

What is it About Evangelicals?

by Alastair McIntosh

73 COMMENTS

27TH NOVEMBER 2016

What is the white evangelicalism with which 25% of Americans identify, of which, according to exit polls, 81% voted for Donald Trump? In the past when I have spoken or written on this subject, it has been a topic of little more than specialist interest within academia. Now, none can deny the pertinence of the question.

Here I want to explore five questions.

- 1) What is meant by “evangelism” in its original gospel sense?
- 2) What is usually meant by “evangelicalism”?
- 3) Why might evangelicalism be prone to prejudicial binary worldviews?
- 4) How might Donald Trump’s psychohistory so connect, including into Anglo–American exceptionalism?
- 5) Can evangelism, if not evangelicalism, transcend myths of redemptive violence?

1. Original Evangelism and Social Justice

Theologically speaking, an evangelist or evangelical should be a “bearer of good news”. The term derives from the Greek – euangelion . It is made up of eu, meaning good as in euphoria, and angellein as in angel, a divine messenger. The word should therefore be taken to mean an “angel of good news”.

Luke’s gospel uses the Greek term, euangelisasthai (“proclaim good news”), when Jesus reads out his mission statement in the temple at Nazareth at the start of his ministry. In contrast to white American evangelicalism, this is not a message of personal salvation, of privatised religion. Rather, it is a full-on social and spiritual gospel.

The full scale of Jesus’ mission statement is encoded both within the original Greek of Luke 4:18–19, and in its Hebrew backdrop from the prophet Isaiah. The scripture passage states that he (Christ as Messiah) has come to address material poverty, to remove the scales of spiritual blindness, to liberate the prisoner and the oppressed, and to heal the broken-hearted.

Also coded within this proclamation is “the acceptable year of the Lord” – the Jubilee of the Hebrew prophets. This was a periodic full scale programme of economic and environmental reform to restore justice. It included radical land reform, ecological restoration by resting both the soil and all of nature, the cancellation of debts and the freeing of slaves.

Such, then, are the “good tidings of great joy” (euangelizomai) heralded at the start of Luke’s gospel (2:10). Personal salvation is, of course, central to this. But to salve means to heal, and the healing is to restore right relationships. What can one say, but give us more such evangelists.



(<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/6-Luther-and-Calvin.jpg>)². Reformation Evangelicalism and Blood Sacrifice

In contrast to this social evangel (or gospel), the 16th century Protestant reformers, starting with Luther, narrowed down their usage of the term to focus on personal salvation. Why that shift from the social to the personal? In principle, there ought to be no contradiction between the two. The Reformers probably assumed that. To be an evangelist or evangelical should be the same thing. There is no etymological difference. However, as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it, “evangelical” has come to be: “Applied to those Protestants who hold that the essence of the Gospel consists in the doctrine of salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ, and deny the saving efficacy of either good works or the sacraments.”

In other words, a personalised slant and a number of filters have become applied to the original gospel concept. The pivotal principle here is atonement. The term only entered English with the Reformation in the 16th century, and specifically so, in its sense of at-one-ment with the divine nature – usually held to be through Christ’s blood sacrifice that makes good for human sin.

In Calvin’s view, God is “armed for vengeance”. Christ on the cross is not about the power of love absorbing the violence of the Roman empire and of corrupt religious authorities.. Rather, as Calvin put it, he “undertook and paid all the penalties which must have been exacted ... he endured the death which is inflicted on the wicked by an angry God”

An obsession with sin and the driving power of its associated guilt had long lain at the heart of the Jewish temple’s economic system, as shown in the Hebrew Bible or “Old” Testament. Animals were sacrificed to propitiate sins. Jesus, as a Jewish reformer, turned over the temple money changers’ tables. He repudiated their corrupt religious economic system. Much Christian theology – Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox – understands Christ’s death on the cross as a transfer of that propitiation system. Christ became the blood sacrifice instead of animals. Christians are thereby freed from having to make animal blood sacrifices, because the buck stopped at the cross.

The Protestant reformers successfully challenged the medieval Catholic Church’s re-invention of a temple economy. Here, “indulgences” were paid to priests in the belief that ... at Christ’s mercy could thereby be bought. Arguably, however, the Reformers failed to grasp the full signif

other words: be absolved of the past and now get on with your life, and stop wallowing in your obsession with your karma. As the great Hindu-Catholic theologian Raimon Panikkar put it, “Only forgiveness breaks the law of karma,” and this is the depth psychological strength of the Christian message. How many times, forgiveness? Jesus taught not seven times, but seven times seventy times. In other words, shit happens in life, and we cause it to happen, but we are looking at a depth of cosmic love that provides perpetual letting go – for-give-ness.

Saint John the evangelist taught, in his New Testament letters, that “God is love.” That “perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment” (1 John 4:16-18). However, evangelicalism’s focus on blood atonement in the sense that “Christ died for our sins” hinges on a disturbing mix of love expressed through wrath. In John Calvin’s view, God is “armed for vengeance”. Here, Christ on the cross is not about the power of love absorbing the violence of the Roman empire and of corrupt religious authorities. Here is not a testament to the power of nonviolence. Rather, as Calvin put it, Christ on the cross “undertook and paid all the penalties which must have been exacted ... he endured the death which is inflicted on the wicked by an angry God” (Institutes, 2:16:10).

This theory of what the cross represents is known as Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA). It holds that Christ was our substitute in taking the punishment for sin from God. It parallels an earlier Roman Catholic teaching of Saint Anselm’s, and in the backdrop is Augustine and Paul. Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury who was put in place by a son of William the Conqueror’s, held that God, like a feudal superior, held order by the honour system of fealty, and required his honour to be “satisfied” (or punished) in the face of human sin. This, it is argued, out of a greater love.

In sharpening Anselm up by bringing to bear his lawyer’s mind, Calvin became the cornerstone of traditionalist Presbyterians. Also, of such groups as “particular” (or Calvinistic) Baptists. Such a schema, especially today in the Bible Belt, forms the bedrock of white American evangelicalism. Calvinists would argue with me, and between themselves, as to how I have presented PSA here. At the end of the day, what counts politically is not so much this doctrine of the cross, but the psychology of how it plays out, for it turns out that not all are “saved”.

3. Prejudice and Predestination

Conservative evangelicalism – like some conservative Catholic and Orthodox theology – does not accept that salvation is universal. There is ongoing debate as to whether the gift of God’s saving grace is provided for all, or only to the “chosen few”. Most Presbyterians, at least in Scotland today, teach the offer of free grace, and do so looking back to figures such as Karl Barth and Thomas Boston. But the ultra-conservatives have a point that this does not sit well with the Reformation creeds.

Conservative evangelicalism does not accept that salvation is universal.... The Damned are quite literally, the Godforsaken. As Patti Smith, the “godmother of American punk” put it in her lyric, Gloria: “Jesus died for somebody’s sins, but not mine.”

The problem is that, because Hell is believed to exist literally (and not just in a purgatorial sense, that we bring upon ourselves, and need to burn off, as it were), then Hell has to be populated. As God is sovereign over the cosmos, and as Calvinism lacks a deep theology of kenosis, or divine letting go, the evangelical belief is that from before the foundations of the earth were laid, God chose the Elect and the Damned. In Calvin’s words: “All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation and, accordingly ... we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death” (Institutes, 3:21:5). Nothing that we can do – whether through prayer or good works – is able to alter that foreordained fate.

Here, then, is a worldview that posits not the equality of humankind, but the fundamental inequality. It is known as “double-predestination” because it understands human souls as being helplessly pre-ordained for either Heaven, or Hell. Following from this, Calvinism derives the doctrine of “limited atonement”. This holds that Christ’s atonement on the cross was not for the benefit of all. Its benefits were “limited” to the Elect alone. The Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 remains, to this day, the “subordinate standard” (subordinate only to the Bible) of most British Presbyterianism, and similar statements have replicated across the former Empire. It states the doctrine of limited atonement very clearly. “Neither are any other redeemed by Christ ... but the elect only” (3:VI).

Traditionally, the Damned are held to be the greater part of humankind. The countervailing notion, universal salvation, such as was taught against Calvinism by the 17th century Quaker, Robert Barclay, was deemed a heresy. In 1830 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland removed the Rev John McLeod Campbell of Rhu from his parish on heresy charges, precisely for challenging limited atonement and thereby, disavowing the Westminster Confession.

Under double predestination and limited atonement, the Damned are quite literally, the Godforsaken. As Patti Smith, the “godmother of American punk” put it in her lyric, Gloria: “Jesus died for somebody’s sins, but not mine.”



