church’s current political alliance.”

—**Derek W. H. Thomas**, John E. Richards Professor of Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary

“Nothing like an outsider’s eye to bring into focus the difficulty of relating conservative politics with conservative Christianity. Relating political parties and their agendas to biblical teaching has rarely been

more difficult than today. In this highly readable analysis of evangelicals' tendency to relate Christian faith to conservative politics, Trueman, a Brit playing a modern-day de Tocqueville, warns against absolutizing any political/economic worldview. His best advice: Be eclectic when listening to and reading political pundits, and be thoughtfully and actively engaged in the democratic process."

—**W. Andrew Hoffecker**, Professor of Church History,
Reformed Theological Seminary

"Carl Trueman is a unique individual. Only a man of his intellectual stature and personal charity would have the courage and grace to bring together the best of both the political left and the religious right in the name of Christian statesmanship. Trueman parries and thrusts against those to the left and the right of him. Like the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse, he knocks over the sacred crockery of the Tea Party, and pours down scorn and plagues on tree-hugging, femonazi, sissy liberals. If you're a pro-gun, pro-homeschooling, anti-Obama conservative who believes that it is America's duty to nuke Iran, this book will disturb you. If you're a cross-dressing, earth-worshiping, gay, atheist professor at Yale who thinks killing unborn babies is moral, this book will infuriate you. Trueman's attempt to indigenize British communitarianism within libertarian America in the name of Christian political responsibility is sheer genius. This is political ecumenism at its very best. If Trueman were running for governor on the Republicrat ticket, I'd vote for him. I'm Michael Bird. And I endorse this message!"

—**Michael F. Bird**, Highland Theological College, Scotland,
and Crossway Bible College, Australia

REPUBLOCRAAT

CONFESSIONS OF A
LIBERAL CONSERVATIVE

CARL R. TRUUMAN


P U B L I S H I N G
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FOREWORD

Peter A. Lillback

WHEN THE REV. Dr. Carl Trueman asked me to write the foreword to his *Republocrat: Confessions of a Liberal Conservative*, I tentatively accepted it as an honor—at least at first. As I began to think about the daunting challenge of writing such a piece, given that I’ve been known as a “conservative’s conservative,” I began to have second thoughts. Perhaps sensing a growing skepticism on my part about the wisdom and propriety of my doing so and a palpable hesitancy to take on such a precarious task, he sweetened the invitation by divulging that he also planned to dedicate his little book to me! I knew then that I had to say an emphatic yes. How could I say no to a brother who had led me to the glorious summit of Ben Nevis and stood shoulder to shoulder with me in the dark nadir of theological controversy? It was then that I wrote to Dean Trueman, telling him that I would accept the task of writing a foreword that was “suitably contemptuous”! How else could it be done? How else could a conservative celebrate an *oxymoronic* book titled *Republocrat: Confessions of a Liberal Conservative*?

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So to be “suitably contemptuous,” let me consider the carefully selected adjective *oxymoronic*. I do like the fact that it concludes with the word *moronic*. I let the innuendo of that word speak for itself. But do note that the word begins with *oxy*, which has the sense of “sharp,” “acidulous,” or “caustic.” Thus the two words together connote a sharp contradiction. Words and phrases such as *sophomore* (wise-fool), *deafening silence*, *exploding peace*, and perhaps *family vacation* fall under this rubric. So does the title *Liberal Conservative*. Indeed, it takes an oxymoronic scholar to write an oxymoronic book. Let me illustrate.

Here is a man who has memorized the lyrics of Bob Dylan and Led Zeppelin, but prefers to sing only the psalms on the Lord’s Day. Here’s a dean who only under coercion reluctantly walks the 26.2 steps to the president’s office from the dean’s office for fear of being asked to do some extra work, but regularly delights in running 26.2 miles, even if it means there will be icicles hanging from his running shorts and oozing wounds from his ice-nicked ankles. Here is a scholar who relishes the writings of Karl Marx, but who is inherently, instinctively, and immutably committed to the Reformation spirit of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Here is a man who refuses to go to counseling to address these oxymoronic traits, but who nevertheless is soon psychoanalyzed by all who associate with him. And how can a man so conflicted write intelligent blog articles read all over the globe, all the while being suspicious of technology? How can such a conflicted soul fill rooms with students eager to eat donuts with the dean, and delight generous bourgeoisie donors with the alluring British accent that suffuses his penetrating and entertaining lectures, which are supercharged by that intoxicating British genius for the mother tongue?

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Perhaps this composite of opposites called Dean Trueman can be explained by genetic determinism. After all, his father was a gentleman chartered public accountant, well respected in his service to the bourgeoisie leadership class in the UK. But his grandfather was a brawling union boss who busted up more than one pub to keep the proletariat workers in line. Clearly, there are reasons for the oxymoronic Trueman disposition. At least we can see why we should extend a bit of sympathy in his direction.

