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The Anabaptist Option:

Neo-Calvinist Cornelius Van Til was a lifelong Republican voter, but couldn't crack the application of Reformed theology to politics. How does the Christian worldview manifest in the political realm with regard to particular parties and politicians?

Van Til's student, Francis Schaeffer, motivated by his postmillennialism in the Cold War context, promoted Christianity as antithetical to communism. Fundamentalist friends like Jerry Falwell found political motivation in the moralist message of Schaeffer's A Christian Manifesto.

The aforementioned mindset put the Moral Majority (1979) into motion right around the time of the Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention (1979) and the presidential run of Ronald Reagan (1981). Similar rhetoric and results followed in the years to come.

Politicians, knowing they had to secure the votes of the Moral Majority, or 'Values Voters,' or 'evangelicals' as a voting bloc, pandered to them by citing their 'Christian faith' and 'pro-life' positions which ran counter to Roe v. Wade (1973), another Schaefferian target.

Those left unpersuaded by the aforementioned project were no longer merely political opponents, but morally inferior people, most likely owing to a lack of true Christian faith and practice. Clearly, the moral failings of Bill Clinton weren't consistent with his Christian faith.

However, what role those failings should play in evaluating him as a president and his policies was up for debate everywhere but inside evangelicalism. One argument tossed about pertained to his having lied under oath while others were interested in his politics, not his bedroom.

Did character matter? Of course. The Church has always said as much. Scripture speaks early and often of the justice that's to be carried out by rulers. But concerns about Clinton's character seemed more a matter of political convenience at the time, and certainly seem so now.

The inconsistencies with which Christians are plagued when it comes to character qualifications for political leaders is amplified by Moral Majority types who begin to read the Republican Party, for example, in reverse.
Being a Christian is conflated with being Republican.

Whether or not we agree with the reasoning, we should see that 'Christian, therefore Republican' is opposite 'Republican, therefore Christian.' The Moral Majority was making a case for the first. Much of Make America Great Again has made a case for the second. This is syncretism.

Nevertheless, this sort of syncretism enjoyed center stage at institutions like Falwell's Liberty University for decades. While a Democrat student group eventually popped up, and while Democrats were always (supposedly) welcome, they've never been a dominant force there.

But that's beside the point. The problem was the syncretism on the other side of the political landscape fraught with idolatry, dogmatism, and conscience-binding regarding the particulars of mere political opinion.

The aforementioned elements of the Religious Right rejected longstanding Christian approaches to political policies on just war theory, for example, taking you to either favor the Bush wars, or else hate our troops and conservative politics.

Calling Republicans to account for their failure to end the holocaust of abortion led to the questioning of your Christianity. And we won't even talk about what would happen if you suggested something with regard to, say, prison reform.

Now, here's where those to the 'left,' as well as those to the 'right,' will get upset with me. Many of those who made up the Religious Right are only now seeing these issues that were evident twenty years ago and more. Trump has exposed moral hypocrisy all around.

To put it plainly, a good number of Christians have prostituted their platforms and pulpits to political parties and public figures. Not only has this happened with MAGA, but with Never Trumpers as well, who are the descendants of the Moral Majority.

Not only is it true that Never Trumpers are the historical descendants of the Moral Majority, they are its principial heirs as well. Trump is a moral monster. What do we do with that? This is where the Religious Right has split, but based on the same underlying worldview.

Some went old school, attempting to interpret Trump in light of the 'Republican therefore Christian' argument. 'All have sinned' came to mean 'sin isn't really all that bad' instead of the opposite, which is what Scripture actually means. Forgiveness came to mean forget about it.

Conspiracy theories about Trump being a Cyrus or else secretly coming to faith began to circulate. This is the way a guilty conscience reacts to the realization that previously held moral principles have been set aside for political power.

Others on the Religious Right went with a new moralism that constantly calls character into account. Trump is a foul-mouthed, adulterous, arrogant bigot who must be opposed at every turn or else we kill our Christian convictions, but this also conflates the GOP with Christianity.

It's no accident that Never Trump was headed up by New Calvinists who have a taste for the Neo-Calvinism that gave rise to the Moral Majority and Religious Right. (Meanwhile, those who lean opposite Calvinist theology largely went the other way on Trump.)

New Calvinism also morphed into a social justice movement within evangelicalism, which engages in the culture wars of yesteryear, but with different names and aims. Never Trump is the new Moral Majority by way of 1) character matters, 2) Neo-Calvinism, and 3) social justice.

What's the problem? This theological approach is probably politically unsustainable. A good number of Never Trumpers excused their Democrat or third party vote based on the fact that LGBTQ+ advances are a foregone conclusion and the GOP failed on ending abortion.

Setting aside whether the GOP was ever effective with regard to LGBTQ+ issues, the concession now is that they were never truly pro-life, but were pandering to the Religious Right. Why should Never Trumpers have credibility on the issue of life given this decades-long deception?

Democrats and principled (longtime) third-party voters are exempt from concerns with inconsistency or hypocrisy here. So are some who practice two-kingdoms theology that sees politicians the way it sees doctors and mechanics. Character matters, but more than character matters.

The Anabaptist option, a disengagement from politics, awaits the Religious Right, as the character that turns the culture of a nation (there's the Neo-Calvinism) is absent in America, populism has broken the GOP, and a viable third-party is a pipe dream. Preach the gospel again.