Leaving aside the emotional impact of such authoritarian religion, the political impact is to legitimise a binary worldview that sees social realities in terms of an in-group and out-group, with us or against us, good state or bad state. A desire for black and white certainties is characteristic of the authoritarian personality, and this obsession with purity plays through into racial prejudice. The backing of the Dutch Reformed (Calvinist) Church for apartheid is well known, though it has been repudiated in the post-Apartheid era. However, in its time it justified racial segregation. As C. W. de Kiewiet wrote in the seminal, *A History of South Africa*, the Boers believed in their own manifest destiny from God “setting them apart from the unelected pagans about them [and] bred in them a sense of special destiny as a people.” A quick look at the websites of white supremacist groups in America shows the same sorry theology playing through.

Writers such as Erich Fromm and Richard Steigmann-Gall have argued that Lutheran and Calvinist thought was at the root of Nazi ideology. Luther, for his explicit writings against the Jews, and Calvin, for his positing of basic inequality. Erich Koch, the Nazi commissar of East Prussia who sent hundreds of thousands of Jews and Gypsies to their deaths, described Hitler’s project as “Luther’s unfinished Reformation.”

It wasn’t just the Protestant Nazis. Like many of the far right in France today, Goebbels was of Catholic provenance. His twisted reading of the gospel was that “Christ is harsh and relentless.” Only laïcité wins, secularism, which is perhaps the point. Roman Catholic theology from before the Vatican II reforms of the 1960s, historically had an even more pernicious effect on Native American history than evangelicalism has had. Catholics projected their own binary worldview: one of “Christian” versus “pagan”, or “civil” versus “barbarian”, and these linked to the teaching of “no salvation outside the Church.” However, my focus here is on Protestant evangelicalism. It wasn’t the Catholic vote that swung it for Donald Trump in the White House.



REV. ALEXANDER MACLEOD.

of “manifest destiny”, justifying American exceptionalism as the God-given right to lord it over lesser nations. If this sounds like an overstatement of the case that religion has been weaponised, check out the words of national charter songs like Rule! Britannia, or America’s national anthem, The Star-Spangled Banner. Few parts of the world reveal this weaponisation of religion more strongly, and lastingly, than in Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

After the Battle of Culloden in 1746, redcoats of the fledgling British state were positioned in villages across the land. A line of garrisons, from Fort William in the west to Fort George in the east, marked out the north-west frontier of a fledgling British state that was still in the process of consolidating its own “internal colonisation” on the “Celtic fringe”. To win the hearts and minds of “rebels”, the Patronage Act of 1712 was invoked, allowing landowners to appoint clergy of their choice. State funds – the king’s Royal Bounty – were already in place following earlier uprisings. These as well as other fundraising in the metropolitan south – from Edinburgh to London – paid for evangelisation by which to win over erstwhile Catholics to the “true Protestant religion”. With it, came loyalty to the British state, and military service to its sovereign “Defender of the Faith”.

In the eyes of the evangelical writers of Ross-shire, religion on the Isle of Lewis had become lax by the early 19th century. The chasing out of priests by Redcoats in the aftermath of Culloden had left a spiritual vacuum that the Church of Scotland, as by law established, had failed adequately to fill. Practices that were held to be “pagan” or “Papist” persevered. To get a feeling for this gentle, folk and nature-centred spirituality that had been indigenous to the Hebrides, we only need to look at the six volumes of *Carmina Gadelica*, collected by the ethnographer Alexander Carmichael in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In 1815, the whole of Lewis was inherited by Lady Hood, Mary Elizabeth Frederica Mackenzie. Her father, the Governor of the Barbados slave colony had exhausted his liquid assets in gambling, and begun the clearance of villages in the south east of Lewis (Pairc) to make way for commercial sheep ranching. Her husband, Vice-Admiral Sir Samuel Hood, had commanded the British fleet out of Madras where Lady Mary lived what contemporary writers described as a wayward life. Indeed, T.B. Macaulay considered her a “wicked woman”.

Following the death of Admiral Hood, her second husband, also impoverished, continued clearances of people from their ancestral lands to make way for sheep, this time in south-west Lewis (Uig). According to research undertaken by CNN, two lines of Donald Trump’s mother’s ancestors were evicted from their homes in these areas. Although the evictions would have taken place just over a century before Mary Anne Macleod left Lewis and met Fred Trump, the driving force of emigration in 1920s and 1930s Lewis was pressure on the land, caused by both evictions and a rising population. It could be argued that we owe The Donald to the Highland Clearances.

For reasons that are not yet adequately researched, Lady Mary took on evangelical religion, and used her power of patronage to hand pick ministers from the mainland. Island historians agree that the first of these, the Rev Alexander Macleod of Assynt in 1824, set the tenor for those who would follow.

Macleod refused to baptise children until the parents were thoroughly catechised. Such was their anxiety, that at one stage the parents marched en masse with bairns in arms across the moors to Tarbert, there to have them liberally sprinkled by the “moderate” Church of Scotland minister of Harris. This was when, as Dr Michael Newton puts it, “baptism was understood by the ‘popular Gaelic mind’ as bringing the child from the unsafe, wild space into the safe, humanized, domesticated space – fully human and part of the community” (pers. com.).

Macleod’s diaries show that he relished using fear to drive the unconvinced into his congregation. Such “strictness” became the norm. As another evangelical preacher, Dr John Kennedy, would write: “The power of the pulpit was paramount in Ross-shire and the people became, to a great extent, plastic to its influence.”

By cultivating a conviction of sin, shame is stimulated, with relief offered through the hope and powerful in-group bonding of being Elect. Mary (Trump) Macleod’s parents had been married in the Free Church of Scotland at Back on the Isle of Lewis. The church holds firmly to the Westminster Confession, and double predestination would have been central to the family cosmology. It remained so, even into my childhood. More to the point, however, is that this cosmology played out over large parts of America. Loraine Boettner, who died in 1990, was America’s leading evangelical writer on predestinarian theology. As he described it: America represented “one of the brightest pages of all Calvinistic history.... Our forefathers believed in it and were controlled by it.”

There is little evidence that Trump feels strongly about faith. He will, however, carry an intuitive understanding of the drivers of evangelicalism, and how to work its levers to advantage.

5. Beyond the Myth of Redemptive Violence

In critiquing American evangelicalism, I do not want to conflate it inappropriately with today’s island faith. In particular, the Free Church of Scotland – the “wee frees” and their offshoots – are too easily set up to be a whipping boy. Some counterpoint is in order. It is common these days to hear Free Church sermons preach against the “prosperity gospel” brought over from America, and celebrity

ministry. Although I have known a Free Church minister (now deceased) who claimed to be able to discern the Damned from the Elect, such a binary would rarely play out strongly in the preaching today, where in practice, salvation is taught as being freely offered to all.

The wall with Mexico echoes a deep inner schism, projected out onto the world. A wall that separates the barbarians from the civilised. The Damned from the Elect. A wall for which native Americans, and the black community, have long been paying.

Reformed churches are, by definition, in the ongoing process of reforming, and the Free Church is a prime example of this. It was established in the Disruption of 1843, explicitly to break the patronage of landed power. The human warmth of Free Church communities such as the one in which I was raised reveal the evangel of a social gospel deeply embedded, and not segregated off. Both Professors Donald Meek, James Hunter have shown that such grassroots Highlands and Islands Presbyterianism comprised a prototypical liberation theology, that helped to fuel the land rights agitation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My own research has demonstrated how it strongly legitimised the modern Scottish land reform movement. Neither was all of Calvin the trumping of divine mystery by cold human logic. He also had sublime moments, very relevant to the ethos of the isles. Passages like:

“Mankind is knit together with a holy knot ... we must not live for ourselves, but for our neighbours.”

I say this because, if we are not to succumb to authoritarian theology, we must be careful not to push our neighbours into black and white corners. Spiritual life grows by having breathing space. However, the island has had its son, Donald Trump, forced back upon it. Right now, there is embarrassment about Trump, worry for what he augers for the world, and concern for the privacy of his extended family and the unwanted attention that has come to fall upon them.

Donald Trump says he wants to build a wall with Mexico. In island humour, with all the sheep, they're saying that at least he'll know a thing or two about fencing. Joking apart, the wall with Mexico perhaps a deep inner schism, projected out onto the world. A wall that separates the barbarians from the civilised. The Damned from the Elect. A wall for which native Americans, and the black community, have long been paying.

In the end, the bottom line of Christian teaching is that “only forgiveness breaks the law of karma.” Only non-retribution breaks the spiral of violence, defuses the myth of redemptive violence, trounces the temple sacrificial system. The island has had many prodigal sons. In its churches, those of Presbyterian and every other hue, they'll be praying for the President-elect, just like they pray for every other prodigal. Such is the nature of the island's heart. A spiritual community. Where walls get knocked down by the wind, and doors are rarely locked.

This article builds on Alastair McIntosh's previous Bella Caledonia piece about Donald Trump and the Second Sight, and from research in his books Soil and Soul (2001), Island Spirituality (2013), and especially Poacher's Pilgrimage (2016). He is Fellow of the Centre for Human Ecology, an honorary fellow of the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh, and a senior honorary research fellow (visiting professor) at the College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow.

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by Alastair McIntosh

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73 Comments

John Page

5 months ago

Thanks, Bella for making such brilliant material available.