I gained insight about Dr. Trueman's oxymoronic spirit when we traveled to the Highgate tube stop in London to take the trek to the massive granite bust of Karl Marx that looms over his grave. I went to make sure Marx was dead, and was careful to have my photograph taken standing to the *right*, with an appropriate distance separating me from the bust. But not so Dean Trueman. Leaning on the monument that proclaims, "Workers of all lands unite," this now-ordained OPC minister was comfortably to the left of Comrade Karl. I've since been regularly tempted to misspell Dean Trueman's first name with a *K*—Karl Trueman. Given that his impeccable logic is almost always fatal in debate, I've even toyed with renaming him Karl Marxman.

But it's here that the danger of writing this foreword began to sink in. Perhaps by being required to read his book, I would be persuaded! For Trueman's truculent pen and lethal logic would surely have an impact. Even the dead around Marx's grave were not spared. Dean Trueman noted the absurdity of materialists seeking to be buried around Marx's tomb, with headstones adorned with foolish inscriptions such as: "With gratitude from a fellow Communist." The unyielding grave and hopeless end of Communistic materialism made such acts of homage not just illogical but tragic. Only the resurrec-

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tion—emphatically denied by dialectical materialists—noted Dean Trueman, made such veneration in death have any significance.

So in agreeing to write the foreword, I also made an agreement with myself. I would write the “suitably contemptuous” part before I wrote the conclusion. I feared that I could not maintain the Erasmian spirit of *In Praise of Folly* needed to distance myself from Dean Trueman’s political “liberalism” if I first submitted myself to his persuasive pen and trenchant thought. Only in this way could I take the risk of publicly embarrassing myself by becoming a neutered conservative, a sycophant of an oxymoronic scholar.

So to steel my mind, I reminded myself that Dean Trueman was not such a bad chap after all. Hadn’t he given up the interminable monotony of cricket to come to the city of the world-champion Phillies? Hadn’t he abandoned the wimpy kickball of the UK, I mean soccer, I mean British football, for the nation where real men play real football? Hadn’t he, like the Reformed Presbyterian leader John Witherspoon, left Britain to come to the New World with his Scottish wife? How could I not embrace this challenge? He was a Westminster Seminary scholar, a theological mind formed at St. Catharine’s in Cambridge, and a graduate scholar from Aberdeen.

Thus mentally prepared, I took up and read. But I did so also remembering our tour of Bunhill Fields in London—the burial grounds of nonconformists including John Bunyan, Thomas Goodwin, Oliver Cromwell’s son, and others persecuted by the Anglican “conservative” establishment. This excursion had previously helped me to see why Puritan and “liberal” were historically closely linked in the British context. King Charles I certainly understood that Oliver Cromwell was no conservative in terms of British politics!

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So in turning from the *ad hominem* to the *ad substantiam*, what do we learn from an actual engagement with Trueman's *Republocrat: Confessions of a Liberal Conservative*? To distill the thoughts that came to mind, a couplet not written by Dylan or Zeppelin emerged:

Pilgrims see what locals don't
And strangers speak when others won't.

In other words, this book is wrongly titled. It's not the *Republocrat: Confessions of a Liberal Conservative* at all. If it were that, as Dean Trueman makes abundantly clear as he begins, the title should be *Confessions of an Old Liberal Conservative*. Even better, its title should be *The Critique of Political Folly by a Pilgrim in a Strange Land*. The liberals of today, no more than the conservatives in contemporary America, can take no comfort in this jeremiad on the inane and the inept that often characterizes the popular press and media maelstrom. What we really have here is a critique, written from a deep sense of alienation, indeed, from the perspective of a political alien, an outsider, a lonely thinker who longs for the truth of a better city that he cannot find on either side of the Atlantic. His omnidirectional diatribe lampoons the cherished political idols that dominate our political landscape.

In the spirit of a good brawl, led by a union boss busting up an otherwise quiet pub, our author's criticisms take no prisoners, whether they're Marx, Marcuse, Murdoch, Major, Beck, O'Reilly, Limbaugh, the BBC, the New Left, the conservative Right, Bush, Clinton, or even *The Patriot's Bible*. (Thankfully, he

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leaves my hero George Washington unscathed!) Even conservative Presbyterians, automobiles, and televisions come under his shock-and-awe campaign. I must admit that even as a conservative I couldn't suppress chortles of laughter, alongside shocks of disdain and disagreement, all the while admiring Trueman's unmasking of the well-camouflaged foolishness on all points of the political spectrum.

This historian-turned-pundit, with all the force of a prize-fighter's left jab and right hook, leaves the left, right, and center (or *centre*) reeling on the ropes. But that doesn't mean that he wins the match. His opponents may fall to his wit, words, and wallop, but that doesn't mean he gets it all right. Just because Bill O'Reilly is illogical at times and Glenn Beck's histrionics are more stage than sage, that doesn't mean there aren't good reasons to avoid the socialization of medicine and the limitation of Second Amendment rights. But since I'll admit I'm a bit gun-shy—I'm writing a foreword, after all—I'll wait for a safer place to tear apart the straw men that Trueman has lurking in his arguments and the subtle non sequiturs that stalk his conclusions. One problem with Trueman's critique I cannot help but point out here: it is the vastly understated admission "I also have no problem with outrageous overstatement to make a point, no doubt being guilty of it myself on various occasions." This humble admission left me wondering whether the author had read his own book! But there is socially redeeming value in this pilgrim's pogrom against political pabulum: "Indeed, I look forward to the day when intelligence and civility, not tiresome clichés, character assassinations, and Manichaeian noise, are the hallmarks of Christians as they engage the political process."

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So in the spirit of that eschatological hope, I heartily recommend that you read this book. But you do so at your own peril. Its intensity, as well as its pointed, provocative, and persuasive prose, will force you to look at the Vanity Fair of politics from a pilgrim's perspective. It's just possible that you, too, will begin to yearn for a better city. And because of the grace of that city, I'm grateful that a conservative's conservative can call a liberal conservative a precious brother in Christ. Thanks so much for this great honor, Karl, I mean Carl!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I NEVER WANTED to write this book; frankly, I probably do not need the grief that its basic thesis—that religious conservatism does not demand unconditional political conservatism—could well bring to my e-mail in-box. Nevertheless, when Marvin Padgett and Ian Thompson at P&R Publishing approached me with the idea and suggested that I might be the one to do it, against my better judgment I agreed to write it. So thanks must go first to them, and then to the staff at P&R who worked so hard to take the book to press.

I must also thank Sandy Finlayson for many conversations about the issues with which I deal. As a fellow immigrant, and from a confessional church tradition that often involved social radicalism, he is a true kindred spirit; and like me, he believes there is nothing like a glass of brandy to bring clarity to a political discussion. Thanks also to Rob Burns, former student, whose knowledge of radical politics far outstrips my own, and who, in the later months of the project, was a source of encouragement and of some important information and sources on some of the matters discussed herein.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks as always to the ladies in Academic Affairs—Becky, Leah, and Rebecca—who keep the office running so effectively that their boss has time to write; to the trustees at Westminster for granting me study leave, part of which I used to finish this book; and to my beloved wife, Catriona, and sons, John and Peter, for providing such a happy home.

Finally, thanks to Peter Lillback, president of Westminster Theological Seminary, for writing the foreword. Peter and I are poles apart in our political commitments, and I have often commented to him that, on paper, we should be neither friends nor colleagues; but both our friendship and our working relationship seem to work, and, indeed, to do so remarkably well. This book is dedicated to him, with the hope that it does not ruin his reputation!



LEFT BEHIND

A CHAPTER ARGUING that the Left has lost its way and is barely worthy of support these days seems a suitably contrarian place to begin this book, and something that will at least offer temporary relief to those who fear the work as a whole is simply going to be a diatribe against the Right. On the contrary, this book is not intended as a plea for one party or one political philosophy over another. It is rather a plea for seeing the situation as more complicated and less black-and-white than is often the case in Christian circles.

This first chapter really sets the background for my own approach to the issues. As a Christian, I believe that many of the things that I consider important were embodied in the original vision of what I might call old-style, just-left-of-center politics. Sadly, the things I hold dear as important political issues—poverty, sanitation, housing, unemployment, hunger—have, from the 1950s

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onward, been eclipsed by a new set of Left concerns that have little to do with the kind of social liberalism and aspirations to equality of opportunity to which I thought the Left was committed. The result is that the Left has been hijacked by special-interest groups, and is frequently less concerned than even the parties of the Right with those for whom it should really speak up. That leaves people such as me with no political place to call home. To put it bluntly, we have been left behind.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OLD LEFT

Anyone who spends any time reflecting on the history of political activism will very soon realize that the Left of today bears little or no resemblance to that of the nineteenth century. The rise of the political Left in Europe took place as a response to the dramatic social changes surrounding the Industrial Revolution. As factories and production became the centerpieces of economies in places such as Britain, urban populations experienced exponential growth, workforces expanded, and a struggle inevitably ensued among the old landed aristocracies, the new factory owners and tradesmen, and the workforces that provided the raw labor to make the whole thing possible. In the cities, slums expanded, child labor became an issue, and everywhere poverty and hardship were visible. Nor was the countryside immune: the shift of population and economic emphasis to urban industrial centers had a negative impact on agricultural workers who remained in the countryside.