This was fascinating, Alistair. Thank you! Coincidentally I have spent the last 6 weeks on and off slogging my way through Weber's Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.....it would have been a lot easier had I read your excellent piece first.

The most pernicious trend in the US currently is the alignment of evangelicals and followers of Ayn Rand.

John Page

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replyto=230217#respond>)

John Robertson

5 months ago

'alignment of evangelicals and followers of Ayn Rand.'

Yes, absolutely, agreed

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replyto=230402#respond>)

John Page

5 months ago

See Ayn Rand Nation by Gary Weiss.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replyto=230467#respond>)

John O'Dowd

5 months ago

"See Ayn Rand Nation by Gary Weiss". Good advice, John Page. I read it some years ago – still on my bookshelves – scary stuff. (Must read it again). You still see young Americans with "Atlas Scorned" in their hands. Such dangerous mindless nonsense.

And a brilliant call to have linked it to the content of yet another brilliant, scholarly piece by Alastair McIntosh. So much explained so beautifully – the true tradition of the Scottish dominie – not dead, just sleeping – especially in our thrusting, business oriented 'universities'

What a marvellous resource for Scotland Bella is. Thanks

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231895#respond>)

John O'Dowd

5 months ago

That should, of course, be 'Atlas Shrugged'. Still bloody nonsense under any name

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

John, hello, can you email me with a summary of the significance of the Ayn Rand points? He or she is not on my radar, and a quick Google failed to edify. Cheers.

Graeme McCormick

5 months ago

Having relished the soaring musical feast of an Advent Service in Paisley Abbey this morning as a Presbyterian I feel truly privileged to have read your article. Oh that our main stream press would dare to treat its readers with such respect.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230259#respond>)

Bella Caledonia Editor

5 months ago

Thanks Graeme, we're proud to publish Alastair's work and deepen the debate about WTFIGO

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230272#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Graeme, the comment of yourself (and John Page, above) mean a great deal to me. Since Trump's election I sweated blood over this article. How, in the wake of Trump's politics of stirring hatred, and his evangelical vote, to look at deeply problematic (IMO) Presbyterian (Calvinist rooted) theology? How, without at the same time harming the profound spirituality of those of the more conservative Presbyterian communities in Scotland amongst whom I was raised, and still sustained?

In a powerful dream last night, I was back at school in the Nicolson Institute, Stornoway. It was the RE class, the teacher was an incomer, but here's the crazy part: instead of the teacher teaching religion, it was contemporary island kids telling the teacher what it was all about. The young taking control of their own culture (as is vibrantly happening these days).

I was sitting beside my school/uni friend, the late Mairi Macdonald of Upper Bayble, whose widowed old FC(C) mother I love to visit. Suddenly, amidst all the talk led thus far by the boys, Mairi went down on her knees. In a praying posture, she sang the most exquisitely beautiful song about the love of God. Tears filled my eyes. The theology hardly mattered. This was of the purest truth of the heart.

I awoke, wondering what the dream was about. I knew that Mike Small was publishing this article on Bella today. I just thought: yes, it's about the island's underlying spirituality. The island of Donald Trump's mother, that awaits its prodigals. Even its most renegade prodigals. You're never going to be able to explain island religion and its underpinning spirituality satisfactorily to somebody from away. Not to all the journalists, like from CNN recently, who come in search of Trump's backstory. But you can let them experience it. Oh yes, the island can offer that experience, and right through to our dream lives.

BTW, the pictures above are Luther & Calvin from a German church window, Lady Mary (Hood / Stewart-Mackenzie) the 19th century owner of Lewis (someone, do a PhD on her), and Rev Alexander Macleod, her hard-line protégé. Apologies for my typos. I'd worked the piece over beyond the stage where I could anymore see them. With trepidation, I just had to write it.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230279#respond>)

John Robertson

5 months ago

Should have read this before my comments below. Your answer here softens and qualifies appropriately your attack in the main article a bit.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230399#respond>)

Frank

5 months ago

Alastair, You talk about Trump stirring up hatred, but hatred isn't conjured up out of thin air, it needs ingredients. The first ingredient is something, or someone, to hate, the next is what in this case is the basis of hatred, resentment. Resentment is the perfectly natural reaction to injustice, real or imagine. If the injustice is real and it isn't remedied it becomes hatred of the thing causing the injustice but that hatred can be deflected to a scapegoat and  **BELLA CALEDONIA** is something that is ideologically unacceptable to

acknowledge. I recall watching a documentary some years ago about the rise of the Nazi party in south Africa (prior to ending of apartheid) Redundant steel workers were joining the party because the Blacks were "stealing their jobs." To be a communist in S.Africa was anathema and to condemn Capitalists for making them redundant and employing cheaper black labour would have made them communists. For that reason it was unthinkable to lay the blame where it belonged. Likewise the USA, it is seething with resentment, against immigrants and against economic insecurity and declining living standards. The loss of jobs is blamed on China. The mainstream politicians offer no remedy so the people go for a demagogue like Trump. What Trump will do about immigrants remains to be seen, as for the other problems, it wasn't China that stole the jobs from US workers, it was US Capitalists who outsources the jobs to a country with lower labour costs. But like the S. African steel workers it is unacceptable for US workers to say that. Capitalism is founded on injustice and is all about concentrating wealth and power, since no one ever gives up power voluntarily it is unlikely that Trump will be able to restore prosperity to US workers other than in the short to medium term via. public works. When the system fails again who will get the blame, where will the hatred be directed then.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231314#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Sorry Frank, I only just noticed your post. What you're saying seems to echo what an old friend, Ian Ramsay, said to me tonight: "Trump is a necessary response to illuminate the American shadow."

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=232418#respond>)

Fay Kennedy.

5 months ago

Most insightful. Thanks for your interesting articles that help us understand some of the tumult that is in our world.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230278#respond>)

Aladair Maol-Chriosd

5 months ago

I second that wholeheartedly 😊

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230295#respond>)

John Robertson

5 months ago

Agree, but quite a naked agenda and needing a lot more evidence for its claims.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230398#respond>)

florian albert

5 months ago

'It wasn't the Catholic vote that swung it for Trump'

Has there been a sufficiently detailed analysis of voting to determine this ?

Trump's victory has been ascribed to narrow pluralities in key states in the (post-industrial) Mid West. These are states with a large Catholic vote and a (small) majority of Catholics voted for Trump.

How does the 81% white evangelical vote for Trump compare with the evangelical vote for previous Republican candidates ?

In 2004, George W Bush's victory was popularly ascribed to Karl Rove's success in mobilizing evangelical voters.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230285#respond>)

John Robertson

5 months ago

Yes, fascinating though the article is, it's a bit light on empirical evidence and a bit (not all I agree) a polemic

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230397#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

There's a lot of debate around what's behind which figures. My reference is to the CNN exit polls, as heavily cited in public discourse. Challenging CNN's take, Jeremy Kidwell sent me this:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/no-the-majority-of-american-evangelicals-did-not-vote-for-trump> (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/a>

As the dust settles I'll be watching to see what such bodies as the Pew Research Center makes of it all.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230291#respond>)

Alf Baird

5 months ago

A widna wirry about President Trump, Alastair; if ye hiv ony faith, as ye dae, ye dinna need tae wirry about thon gadgie ataw. He haed a guid Scots mither onywey, sae he shuirly canna bi that coorse. A'm m  eral unionists in Holyrood (aye SNP tae) an aw thair cowan acts an social re-engineerin. A'body in Scotlan kens finewe  stminster onywey.

Graeme Purves

5 months ago

Dae ony o the sleekit scunners o Scotland's swamp-dwellin elite hae "guid Scots mithers", Alf?

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230761#respond>)

Alf Baird

5 months ago

Thay hae mithers, aye, but thair faithers are anither maiter.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230964#respond>)

John Robertson

5 months ago

A fascinating piece and correct in many criticisms of forms of early forms Protestantism and its extreme forms today but does it also unfairly:

1. understate the role of the Reformation and Protestantism in playing the central role in the emergence of democracy and of universal education in many parts such as Scotland?
2. understate the monstrous effects of the Vatican/Catholicism in repressing liberation, democratic and socialist movements through its calculated support for fascist movements?
3. understate the extent to which late 20th Century Protestantism has moved on and in most forms eg in the UK and Europe represents a pretty tolerant belief system?

I write this as a confirmed atheist and socialist.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230395#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

John, first, can I draw readers' attention to a date error. Rev Alexander Macleod arrived of course in 1824, not 1924. I'll ask Bella if that can be tweaked. Thanks to the reader who privately alerted me.

1. I very much take your point on Scottish Protestant education and democracy. I could have brought it in as a mitigating sideline to my main argument, but I was wrestling with length. I thank you for your remark, above, that my added comment material softens and qualifies my main argument. However, your point remains relevant because, in Scotland, Calvinism as "the seedbed of democracy" and Knox's "school in every parish" has fed into the national psyche a respect of participation and education, that still serves as a counterweight to the anti-intellectualism thrown up elsewhere, especially during the Brexit debate. This finds expression in the enduring Scots "democratic intellect". In Scotland we have grassroots pride in education because it is not (apart from private schools) seen as being an elite prerogative.
2. In expecting me to have also dealt with Catholic Church issues, I think you pull me too far off-topic. I say quite sufficient about some of Catholicism's erstwhile sorry history in Part 4, where mentions the reforms brought in with Vatican II in the 1960s.
3. I think you've dealt with your own. Criticism of the moving on of most modern Protestantism in your added comment to my comment above. Yes, it has mostly moved on, though in some Protestant churches gender issues remain at stake, both in terms of equality of roles in ministry and non-heterosexuality. In Scots Presbyterian cosmology (soteriology), the retention of the Westminster Confession with its double predestination and limited atonement continues to sit, as geologists would say, "uncomfortably" with more modern "free gift of grace" theologies. I'll spare other readers from any more on that, but for those interested my book, *Island Spirituality*, can now be googled and downloaded as a free PDF (Islands Book Trust, 2013). My point in this article, however, is to use insights from Mary Trump Macleod's Scotland as prism through which to see more deeply into some of the memes in parts of Trump's support base. It is not an article about Scotland, or wider Protestantism, in themselves.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230429#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Autocorrect changed to "uncomfortably" my geologically more apposite, "unconformably".

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230430#respond>)

Bella Caledonia Editor

5 months ago

Date fixed

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230437#respond>)

John Robertson

5 months ago

Thank for your further comments. I appreciate them and I agree with pretty much what you say except:

'In expecting me to have also dealt with Catholic Church issues, I think you pull me too far off-topic. I say quite sufficient about some of Catholicism's erstwhile sorry history.'

I still feel there's an obligation to say more on this and I feel it would be on-topic. Maybe I'm not reading this as you mean it but I still get an overall feel of unfairness to much of Protest:  ism to the Vatican but no bigot with the Catholics he

knew and worked with. He let me stop going to the Kirk at 12 and reading Sartre and Marx to boot!

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replyto=230453#respond>)

Crubag

5 months ago

Always interesting to read Alastair on our own islands' experiences, but I'm not sure how this links to American Christians general preference for Republican candidates over Democrats? Both would be on the centre-right spectrum by our political compass.

In terms of the specific candidates in 2016, Clinton dropped in Christian support by 3% compared to Obama in 2012, and by 5% for voters identifying as evangelical. But she also dropped by 3% for "white Catholics" and by 8% for "Hispanic Catholics"...

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/> (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>)

So Clinton was failing to connect with Christians across the whole spectrum – assuming that is the basis on which they mostly voted.

The only religious groups Clinton did better with than Obama were the Mormons (up 4%) and Jewish voters (up 2%).

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replyto=230438#respond>)

John Robertson

5 months ago

Yes, one party with two right-wings.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replyto=230454#respond>)

Crubag

5 months ago

Religious traditions are different too, I think. It's not a straightforward Catholic/Orthodox – Reformed/Protestant split, with the Protestant = Calvinism.

The largest reformed denomination in the US is Baptist, followed by Methodist, which are both different from the Calvinist trend.

(though the same is true of England, and many parts of Europe, where a Lutheran variety of reformed Christianity took hold. Scotland is unusual in having such a strong Calvinist influence).

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replyto=230462#respond>)

Vronsky

5 months ago

- 1) What is meant by "evangelism" in its original gospel sense?
- 2) What is usually meant by "evangelicalism"?
- 3) Why might evangelicalism be prone to prejudicial binary worldviews?
- 4) How might Donald Trump's psychohistory so connect, including into Anglo-American exceptionalism?
- 5) Can evangelism, if not evangelicalism, transcend myths of redemptive violence?

Oh look! A discarded script from 'Frasier'.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replyto=230486#respond>)

Richard MacKinnon

5 months ago

I immediately become suspicious of articles that include terms I've never heard of and don't understand. There a number of expressions referred to in the 5 questions Alistair McIntosh explores here: The first is 'psychohistory' as in 4) How might Donald Trump's psychohistory so connect, including into Anglo-American exceptionalism? I don't know what psychohistory is. I looked it up in my Collins Dictionary. No mention. Also 'exceptionalism'. I hear it used quite a lot these days but I don't have a clue what it means. (Please note, my spell checker doesn't recognise it either). Apparently Scotland is an example of it.

Next one. 'myths of redemptive violence?' as in 5) Can evangelism, if not evangelicalism, transcend myths of redemptive violence? This throws up another problem I have with Alistair's terminology. How can you differentiate evangelism, and evangelicalism? They mean the same. At a stretch they differ in that, Evangelism is the name for what evangelicals do. Evangelicalism is the group noun for all evangelicals and their work.

The preconception we are expected to accept without challenge at the very start of this article is, that if we want to understand the roots to Donald Trumps' political beliefs we should look at the origin's of his mother's faith. That I find tenuous. Making those kind of wild assumptions, and then trying to find evidence to prove them is pseudo-intellectual, and that is a term you will find in a Collins Dictionary.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replyto=230494#respond>)

Bella Caledonia Editor

5 months ago

exceptionalism

noun

the belief that something is exceptional,

Exceptionalism is the perception that a country, society, institution, movement, individual, or time period is "exceptional" (i.e., unusual or extraordinary) in some way. Although the idea appears to have developed with respect to an era, today the term is particularly applied to national or regional exceptionalism. Other uses

Thinking you are different or special when you're really not, you're just the same then using that delusion to justify yourself or your case on the basis of that delusion.

Psychohistory – Wikipedia

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychohistory> (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychohistory>)

Psychohistory is the study of the psychological motivations of historical events. It attempts to combine the insights of psychoanalysis with the research methodology of the social sciences to understand the emotional origin of the social and political behavior of groups and nations, past and present.

You're not asked to accept any preconception – just to read Alistair's article and see if it gives you any insight. If it doesn't that's okay – it doesn't need to be a matter of personal offence to you.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230511#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Richard (and others) – For those wanting more scholarly backdrop to my short article, I have referenced 2 of my books at the foot of the article, one of which (Island Spirituality) is now free online. Both of these contain sources.

Adding to what Bella's editor has said above about psychohistory, the website of Oxford University Press gives an Oxford English Dictionary definition of the term:

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/psychohistory> (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/psychohistory>)

It would be fair, however, to say that the idea of psychohistory is controversial. My colleague Nick Duffell (who wrote *The Making of Them, Wounded Leaders*, and whose new book (with Thurstine Basset), "Trauma, Abandonment and Privilege", is just out from Routledge) discusses the term's use on his blog site here:

<http://woundedleaders.co.uk/what-is-psychohistory/> (<http://woundedleaders.co.uk/what-is-psychohistory/>) .

American Exceptionalism is a well-established concept. The former religious correspondent of *The Times*, Clifford Longley, explored such ideas in his book "Chosen People: the Big Idea that Shaped England and America". Google his name, and various articles/papers will come up. The appeal to exceptionalist theology is not the unique provenance of Republicans. Indeed, Vladimir Putin took issue with Obama over the matter in a remarkable op-ed that he wrote in 2013 for the *New York Times*, over US intervention in Syria:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html> (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opi>

The Obama-Putin spat led to an explosion of articles around such inter-related notions as exceptionalism, manifest destiny, and translated designations of being a chosen people (e.g. the so-called British Israelites). References to a number of these sources are given in Poacher's *Pilgrimage* (Birlinn, 2016) where, amongst other major themes woven in to a walk across Lewis and Harris, I contrast the experiences of soldiers coming back from war in Afghanistan and Iraq as told to me first hand with the neoconservative religious underpinnings of the politics that sent them there. However, to cut through the need to dig for references, or to have to look at any of my books, an authoritative starting point on exceptionalism is this 2005 article by the great American historian, Howard Zinn.

<http://bostonreview.net/zinn-power-glory> (<http://bostonreview.net/zinn-power-glory>)

Thanks to you, Richard, and to others above for raising these questions and criticisms. They give me the opportunity to fill in further on points that could not be made in an article that I was trying to keep reasonably short.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230523#respond>)

JN Anderson

5 months ago

Well stated reply, Alastair, we can learn from the depth and peaceful tone of your engagement in reply; not used to seeing much class like that this year in the states. From across the pond, my random opinion — in your commentary, you delve into deep, multi-layered cause/effect, and you get challenged on your word choice. Been there, seen that, 2016. While I need to dissect your commentary much further, Alastair, after such a season, some healthy dialogue toward some roots causes of division – brave exploration of America's deep divisions – from afar, is welcome. It may be true we can't quite clear the fog ourselves. "If you see in any given situation only what everybody else can see, you can be said to be so much a representative of your culture that you are a victim of it." – S. I. Hayakawa Be Well.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230578#respond>)

Richard MacKinnon

5 months ago

Alistair,

Thanks for the reply and I apologise for my original comment. I was a bit harsh on you.