This provides the background to much of the rise of the Left. In nineteenth-century Britain, the Industrial Revolution provided the dynamic to some of the most significant legislation of the time.

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This itself bears witness to the growing power of those outside the traditional aristocracy, which, until then, had enjoyed a virtual monopoly when it came to political power. Thus, for example, in 1824–25 the British Parliament repealed the Combination Acts, effectively making it legal for trade unions to organize. Then, in 1832, the Reform Act extended, but did not universalize, the franchise. These moves were in some sense pretty paltry, but they clearly indicate that Britain was slowly but surely moving toward what we now recognize as a modern democratic state and, more importantly, that the powers that be were being forced to acknowledge that society was changing in previously unimaginable ways.

Trade unions and organized labor were one form of response to the growing needs of workers in the nineteenth century. At another level, various social philosophers articulated political and economic philosophies designed to address the new shape of society and the problems that were being generated for the poor by the dramatic changes taking place. These philosophies varied in terms of how radical their proposals were; for sure, not all such responses could be characterized as “Left.” In Britain, Thomas Chalmers, a leader of the Evangelical Party in the Church of Scotland, was horrified as a young pastor by the slums he found in his parish in Glasgow, to which his response was a system of parish visitation and diaconal care. Yet Chalmers remained a High Tory, and like Jane Austen’s Emma, his concern for the poor was driven by a sense of *noblesse oblige* and paternalism. Others, however, were articulating more radical approaches to the problem.

The most famous of the truly radical responses to the problems of industrialization were the writings of Karl Marx. Marx, a German-born Jew, was profoundly influenced by the philosophical

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school that stemmed from the work of G. W. F. Hegel. Hegel had argued that the whole of history should be conceived of as a great unfolding of dialectical tension; but where Hegel saw this unfolding in intellectual or, perhaps better, spiritual terms, Marx turned Hegel's thinking on its head and rooted this historical dynamic in materialism, specifically the movement of capital and the power relations that connected to this. For Marx, history moved through a series of phases—from a rural feudalism, where an aristocracy essentially held power and sat at the top of the social ladder, through a period of bourgeois control, where power passed to the hands of those who owned the means of production (i.e., factories), distribution (traders), and capital (bankers), to a future utopian state where the workers themselves would control the fruits of their labor. At this point history, in terms of the development of social relations, would come to an end. The whole scheme was inevitable and unavoidable—the workers would triumph.

The many flaws in Marx's theories have been demonstrated countless times over the last century, both in scholarly critiques and, more brutally, in the failed economies, totalitarianism, and gulags that seem an essential part of the Marxist project when put into practice. Marx is interesting to us at this point, however, because his theories, although the most radical in their location of class conflict as the driving force of history, still provide a good indication of what the Left considered important, at least in its inception.

For Marx, as for most of what I might call here the "Old Left," as opposed to the "New Left" that emerged as a force in the 1960s, the major concern was with oppression: how are people oppressed, and what can or should be done about it? For Marx, history held the answer: eventually there would be revolution, and the middle

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classes would be toppled from power by the working classes. For others on the Left, more constitutional means were to be employed: trade unions, political parties, a broadened franchise, a welfare state, etc. All of these could be used to deal with the issue of oppression. The analysis of the situation varied, as did the proposed solutions, but they all had one basic thing in common: they saw oppression as primarily an economic issue, something empirically observable. Some people possessed more than others, and some did not enjoy either the material goods or the working conditions to allow them to live with any quality of life. This was the problem the various movements on the Left wished to address. The philosophies varied, but there was basic agreement on the problem: economic poverty.

THE STRANGE LOVE AFFAIR OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA WITH MARXISM

At first glance, it is perplexing to look back on the twentieth century and see how many intellectuals from Western, liberal democracies were fooled by the promises and rhetoric of Marxism; but this is perhaps more explicable when we look at the context. In the course of history, Communism received something of a boost from the Russian Revolution of 1917, which seemed to indicate that Marxism, at least in its modified, Leninist form, was indeed correct in its claims about the way history was moving. That the revolution had started in an agrarian, rather than industrial, society was odd and involved Lenin and Trotsky, the Revolution's theorists, in certain revisions of Marxist theory; but the rapid industrialization of Russia in the subsequent decades seemed only to prove the superiority of the Marxist cause over its socialist and capitalist

rivals. Only later was the appalling human cost of Soviet industrialization to be revealed to the wider world.