I understand now your subject and your motives and of course the Trump link to The Hebrides is of particular interest to you.

I visited Lewis and Harris this year for the first time and I was blown away (in a metaphysical sense).

Best regards.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230717#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

No need to be apologetic, Richard. You gave me a great springboard. I'm delighted you got metaphysically blown away by your visit to the Hebrides. That's what they're there for. Some people go only for the view, but it's the inner landscape that really blows the mind. In my experience, that is true from all strands of the islands' religious traditions – Protestant, Catholic, pre-Christian. Visitors who miss that, for example, by not showing a bit of respect for the islands' famous Sabbath, can very easily miss the real depth and warmth of the people. That, oddly, contrasts with the harshness of some of the theology. But these are people who live it from the heart, and as a liberal in theological terms, I have to say that I very often  as more passion in the heart, which is why, paradoxically, I enjoy their company.

John O'Dowd

5 months ago

There is little point in trying to educate Mr MacKinnon. He's not here to learn.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=233777#respond>)

JN Anderson

5 months ago

Well stated reply, Alastair, we can learn from the depth and peaceful tone of your engagement in reply; not used to seeing much class like that this year in the states. From across the pond, my random opinion — in your commentary, you delve into deep, multi-layered cause/effect, and you get challenged on your word choice. Been there, seen that, 2016. While I need to dissect your commentary much further, Alastair, after such a season, some healthy dialogue toward some roots causes of division — brave exploration of America's deep divisions — from afar, is welcome. It may be true we can't quite clear the fog ourselves. "If you see in any given situation only what everybody else can see, you can be said to be so much a representative of your culture that you are a victim of it." — S. I. Hayakawa Be Well.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230563#respond>)

Hilary

5 months ago

I have still to read the whole article but I would add that these Evangelicals are mostly , it seems. infavour of the death penatly too. I asked a US prison psychiatrist about it and he confirmed it . This I put down to inherited guilt. We hate those whom we have wronged and making them out to be guilty makes a person feel (comparatively) good. I read the same from a white Baptist pastor over there who admitted to his own inherited divisive and racist feelings as a young man before he worked out where they came from. He now works in the DR prisons.

Back to your article soon

Thankyou for it in advance

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230568#respond>)

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

5 months ago

Alistair mentions Erich Fromm in passing. I have distant memories of reading Fromm's book 'Fear of Freedom'. What I recall of it (hopefully not too inaccurately) was his Weimar Republic thesis that the collapse of so many social pillars (including of course catastrophic devaluation) left people deeply traumatised and psychologically vulnerable. They faced an increasing overload of ever-new daily choices. The relief of routine vanished. There was minimal direction. There was, in a sense, too much "freedom". Relentless stress-fatigue made society susceptible to a controlling leader with a clear tub-thumping agenda. Hitler.

The late Dutch thinker Herman Dooyeweerd lived through the Nazi occupation. The Dooyeweerd family sheltered Jews. After the war Dooyeweerd wrote a long series of newspaper articles which were eventually published as the Dutch original of the book: 'Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian Options'. In one part of the book he tries to philosophically plumb the origins of German fascism. There are various strands to this, but the pertinent one refers to the corrosive influence of "historicism". Classical Humanism (circum French Revolution) had posited rationalist absolutes which over-arched time. By the early 20th C (in the wake of Romanticism) an irrationalist counter-polarity of humanism was taking over. There were now NO absolutes spanning time. Norms were provisional, a transient consensus within a universal flux:

"It calls itself dynamic, believing that all of reality moves and unfolds historically. It directs its polemic against static views that adhere to fixed truths. It considers reality one-sidedly in the light of historical becoming and development, arguing that everything is purely historical in character. This 'historicism', as it is called, knows of no eternal values. All of life is caught up in the stream of historical development.[...] Following the example of the mathematical and natural sciences, earlier humanistic theory had always sought after the universally valid laws that control reality. It constructed an 'eternal order of natural law' out of the 'rational nature of man'. This order was totally independent of historical development, and was valid for every nation at all times and in all places. The earlier rationalistic humanism displayed little awareness of the individual traits of peoples and nations. All individual things were regarded as mere instances or examples of a universal rule and were reduced to a universal order. This reduction highlights the rationalistic tendency of this type of humanistic thought. But as a result of the polarity of its religious ground motive, humanism veered to the other extreme after the French Revolution. Rationalistic humanism turned into irrationalistic humanism, which rejected all universally valid laws and order. It elevated individual potential to the status of law. Irrationalistic humanism was not inspired by the exact mathematical and natural sciences but by art and the science of history. Art revealed the 'genius' and uniqueness of individuality. This 'romanticism', which for a time dominated western culture during the Restoration period after Napoleon's fall, was the source of the view of reality defended by the Historical School." (Herman Dooyeweerd, 'Roots of Western Culture' pp 42, 50)

But Communism resisted this. It subscribed to time-transcending laws being at work:

"It should not be forgotten that communism in its Marxian and Bolshevik sense is primarily a spiritual power, a secularized eschatological faith in the final liberation of mankind in a future classless society" (Dooyeweerd, 'A New Critique of Theoretical Thought' Vol 4 p 602).

Finally, getting to my main point, German Fascism also (goose-)stepped out of the flux [echos of Fromm here]. Nazism recognized no laws above itself EXCEPT the genius and destiny (Schicksal) of the German volk. This also involved the secularization of a Christian motif:

"When the Historical School attempted to understand the whole of culture, language, art, jurisprudence, and the economic and social orders in terms of the historical development of an individual national spirit, it elevated the national character to the status of the origin of all order. It therefore denied the truth that the individual creature always remains subject to law. It argued that if the individual potential of a man or nation is the only law for development and action, then this potential cannot be a valid law. Accordingly, any nation was considered to act rightly and legitimately if it simply followed the historical individual potential or disposition. This view of reality was

historicistic in the sense explained above. Although the Historical School principally rejected the validity of general laws, it nevertheless replaced them with a substitute by a kind of compromise with the Christian belief in 'divine providence'. It viewed divine providence as a 'hidden' law of history, arguing that God's providence rules the history of a nation. Where the Christian mask was laid aside, 'providence' was replaced by 'Schicksal', the historical destiny or fate of a nation. Schicksal played the same role as divine providence; it operated as a norm for the development of a national character. Careful readers will have noted how closely this view approaches the spiritual atmosphere of national socialism and its appeal to providence, to the 'Destiny of the German People' [Schicksal des deutschen Volkes]. We will do well to keep the affinity between national socialism and the Historical School in mind, for later we will see that nazism must be considered primarily a degenerate fruit of the historicism propagated by the Historical School." (Dooyeweerd, 'Roots' p 51)

This post is already much too long. Apologies. But plausible connections to the social dynamics leading to Brexit, Trump, and to what is happening more widely in European politics, seem not so difficult to make.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230615#respond>)

Topher Dawson

5 months ago

Great article Alistair. Double predestination is a pretty indigestible idea. Our son Matthew who you know is now living in North Carolina which had a big Trump vote and I rather fear for my lovely grand daughter.

The idea that America belongs to the white race used to be for skinheads and nutters but I'm getting the impression that Trump's secretive backers quite like it, and it will become more mainstream and respectable. Getting a religious backing for it seems like part of that process. I must ask the next American Christian I meet whether they are thirled to predestination.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230627#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Well, hello Topher. With yourself I should be saying this over a dram: but a more challenging question would be not whether a professing Christian is thirled to predestination. Even materialists are so thirled, a.k.a. determinism, or were so, until Heisenberg threw a spanner in the works.

No, the more challenging question would be to ask whether they are thirled to "limited atonement", the idea, hinging on predestination, that Christ came to be a ransom (i.e. liberation) only for the Elect.

Such a theory has its scriptural proofs, but those proofs (if one wants to think in such a legalistic way) are trumped by the greater scripture proof of love; as when Christ said, "Come to me ALL ye ..." and the original Greek means ALL, not just some.

Why does any of this matter? It matters if, whatever our denominational backdrops might be if any, the Christianity of the future is to rise above the violent religions of violent men of violent times.

That's to say, the violence (or "sin") that makes God in a human image, and which trumps divine mystery with human logic. The violence which – pace Putin in my links above, because this is about geopolitics too – posits a cosmology in which not all stand as equals on the ground of being, a.k.a. the divine nature.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230659#respond>)

Topher Dawson

5 months ago

Thanks Alastair for the technical religious term: limited atonement for the Elect only. I will try it next time I get the chance.