A second element that added to the appeal of Marxism to the Left at this point was, paradoxically, the rise of Fascism and Nazism. It is often staggering to look back to the 1930s and see how many intellectuals—George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Koestler, H. G. Wells, Stephen Spender, and many others—were taken in by the ideology of the Soviet Union. Some of these intellectuals, including Koestler and Spender, were later to repudiate the creed and write devastatingly against it. Today, post-1956, 1968, and 1989, this commitment seems utterly bizarre; but in the 1930s, the full extent of the butchery of Lenin and Stalin was not yet known, and Communism seemed to provide the only vigorous and compelling opposition to the hard Right vision of the Mussolinis, Hitlers, Francos, and Codreanus. Fascism and Communism grew together in a kind of vicious symbiosis. To those opposed to Nazism, it seemed Marxism offered the last, best hope—until, of course, the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939; although even after that, many hung on to the illusions of Marxism until the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and beyond. It was a sorry case of never mind the facts, give me the romantic vision.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE: THE ROAD TO REDEFINITION

Beyond the narrow bounds of Marxism, the history of Britain in the first half of the twentieth century bears witness to many successes of the Left with regard to the Old Left issues of political and economic oppression. The universal franchise was granted in 1928, and the foundations of the welfare state were laid in the Lib-

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eral governments of the first two decades of the century, reaching full expression with the founding of the National Health Service during the Labor government of Clement Attlee of 1945. To those who have a knee-jerk reaction against government health schemes, I am one who probably owes his very existence to such a scheme: the system basically provided my maternal grandparents with health care that would otherwise have been impossible to obtain; and for the record, they were far from the welfare scroungers so beloved of certain types of conservative political pundits. Granddad worked in a factory, Grandma scrubbed floors, and neither was ever in debt. They were just poor—hardworking but poor. In the world of the late 1940s and early 1950s, some form of mixed economy, with a moderate welfare provision, seemed the best way to alleviate such poverty.

If the first half of the twentieth century seemed to point toward some form of socialism as the wave of the future, the second half put the lie to that notion. On the far Left, a series of crises demonstrated beyond question the vicious effects of totalitarian Communism. The gulags of Stalin's Soviet Union, the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution and the Prague Spring, the Cultural Revolution in China, the killing fields of Cambodia, to name but a few, showed how the quest for utopia so often ends in a blood-soaked nightmare, whose victims are the very poor and oppressed for whom the Left professes to be most concerned. Then the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites, symbolized above all by the fall of the Berlin Wall, indicated that the Communist experiment, at least in its Soviet form, was at an end. While Cuba limped on, and China chose a very different path, mainstream Communism of the classical variety was dead.

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While the hard Left was in disarray in the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe, the intellectual hard Left of the West had also undergone something of a transformation. I noted above how the Left, for all its diversity on economic issues, originally exhibited a consensus on what constituted the primary form of oppression: it was economic, and involved some people possessing control over things important to quality of life that others lacked. For example, John Doe had fresh running water but fenced off his spring so that Fred Bloggs and his family could not get access to it; Pete Smith insisted on selling his apples at a price that most poor people could not afford; and so on and so forth.

By the 1950s, however, it was becoming clear to a number of Left intellectuals that the long-awaited world revolution was probably not going to come and that the revolutions that had arrived had not produced quite the unequivocal utopias that had been expected. Alongside this, the collapse of the old nineteenth-century European empires after the Second World War, and the rise of nationalist movements in the former imperial colonies, had added new dimensions to notions of liberation. Ethnicity, for example, as much as economics, now started to play a role. In retrospect, it is clear that ethnicity was always a factor, perhaps often a more significant factor than economic class, even in Communist revolutions. But now movements of ethnic liberation became explicitly linked to left-wing ideology, of which the struggle against apartheid in South Africa is perhaps the best known. This was in some ways an odd move; it represented a subtle shift away from oppression seen in purely economic terms (though ethnic oppression typically involves economic oppression). Moreover, with its explicit nationalist and

ethnic interests, it exhibited some affinities with earlier right-wing movements.

MR. MARX MEETS DR. FREUD: THE CHANGING FACE OF OPPRESSION

In addition to the nationalist-left alliance at a practical level, a possibly even more significant alliance was occurring at an intellectual level. In the 1950s and 1960s, the work of a number of Marxist cultural critics, associated with an intellectual group known as the Frankfurt School (because its primary advocates were based at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt am Main in what was then West Germany), began to take root. The Frankfurt School was responsible for development of so-called critical theory, which represented an attempt to articulate a future for Marxist-based social change in a way that offered an alternative to both Western liberal democracy and the Stalinism of the Soviet Union. Crucial to the popular politics of the Left was the fusion that certain leaders of the school, most notably Herbert Marcuse, achieved between classical Marxism and Freudianism.