There was an early Bob Dylan song called "God on their side". The last two verses are

Through many a dark hour
I've been thinkin' about this
That Jesus Christ was
Betrayed by a kiss
But I can't think for you
You'll have to decide
Whether Judas Iscariot
Had God on his side.
So now as I'm leavin'
I'm weary as Hell
The confusion I'm feelin'
Ain't no tongue can tell
The words fill my head
And fall to the floor
That if God's on our side
He'll stop the next war

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230703#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

I didn't know that lyric. Thanks. The trouble with the sugar daddy idea that God should keep intervening to stop bad things from happening, is that it violates human freedom to  ve, partly through and "being with" suffering. There is an important etymological difference between "intercede" and the spiritual term, "intercession" (Latin: *cedere*), to yield

way or to cede, thus a sense of intercession as entering into the spaces inbetween, or being present with, rather than Superman zapping from on high.

On Judas, I love the Russian Orthodox tradition that even he, when he hanged himself, still had in his pocket a crust from the Last Supper. Thus, the possibility of divine incession, even there.

Anyway, I'd better go easy on doing theology on Bella before I get rumbled and banned.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230710#respond>)

Feorghas MacFhionnlaigh

5 months ago

It is probably worth reminding ourselves what a stinking choice the American electorate had. It is clear that many people at large voted for Trump DESPITE great distaste and trepidation. They did so apparently because they were definitively unchuffed with Hillary.

Are our assumptions just a tad complacent? Would the question "Why were 81% of evangelicals anti-Clinton?" have engendered a significantly different article from "Why were 81% of evangelicals pro-Trump?"

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230643#respond>)

Alf Baird

5 months ago

This was not a "stinking choice" for Trump voters, it was actually manna from heaven. It was an excellent opportunity for many voters to reject the usual choices of useless self-serving pc neoliberal/militarist pseudo 'intellectual' elites, and actually vote in someone who has achieved something concrete in life/business without depending on public money. This was a vote against the serial troughers and global military shit-stirrers. Voters ken fineweel that Trump is a 'wide boy', but they also ken that he is just the type of 'no shit' guy needed to fix the public sector swamp in Washington, and nobody can doubt his patriotism. Scotland could do with a Donald to clean up our elite public sector corruption.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230648#respond>)

Graeme Purves

5 months ago

But how is this to be done, Alf? What practical measures need to be taken to drain the swamp? How are the guilty parties to be identified? What criteria should be used? Once the sleekit creaturs hae been flushed out, what is to be done with them?

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230763#respond>)

Alf Baird

5 months ago

The ordinar staundart practeese is tae rewaird thaim aw wi a knighthood or an MBE, or OBE, an a fat pension. Anither wey wid bi tae laid thaim oan thon Brit Empire steamer an cry "f-off", juist like ivery ither ex-colony.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230967#respond>)

David G Anderson

5 months ago

A finely-nuanced cerebral argument drawing on some deep wells of history. As far as the curtain of shame goes, I find both sides sinners on this Manichean typecasting.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230656#respond>)

Max

5 months ago

"Conservative evangelicalism – like some conservative Catholic and Orthodox theology – does not accept that salvation is universal. There is ongoing debate as to whether the gift of God's saving grace is provided for all, or only to the "chosen few". Most Presbyterians, at least in Scotland today, teach the offer of free grace, and do so looking back to figures such as Karl Barth and Thomas Boston. But the ultra-conservatives have a point that this does not sit well with the Reformation creeds".

– Just started reading this article, seems interesting. However there seems to be a bit of a mix up in the theological language here – What do you mean by Universal salvation, or the offer of free grace? Do you mean "Universalism", ie. that all will be saved (not held by Karl Barth), or do you mean arminianism (That God chooses those who choose him in faith), or do you mean merely that the gospel is available to all (Which Calvin and Augustine believed (Augustine – "Anyone can be saved if they want to")). Thomas Boston taught merely that anyone could come to Christ, but repentance and good works follow from meeting with him (ie not Universal salvation). Thats great news, but not Universalism! Slightly surprised that as a theologian you appear to not understand the Marrow controversy. Generally in Christian theology we talk about the offer of free Grace as meaning that one does not have to "do" anything, or provide merits in order to recieve grace from Christ. ie – Calvinism. Not arminianism (where faith is required). Or Universalism.

I know lots of people reading this don't care about theology, but if you can't get the basics of historical philosophy and theology right, it calls into question everything else you have written. I

I shall keep reading, I'm interested to see how all this relates to Trump.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230754#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Hello Max. The passage that you quote from me makes it pretty clear that I do recognise that there are a range of positions on the questions that you raise. However, to have gone into what those are would have added little to my argument about prejudice, binary worldviews, and Trump's evangelical support base.

As for the Marrow Controversy – e.g.

<https://faithalone.org/journal/2003ii/makidon.pdf> (<https://faithalone.org/journal/2003ii/makidon.pdf>) – the rejection of The Marrow of Modern Divinity by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, circa 1720, was on grounds of it being supposedly inconsistent with the Westminster Confession of Faith.

It was a matter that caused great distress to the book's sponsor: my reputed many times great grandfather – the Rev Thomas Boston.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230801#respond>)

Max

5 months ago

Hi Alistair,

Thank you for your very quick reply. I shall read up on the Marrow controversy. looks really interesting and actually very important. Interesting you are related to him!

I will read the rest of your article and see how this all fits.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230813#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Thanks Max, mind you, I don't want to give the impression that I've got all this 16th – 18th century theology sussed. I find some of it hard to grasp, seemingly contradictory, and of questionable relevance to the fundamental teachings of love. I only understand some threads of it all. Not for nothing do I sometimes describe myself as a "fake theologian". But in the face of mystery, can any of us really claim otherwise?

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=230822#respond>)

MBC

5 months ago

I thought that one of the curious psychodynamics of Calvinist predestination was that though God has decided before the beginning of time which of his human creatures he would save, and who not, we human beings didn't know if this was us or somebody else.

This, according to Louise Yeoman, set up a state of perpetual acute anxiety about our ultimate fate, which, coupled with the belief in the continual revelation and witness of the Holy Spirit, meant that rather than apathy and dejection, it produced a curious activism and constant fretting to see if we could detect signs of our salvation. The idea that God may be constantly questioning us, testing our conscience, prompted people to act in accordance with their conscience and their witness. For instance, if you found yourself thinking, 'They really ought to do something about that' it might prompt the secondary thought that maybe God is telling YOU that YOU should do something about that, since your 'lights' (God, via the Holy Spirit) were telling you it was wrong.

So this gave people the courage to challenge established authority – if they thought it was morally wrong and their conscience (= the free movement of the Holy Spirit revealing its truth through their witness) was telling them so. Hence the Evangelical support for the abolition of slavery and many other social reforms.

When I was doing my doctoral work, on Glasgow, in the 17th century, I came across how this was being pitched in sermons.

Questions by the preacher, to his hearers like: 'When did you first experience 'seriousness?'' Meaning, what age were you when you first thought about life and death and what came after? There could hardly be anyone above the age of seven in the audience who hadn't previously contemplated that thought, in an age when so many died before the age of five. It was seen as a good sign if you had experienced seriousness at a young age, especially if the experience had been emotionally intense and prompted a change in attitude or behaviour. This might indeed be a sign that you were one of the Elect.

Next question: 'What were you doing at that time when you first experienced seriousness?' and so on; this forensic audit of our deepest existential angst, our deepest fears – and our greatest hopes.

People on their deathbeds would call for their friends and express the terror that they had not yet received 'assurance', which was apparently some sign from God that you were saved, typically considered to be some intense blissed out experience of His Love. Their friends would then try to reassure them saying, 'if anybody's going to be saved, Tam, it's going to be you'.

The point I am driving at is that the belief in predestination and the Elect didn't at first, at any rate, breed hubris but rather the opposite. However, it did seem to build the confident spirit to challenge the structures and social hierarchies of the secular world.

Topher Dawson

5 months ago

Hi Max and Alistair, you are certainly illuminating some Christian contradictions here! I'm an outsider here but since our continued health depends on Trump not pushing the button I thought it may be worth understanding what motivates his followers.

I thought the parable of the vineyard was Christ's way of saying that even sinners could get a late pass into heaven, but this appears not to be the way some people see it. I'd hate to see professing Christians wiping out groups they had defined as not of the Elect. (as they have done so often in the past)

Max

5 months ago

Hi Alistair,

Sorry it has taken so long for me to get back to you. I read your article with considerable interest. You mentioned that Calvinism does not have “a deep theology of kenosis” – could you explain this?

I think you have portrayed the free church of Scotland in a fair manner, and there are certainly hints in your article that Calvinism's cultural impact have been quite mixed, which I would agree with. I always can't help but notice that the least corrupt countries in the world are those from strong reformed/Lutheran backgrounds. Perhaps the positive side of a strong sense of absolute right and wrong, black and white etc.

Also, if you go to <http://thestateoftheology.com/> (<http://thestateoftheology.com/>), you get results of surveys carried out by the conservative evangelical group Legionier. These surveys strongly suggest that the vast majority of America's “Evangelicals” do not hold views at all similar to Calvinism, of any shade. Prosperity gospel, Arminianism and post modern views hold sway. Surely Billionaire Trump, who represents a gospel that “God helps those who help themselves” would appeal to those who hold such a theology? Trump would not appeal to Calvinists in this regard, where only God through Jesus Christ can save, no merit, total depravity etc.