Supplementing the economic categories of Marx with the psychoanalytic categories of Freud, Marcuse and his followers effectively broadened the whole notion of oppression to include the psychological realm. Such a move is dramatic in the implications it has for the way one views politics. Simply put, oppression ceases to be something that can be assessed empirically in terms of external economic conditions and relations, and becomes something rather more difficult to see, i.e., a matter of the psychology of social relations. Marcuse's particular concern was the impact of consumerism,

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the acquisition of material goods, on the individual. The market gave individuals an illusion of freedom, in that they thought they had choice over what they bought. But in fact the kinds of goods available were limited by what the people in charge chose to sell, and the driving forces of the market—advertising, commercials, etc.—were simply a form of propaganda that tricked people into thinking they needed particular goods in order to be happy. The poor, benighted public was the victim of a manipulative capitalism that first created wants and then satisfied them. Thus oppression was psychologized. No longer was it lack of material goods that constituted oppression; now oppression was essentially defined as being tricked into thinking that material goods were the answer.

One can see in the work of Marcuse and company a response to an awkward fact that was becoming increasingly obvious in the 1950s and 1960s. The problem that Marxist intellectuals faced was this: they wanted a workers' revolution that would usher in the proletarian utopia, but in the boom years after World War II, it became increasingly obvious that the working class did not want a workers' utopia; they wanted to own consumer goods. They didn't want workers' councils; they wanted cars, televisions, washing machines, and countless other things. The accumulation of "stuff," not the reorganization of the means of production, was what motivated them. I well remember walking around one of the poorer estates in Aberdeen some years ago and noticing that the number of large, ostentatious satellite dishes attached to the housing blocks seemed to far outstrip anything I ever saw on the middle-class street where I lived. The opium of the people, one might say, was no longer religion; rather, it was televised entertainment. People did not want the vote; they wanted soap operas on demand.

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Seen in this light, Marcuse's work can be interpreted as a response to the rise of the consumer society; and the political problem of human existence was not poverty so much as inauthenticity—the making of men and women into what they were not designed to be, which consumerism brought into being. It also helped to explain, from the perspective of the Left, why conservative leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher proved so popular: they facilitated the consumer society and even appealed across traditional class boundaries. They offered not true, authentic freedom, as Marcuse understood it; they offered the one-dimensional existence of a society that saw meaning in mere material accumulation—the modern equivalent of the Roman bread-and-circuses strategy.

HOW AUTHENTICITY MADE THE LEFT INAUTHENTIC

The significance of this move by the Left can hardly be overestimated. By placing notions such as *authenticity* at the center of its agenda, the Left was able to broaden its set of concerns far beyond the mere economic or political in the traditional sense of the word. Indeed, it is arguable that the economic and material concerns that drove the radicals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries virtually vanished, to be replaced by a whole set of much more contentious and nebulous issues. Now, with “authenticity” being the goal, and that conceived of in psychological terms, oppression itself was psychologized so that even the person who enjoyed good material conditions might yet be “inauthentic” because of the way in which society imposed its values upon him or her. Oppression takes place inside the head, as individuals are manipulated and kept

quiescent by the forces of mass media and a surfeit of goods and possessions. Cynically, one might say that oppression becomes whatever the Left intellectuals say it is or whatever the lobby groups decide to campaign against.

Such an approach easily combined with a number of other impulses within the wider intellectual culture. Postcolonial thought, with its emphasis on debunking any notion that Western democratic institutions and values were essential goods, argued rather that such things were simply the latest stage of the attempts of the Western powermongers to impose their will and values on the rest of the world. Then, various strands of postmodernism offered critiques of values within Western society itself, particularly in terms of sexual mores and gender roles. To make heterosexuality and monogamous marriage normative was, again, oppressive and prevented the gays, lesbians, and others who might have once been regarded as deviant from being “authentic.”

This psychologizing of oppression, combined with postcolonial thinking and postmodernism, has led the organized Left to adopt some strange positions that once would have been antithetical to its philosophy. For example, it has often been the case that the most intolerant groups with regard to homosexuality are working-class; the issue of gay rights is, by and large, the preoccupation of the middle class. So in advocating gay rights, the Left frequently finds itself opposed to the values of the very people it was originally designed to help.

Further, while the Left in origin was supposed to provide a voice to the voiceless, the link that has been forged between abortion and women’s rights has meant that the most voiceless of all—the unborn—are those most vigorously silenced by those who should

be speaking for them. This irony and moral inconsistency has not always been lost on those who would regard themselves as being of the political Left and, in the case of a man such as Nat Hentoff, helped to convert him to the pro-life cause. The anomaly is most embarrassingly obvious at international congresses on women's rights, where women from poorer countries who struggle daily with issues such as clean water, food, female circumcision, etc., often seem bemused by the obsession of the materially well-off women of the West with the matter of abortion. This hijacking of the Left by identity politics means that the current struggles in which the Left are engaged are not of a kind that my grandfather would have recognized, and represent rather a betrayal of the Old Left.

Then, of course, the most obvious problems occur with wars and international relations. Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, I could never quite understand why the Right wanted a boycott of the 1980 Olympics over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but opposed sporting bans on South Africa, while the Left was outraged at any attempt to boycott the Olympics, because "politics should be kept out of sport," yet reviled any sports person who had contact with South Africa. The answer, of course, was that neither side was really concerned about freedom; it was more about which regime was more acceptable. That the Left thought the world of Brezhnev and company—most of whom had blood on their hands from rising under Stalin, not to mention their subsequent involvement in repression—somehow better than the world of Vorster and Botha was ridiculous, but it showed how far they had come from original ideals of human rights.

Yet the situation today is, if anything, worse. The Left's opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is odd, given that both

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represented feudal regimes with despicable records on human rights. That the regimes were nasty and vicious does not justify an outside power invading sovereign territory; but to listen to much of the rhetoric on the Left and to see the craven obeisance paid to a man like Saddam Hussein by a so-called man of the Left like British MP George Galloway is sickening. The Left was supposed to be committed to speaking up against oppression *wherever* it may be found, not simply in those countries allied to the West; it has degenerated at points into little more than a knee-jerk and childish reaction against anything that middle America and middle Britain consider valuable or worthwhile.

There are plenty of other absurd examples of the way in which the Left has been hijacked by special-interest groups. One can think of how the trendy poststructuralist thinker Michel Foucault, whose academic work was targeted at unmasking the secret agendas of those with power, welcomed the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. More recently, I was struck at the outrage that greeted Barack Obama's choice of Rick Warren, the megachurch pastor, to pray at his inauguration. I have many questions and concerns about Warren's theology, but I take my hat off to him in terms of the various social causes to which he has committed himself and devoted time and money, including projects to help the poor both in America and abroad. What was interesting was that all his admirable work on behalf of the suffering and the physically destitute counted as nothing to the pundits of the Left in the light of his opposition to gay marriage. So a man who has helped to feed the hungry and clothe the naked is still regarded as a callous, right-wing head case by a group of middle-class commentators and activists, simply because he is opposed to allowing middle-class

homosexuals and lesbians to achieve middle-class respectability. It is a strange world where well-fed television hosts, dressed in Armani suits, Vera Wang dresses, and Jimmy Choo shoes, trash a man with an exemplary record on poverty, simply because he cannot support a middle-class lobby group. But such is the hijacking of the Left by those whose agendas are far removed from the old-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century vision of the universal franchise, decent wages and working conditions, basic health care, and sanitary housing. Call me old-fashioned, but I am not sure that stopping Melissa Etheridge from marrying her partner and enjoying the consequent tax breaks and hospital visiting privileges is in quite the same league of importance as providing clean water to a village in Africa or polio vaccinations for children in Asia, or helping to stop the street violence in Philadelphia. Yet the former cause seems to grip the imagination of the political parties far more than any of the latter.

EVANGELICALS AND THE NEW LEFT

Most of us have come across those evangelicals who, in reaction to the Religious Right, like to parade the fact they vote Democratic in a kind of schoolboyish “Aren’t I naughty?” kind of way. It’s often an empty gesture, a kind of theological vegetarianism; vegetarians do something that costs them nothing, but my, oh my, does it not make them feel morally superior to the rest of us. So many of the evangelical intelligentsia have bought the concerns of the New Left, with its nebulous and psychologized notions of oppression, which allow for many a “right on” gesture that costs them nothing. Even as I wrote this chapter, the evangelical world threw up an example

that shows that, as usual, the trendies of American evangelicalism ape the wider culture, always a day late and a dollar short, and always in a way that makes them look ridiculously sanctimonious and self-important. In February 2010, Dr. Philip Ryken, the pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, accepted the position of Wheaton College's president. Immediately, the blog world erupted with the noise of heartfelt cries about how dreadful it was that the job was being given to a middle-class white male intellectual rather than a representative of a minority (as defined by the middle-class consensus, one presumes). Most of the cries, of course, came as usual from—ahem—middle-class white intellectuals, with quite a few male representatives among them; but not one of those intellectuals was, as far as I know, resigning his own job in order to make way for a minority candidate and to help with the ending of oppression. Thus the self-righteous outrage was as self-contradictory as it was predictable—a typical display of New Left concerns that cost the whiners nothing and were therefore worth nothing. They mewled and they puked, but they did not hold themselves to the same standard to which they wished to hold the Wheaton board and Dr. Ryken. Nor, perish the thought, did they see themselves as candidates to make self-sacrificial examples for others. It is so much easier to lob brickbats at others—and it helps the conscience so much to do it in a righteous cause—than it is actually to make a costly stand oneself. The whole phenomenon was quite simply a sickening display of smugly self-righteous indignation; yet the verdict on Dr. Ryken, the quintessential middle-class white man, is surely just, for a jury of his peers has after all delivered it.