However, perhaps you would agree with me on this and would point out the main thrust of your article, namely that the predestinarian views of Calvin which in the past centuries propagated so offensively quickly across the nation have led to the nation's populace having an acute sense of right and wrong, black and white, tribalism etc. This has sickened the culture, so even if today's Americans prefer Arminianism to Augustine, they still have an unpleasant cultural left over. I don't want to misrepresent your article, is this the sort of thing you were going for? I don't entirely disagree with you on this point, but:

First of all I would like to point out that the belief that God predestined some to be saved and some to be damned is a pretty ordinary belief held by both Calvinists and Arminians, and Roman Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. All actually believe God is sovereign. The difference between Arminians and Calvinists is rather, that in Arminianism, God makes his decision based on foreseen merits, whilst in Calvinism, God makes his decision on his own free will. You know this already, but the point is here, in orthodox Christianity of every denomination there is black and white, there is truth and falsehood, there are the elect and the damned. Both sides of the argument seem to have their caveats, and problems, for example the idea of the gospel only being preached to the elect is a distortion of what Calvin believed and led to cliques and intolerance. This view was hardly widespread though, at least as far as I understand it.

Second, racism has sadly been rife in America ever since its beginning, as it seems to be in many parts of the world. I'm not really convinced this has anything to do with Calvinism. In America's early days churches were all segregated, Arminian as well as Calvinist. I think the reasons for this were cultural, and go back to a national history of slavery, but not really Calvinism. Of course I understand the picture of the Puritans thinking of themselves as God's chosen people for the promise land. I agree that distortions and an exaggeration of Calvin's doctrine had negative effects. But so has many other distortions of Christian doctrines. I think if you look at history, any association between Calvinism and racism is probably due to the fact that Calvinists moved around to places where there was a significant other cultural minority (or majority).

My experience of America is it is a country of extremes. People voted Trump because of a rebellion against the status quo, and a belief that he would restore the American dream. A prosperity based, Pentecostal driven Arminian American dream. Not a Calvinistic one.

I stand by what I said before, I think you have deliberately squished Open Theism, Arminianism and Universalism together and pitted them against Calvinism. Although many of your assumptions about Calvinism are correct, this idea has distorted your article. In fact, in insinuating the us (all other Christians) versus Calvinists, are you not being black and white? Us versus them? I think most people would agree these beliefs are entirely different.

In conclusion, I agree that the cultural legacy of Calvinism in America is mixed, some good some bad. I don't think however it has anything to do with Trump, who appeals to people of whose theology is the opposite persuasion.

I will do more research on the supposed link between Calvinism and racism, and get back to you.

Max

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Hello Max

I would have missed your comment completely but that I dipped back into this article to check something, and saw that there had been a fresh posting. Just to avoid confusion as the threads here are getting tangled, this is in reply to your post of 7 Dec. It must be a short reply a) because I am very pushed, and b) because some of the issues you raise go beyond my sphere of competence.

I think that anything that is about Protestant theology must acknowledge that Luther and Calvin between them are the two biggest influences. As such, their thought spills out across Protestant denominations. Thus why (and with a nod particularly to Article XVII (affirming predestination) of the XXXIX Articles of the Church of England), the late Prof Hugh Cartwright of the Free Church College in Edinburgh wrote in 2009: “In accordance with the terms of the Union between Scotland and England, previous Acts of the Parliaments of each kingdom, and the constitutional basis upon which the monarch occupies the throne of the United Kingdom, the faith to be upheld by the state, represented by the monarch in Parliament, is that of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Thirty-Nine Articles, or Calvinistic Protestant Christianity.” For references and discussion on that, see my book *Island Spirituality* that, if you google, can now be downloaded free as a PDF with kind permission from the Islands Book Trust who first published it. Cartwright's critics have called him an “arch-constitutionalist” on this matter, but constitutionally he is correct, at the time of the Union, of course, the North American colonies that became the USA were British colonies. My claim of Calvinistic influence, then, is doing no more than claiming what influential Calvinist writers – Kuyper is another – have claimed for themselves. That said, Calvinist influence has played out with different emphases in different places. My French relatives, all of Huguenot descent, cannot believe that we in Scotland have taken Dutch Calvinism, via Westminster, and hung on to the Westminster Confession that seems to them so at odds with how they understood Calvin's teachings, but that's another story.

So, my first point is that I don't think the deep influence of a Calvinist binary can be denied in America. I've given references elsewhere in this thread – Clifford Longley's is an accessible  matter of what you make of the evidence yourself. On your question about “kenosis” or self-emptying. I think that Calvinism does have a surface kenosis. That's very clear, for example, where Calvin

says in the Institutes that Christ stood in the dock, and took the punishment, in our stead. However, I do feel that the emphasis on the sovereignty of God has limited Calvinism's vision as to what I think of as a deep kenosis – the self-emptying of God in Godself – the mystical being alongside humankind and limiting the use of divine power to allow for a full working through of things in the fulness of eternity. My friend the Glasgow theologian Doug Gay has picked me up on that one. He considers, if I dare try and paraphrase my understanding of him, that such kenosis is inherent in the doctrine of the Trinity. He thinks I miss that point. I think that I can see what his point is. It's inherent in discussions about Rublev's icon of the Trinity. However, I'm a little wary of that line of argument, because Rublevian relationality was not how we were taught the sovereignty of God. We were taught a much more militant, muscular version, such as comes through in the WCF and associated writings. When I say "we", I mean we who were raised on Trump's mother's island, and that is the specific context in which I have written this article. I think, however, that the island's theology, especially of the past, gives an insight into what prevailed much more widely in the era when America was established and settled under predominantly "Puritan" influence. OK, Puritan is a multiplex and contested term, but you'll get my drift.

I'm sorry Max, that's as much as I have time for, and also, to be frank, you've probably got me up to the limits of my competence here. My bottom line is that I do think that any theology that preaches the fundamental inequality of humankind, such as a binary division between an in-group and an out-group, has a bit of explaining to do to those who allege that "religion is the source of conflict." Also, specifically on Trump, I learned just yesterday that I am not alone in that analysis. An American scholar sent me this sociological paper. Towards the end, it zeroes in on double predestination and the American emphasis on Rapture theology. If you don't have an academic account it will cost you a fortune to download it, so email me if you wish on mail@alastairmcintosh.com (<mailto:mail@alastairmcintosh.com>) and I'll share a copy with you for private use. The link, which lets you read the first page, is:

<http://csx.sagepub.com/content/45/6/683.extract> (<http://csx.sagepub.com/content/45/6/683.extract>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Well, hello MBC. What a very interesting post. Further up, I cited a document about the Marrow Controversy in Scots Calvinism. This speaks of the "assurance" (or reassurance from the Spirit working within), of being "saved". It concludes of the Marrow Men: "Their response illustrates their belief that indeed assurance is the essence of saving faith."

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, also from a Calvinist position, held this to be heretical. Make what you will of that contrast of views. I'm afraid that I'm mostly defeated in my efforts to get my head adequately around it all, not least, because there's something that feels sterile, and self-obsessed, about the whole debate, as if our spirituality should be driven by the prospects of reward in Heaven, or punishment in Hell.

How does this bear on Trump's evangelical supporter base, and specifically in answer to your last paragraph? As I see it, the question of assurance or otherwise is a subordinate issue. The primary issue is the binary cosmology of a black and white, Heaven/Hell, Elect/Damned worldview, and how that plays out psychologically and politically. Some consider such binaries to be biblically sanctioned. But that misses the point of metaphor, or parables. I don't think Jesus meant a story like that of Lazarus up in Heaven and Dives down in Hell (actually, Hades) to be taken literally. It's metaphor, a way of teaching to be creatively explored after the Jewish manner of midrash. The old Hebrideans understood that, as with the Eriskay story of how the robin, once just another little brown bird, saw what was happening and dived down with a drop of water in his beak from the holy well. They deepened and thereby mitigated the story, the proof of the truth of which is the robin's red breast. To treat the story literally as a depiction of spiritual cosmology; to shut off the "parrhesia" or boldness of the Holy Spirit in playfully interpreting it; might be to succumb to authoritarian psychology and infantilised theology.

This issue – religion that is both authoritarian and/or infantilised – is one of our biggest legacy problems from the Christian past. Brian D McLaren, the "post-evangelical evangelical", tackles such matters in his recent book, "The Great Spiritual Migration." A lot of good theologians are tackling such matters these days.

If Christian faith is to have a future, it must grow from the heart and grow up in mind. It must rest upon the fulcrum that "God is love". All else follows from that. For me, it's the only "assurance" that we need. It's why I concluded Part 1 of my article, above, with the line: "What can one say, but give us more such evangelists."