Far from standing as a testimony against the culture and for biblical categories of oppression and liberation, the trendy evan-

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gical Left on display that day clearly enjoys empty, conscience-saving gestures as much as the trendy political Left. After all, it is far easier to sit at a Starbucks Wi-Fi hot spot taking blog swipes at college appointments, or moaning about the mere existence of a few small Protestant denominations that do not ordain women (and whose mere existence seems to “oppress” those who have never even darkened their doors), than to address real matters of oppression, persecution, and tyranny in the world.

CONCLUSION

For someone like me, here lies the heart of the problem of the New Left: once the concerns of the Left shifted from material, empirical issues—hunger, thirst, nakedness, poverty, disease—to psychological categories, the door was opened for everyone to become a victim and for anyone with a lobby group to make his or her issue the Big One for this generation. “Authenticity” and “inauthenticity” are entirely subjective categories, and forms of oppression are thus whatever the oppressed person claims them to be. This is why the media outrage that greets a perceived racist or homophobic comment often far outstrips that which greets scenes of poverty and famine, and it is what leads the likes of Richard Rorty to compare the Holocaust of the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s to the treatment of homosexuals in America and to do so with an apparently straight face. At that point, we are truly in a la-la land with no moral compass, a place that should provoke nothing but ridicule and contempt. This is not to say that bigotry of any kind is at all acceptable or desirable, but to argue that the Left has lost all sense of proportion with regard to what is and is not of most

pressing importance. It has become, by and large, the movement of righteous rhetorical pronouncements on total trivia.

As the Left adopted such concerns as gay rights and abortion as touchstone issues, those of us with strong religious convictions on these matters found ourselves essentially alienated from the parties to which our allegiance would naturally be given. The parties of the Right, while representing to an extent, and at least on paper, positions on these matters with which we are comfortable, yet also represent policies in other areas where we find ourselves in fundamental disagreement. If you do not think an untrammelled free market is the answer to society's ills, and if you believe there is such a thing as society and government that, as the democratically elected instrument of that society, has a role to play in health care and helping the poor, where do you turn in a world where the big issues on the Left are gay marriage and a woman's right to choose? Thus I find myself politically homeless, restless, and disenchanting, and I suspect I am not alone.

Now, I need to anticipate the argument of a later chapter here: I believe that on certain issues there is no obviously "Christian" position. I am inclined to include among such issues the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the appropriateness of trade unions, rates of direct and indirect taxation, etc. To make any of these things acid tests of Christian orthodoxy is to go well beyond anything the Bible teaches or that the church has felt it necessary to define over the two thousand years of its existence.

Even more, however, I believe that even on those issues where Christians agree on what the end results should be, there is yet room—significant room—for Christians to disagree on how these might be achieved. Thus, for example, it is an unequivocal demand

of God's Word that Christians are to love their neighbors. The parable of the good Samaritan, answering the question "Who is my neighbor?" and ending with the imperative "Go and do likewise," would seem to be only the most obvious text to address this matter. Now, if one happens to believe that the untrammelled free market, deregulation, massive defense budgets, and paltry domestic infrastructure spending are not the best ways to address this biblical imperative, where does one turn? Not to the Republican Party, for whom these matters have become virtual mantras. Yet the Democrats seem to be in thrall to precisely the kind of middle-class identity politics of the gay and pro-choice lobbies in which the real oppressed—the poor—are of only marginal concern. Hence, I suspect, the fact that so many of the American working class have—in a move that should seem bizarre—shifted their allegiance to the Republican Party because this party at least makes an attempt to appear to stand for the kind of social values that are of concern to them.

So in this first chapter, I bring nothing for the comfort of those Christians who want to stand with the Old Left on issues such as poverty; we have nowhere to call home. We are despised by those who claim to speak for the oppressed but only seem to speak for those whose notion of oppression is somebody, somewhere, telling them they have to take responsibility for their own irresponsibility or that certain self-indulgent behavior is unacceptable. The progressive intellectuals and the parties of the Left have, by and large, been raptured to a world of identity politics, pampered celebrity endorsements and agendas, and middle-class lobby groups, and we old-school types have been left behind. Let's just hope that the tribulation does not last too long.