And just to be explicit, I'd like to reassert that where I come from, the island where Trump's mother's people come from, the greater part of those who, these days, might call themselves "evangelicals", live out their lives according to that evangel. Our theological differences, where we have them, are of the head but not the heart.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231376#respond>)

JN Anderson

5 months ago

Since you mention McLaren, his trilogy of novels beginning with "A New Kind of Christian" are insightful, excellent reads, which address the same theme of what you mentioned above about him, in personal stories playing themselves out toward walls coming down, not creating more of them.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231562#respond>)

MBC

5 months ago

Alastair, thanks for that. As for how the black and white Calvinist predestinarian view plays out in the US today, and how it crucially affected victory for Trump, it is anybody's guess, but from my limited knowledge of it I would posit that US Evangelicals are a spectrum. 20% would appear not to have voted for Trump. And Evangelicals weren't the crucial demographic. I'm thinking about the Vineyard churches founded by the Californian John Wimber, which strike me as being at the liberal end of that spectrum. There are also all the black Pentacostal churches. They are also Evangelical but my guess is they didn't vote for Trump. From recent visits

LBJ's day) I certainly detect a judgemental culture in some quarters. A vivid memory of our visit last year when we were on a trip to visit friends in a small Texas town and stopped off at a store in the middle of nowhere is of coming across particularly garish Christian merchandise like 'Jesus my Saviour' plaques and crosses aimed at the kind of people who ride motor bikes and are into heavy metal. None too subtle.

As to the Marrow controversy, this is interesting because that was in the 1720s. But the material I was coming across re assurance was in the 1690s, amongst ex-Covenanting ministers, like Alexander Shields. So it's suggesting to me that a kind of cultural change was taking place after the patronage act of 1712 when landowners got back the power to appoint ministers and the Moderates started to get the upper hand.

I suppose the conclusion I am coming to is that the power of ideas depends not on the innate qualities or psychodynamics of those ideas but rather in the way that different groups will use the same ideas in different ways, and powerful popular ideas in particular are appropriated by the powerful to justify their position.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231578#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Absolutely agree with your last paragraph, MBC. Interesting what you say about the 1690s. Key dates to remember around there, as you'll be well aware, are 1688 ("Glorious Revolution") and 1706-07 (the Acts of Union). By the way, if any of you still following this thread are living in the Central Belt of Scotland, then watch out for the American Gaelic scholar Dr Michael Newton's lecture at Edinburgh University at lunchtime on Fri 9 December – "Blinders to the Right; Klans on the Left." One of Michael's concerns is how neglect of Celtic studies in academia has left the door open for its political appropriation. His tweet with a flyer can be accessed without needing a Twitter account, at <https://twitter.com/gaelicmichael/status/802496620415873024> (<https://twitter.com/gaelicmichael/status/802496620415873024>)

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231585#respond>)

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

5 months ago

So to what extent is universalism itself not just another form of predestination? What of those who do not WISH to be "saved"?

Cf the following from Beat poet Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) in a late radio interview:

"I don't think there IS a heaven or a hell! I would not want to be condemned to go to heaven for ever! That sounds like a monstrous...that sounds like HELL!"

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231629#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Completely with you there, Fearghas. We are predestined to become what we choose to be.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231682#respond>)

Joan H Craig

5 months ago

Two African incidents are called to mind by this discussion.

The first is an account by Vincent Donovan in "Christianity Rediscovered". He had prepared the villagers for baptism. He explained that one man, who had always been out herding cattle, and never attended meetings, would not be baptized. Neither would the lady who scarcely believed the message. The old man of the community stopped Donovan's pronouncements, "Padri, why are you trying to break us up? ... I can declare for them and for all this community, that we have reached the step in our lives where we can say, 'We believe'"

The second incident was in Dar es Salaam. One day a delegation of theological college students came to see me. They had a problem in their family and community, a mixture of Christians and Muslims, who got along well together. However, there was a stumbling block – the doctrine of the Trinity. Would I please abolish the Trinity, so they could all live peaceably again.

Eh Uhhmm!

I did my best to sort things out with the help of Rublev's icon...

Accommodation of difference for the sake of inclusion – Inclusiveness trumps the niceties of our logical argumentation.

Priority is Community.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231687#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

What a brilliant move to use Rublev. I have to confess that with out it, without that teaching of relationship beyond just a binary polarity, the doctrine of the Trinity has always seemed to me to be little more than an obsessive badge of spurious identity.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231958#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Just for any valiant diehards (thank you) still following this thread, here's a piece just out from the Washington Post on Trump and the prosperity gospel. Basic idea is that worldly prosperity is a sign of God's blessing and therefore, of being of the Elect. Just to re-emphasise, the Free Church of Scotland of Trump's mother on the Isle of Lewis frequently

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/11/27/trump-was-especially-a-triumph-for-the-prosperity-gospel-ideology/>



Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Just up, here's a courageous and sensitive blog from "Hebridean Writer" Katie Laing about how she and others on the Isle of Lewis are feeling about Trump's island connections. (BTW, my "completely" agree with Fearghas, above, should have been more nuanced, depending on how his points are understood.) Read Katie at:

<http://www.hebrideswriter.com/2016/12/01/why-i-couldnt-talk-on-the-telly-about-trump/> (<http://www.hebrideswriter.com/2016/12/01/w>

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231796#respond>)

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

5 months ago

I wasn't pushing a line. Just interested in what you might make of it. Thanks.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=231825#respond>)

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

5 months ago

Some might find of interest a fuller version of the Ginsberg quote above, giving it some context. He shows himself well aware of the philosophical roots of his comment. He was speaking on France Culture radio in a mix of English and French, as given. (Excuse my use of caps for emphasis in absence of italics):

"I don't think there IS a heaven or a hell! I would not want to be condemned to go to heaven for ever! That sounds like a monstrous...that sounds like HELL! C'est une condition de STASIS permanent...d'immobilité permanente. Tous les choses sont impermanents. C'est claire!... C'est moi, Allen Ginsberg, qui a lu HÉRACLITE! On ne peut pas entrer le même fleuve UNE fois...! (France Culture, La poesie n'est pas une solution: Une anthologie parlée d'Allen Ginsberg, États-Unis, par Frank Smith 01.08.2012)

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=232327#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Ginsberg's great, to me his Howl is in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets of his forbears. It's a poem I often use in teaching, including the Postscript (or whatever to Howl, with its Holy Holy Holy counterpoint that demonstrates the truth that, very often, the opposite of one great spiritual truth is another great spiritual truth. I think, Fearghas, that's how it is with this heaven and hell stuff. That's why, above, after responding to you in absolute agreement I later thought: "but wait a minute, you could also argue the opposite with validity." Like, heaven may be stasis, but may also be the heart of the dance. Human logic fails us in the mystery.

Alastair McIntosh

5 months ago

Sorry to keep adding to this, (and thanks Fearghas), but the past week has seen some excellent theological analysis of Trump's support base, and why the white evangelical vote edged higher than what the Republicans normally get, instead of having collapsed under Trump's disdain for minorities and towering gold idolatry.

What's been happening this week, is that progressive Christians, including some from evangelical backgrounds, are waking up to the imperative to break polite silence. As Walter Wink would have said, they're embarking on a process of 1) Naming, 2) Unmasking, and 3) (nonviolently) Engaging the Powers that Be.

For example, the following from the Washington Post writes of how Southern preachers, who worked to proclaim a liberation theology of "good news to the poor" – "were viciously attacked as "political religionists" by a plantation caste that perverted theology to frame their backlash against "Negro rule." Copy and paste this link to read:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/11/23/the-racist-roots-of-white-evangelicalism-and-the-rise-of-donald-trump/?utm_term=.cf461845609e

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=232276#respond>)

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

5 months ago

Craig Murray's blog today (Thurs 8 Dec) would seem to add something to the mix. An extract:

"But what is beyond doubt is that the #spiritcooking sensation on social media had a real effect on the US election, and in an election where the margins were so very close potentially an extremely important one. Tens of millions of people saw the images on social media. It galvanised evangelical Christians to vote for Trump and, perhaps much more crucially, it contributed materially to a massive depression of the African American vote for Hillary as millions of African American Christians, disgusted by seeing apparent endorsement of Abramovic's voodoo and satanic references by the Clinton camp, sat at home and did not turn out to vote. That 2 million black Americans who voted for Obama did not vote for Hillary was not because they are racist – it was because they disliked Hillary for a number of reasons, and spirit cooking was a factor, especially as the famed Democratic machine is heavily reliant upon African American churches for the ground war." (Craig Murray: 'Twitter and Facebook Censorship and Mainstream Media Denial') –

<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2016/12/twitter-facebook-censorship-mainstream-media-denial/> (<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/>

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=233457#respond>)

Alastair McIntosh

4 months ago

Just checked back into this when sending the link to a Texan friend, and saw your comment. Fascinating. Thanks.

Reply (<http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2016/11/27/what-is-it-about-evangelicals/?replytocom=239313#respond>)

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