



Republocrat, Confessions of a Liberal Conservative

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It is time to think before we vote. No more knee-jerk, soundbite un-thinking but a witty, engaging and challenging discussion about stewardship - as children of the kingdom and of this world.

Republocrat, Confessions of a Liberal Conservative Details

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From Reader Review *Republocrat, Confessions of a Liberal Conservative* for online ebook

Douglas Wilson says

A lot of good observations that were largely beside the point, coupled with an occasional exasperating stretch of argument. But he is good with words; he can sure write an entertaining sentence.

Philip Brown says

This was a fun read. I certainly don't agree with everything Dr. Trueman says, but the book is great to bounce ideas off.

Hank Pharis says

If the best that the Republicans can come up with is Donald Trump and the best that the Democrats can come up with is Hilary Clinton or Nancy Pelosi then I have no hope for either party. I've always voted in every election until the last one but I'm not sure I'll vote anymore if they keep nominating such candidates. I wish there was a Centrist Party that would take the best elements of our two present parties and leave behind the extremes that both parties keep moving toward. Oh well I got this out of my system.

Carl Trueman is a centrist. He describes himself as a 'liberal conservative.' Truman earned a Master's Degree at Cambridge and a Ph.D at Aberdeen before teaching at Aberdeen. He then became a Church History Professor and Dean of Westminster Seminary. He is also the Pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, has a blog, a podcast and regularly writes for First Things. This last year he taught at Princeton as a Visiting Professor. Here are a few representative quotes from the book:

The opium of the people is not religion but entertainment. (10)

"Here lies the heart of the problem of the New Left: once the concerns of the Left shifted from material, empirical issues - hunger, thirst, nakedness, poverty, disease - to psychological categories, the door was opened for everyone to become a victim and for anyone with a lobby group to make his or her issue the Big One for this generation. ... forms of oppression are thus whatever the oppressed person claims them to be. ... the Left has lost all sense of proportion with regard to what is and is not of most pressing importance. It has become, by and large, the movement of righteous, rhetorical pronouncements on total trivia." (17-18)

"The connection often made between economic prosperity and Christianity by conservative Christians is but a more sophisticated and rhetorically toned-down version of the Osteen gospel."* (27-28) (*i.e., a prosperity gospel)

"Both megachurches and emergent churches represent not so much countercultures but different accommodations to the prevailing culture." (28)

"Many churches are as secular in their ambitions and methods as any straightforwardly secular organization." (29)

“In the writing of history no one can be neutral, but historians can be objective. ... we are all biased to some extent.” (42)

“While the Christian Right is intolerant of any personal peccadillo on the part of liberals, it is often very forgiving of the private failings of its heroes, as in the case of Rush Limbaugh, with his various marriages and his well-publicized drug addiction.” (51-52)

“While conservative theological types (among whom I number myself) are often very concerned about theological precision, we can tend to think in rather simplistic, black-and-white, cliched terms when it comes to politics.” (80)

“Politics in the present age is not ultimately about policies, because that would require arguments. It is really about images - visual and narrative.” (92)

“The truth about health care is that, however much money is available, it will never be enough; all health systems everywhere have to prioritize resources - financial and otherwise - and tough decisions are going to have to be made somewhere down the line. But is investing this power in a democratically elected government really worse than investing it in private insurance companies that decide which claims to honor and which to refuse? Or which preexisting conditions to accept and which to reject?” ...
National health systems are not perfect, but they are far from the nightmares that have been depicted in some recent discussions about the USA. ... only one country in the entire industrialized world does not have some form of universal health care.” (95)

“I am myself pro-life. Contrary to current cultural logic, my politically liberal instincts (concern for the weak) combine with my evangelical commitments (concern for the sanctity of life) to put me in precisely that camp. Nevertheless, I am suspicious of the way in which the abortion debate plays out in the American political arena, where it seems to be something the Right often uses as little more than a means to drum up cheap votes for its candidates. ... Given, the pro-life rhetoric, what is the actual Republican record on abortion like? Not very impressive.” (105-106)

(Note: I'm stingy with stars. For me 2 stars means a good book or a B. 3 = Very good or a B+; 4 = Outstanding or an A {only about 5% of the books I read merit this}; 5 = All time favorites or an A+ {one of these may come along every 400-500 books})

Rachel Menke says

Perhaps the most interesting part of reading this book in 2018 is that it was written in 2010! It's sobering to see how many of the issues Trueman warns of have not changed and in most cases it is even more frightening to see how they have (for the worse). Trueman writes to exhort Christians to not think as a republican or Democrat but as a Christian which means not only thinking about issues from multiple perspectives but seeking out and building community with people of all different political and socioeconomic viewpoints. I affiliate with neither of the major parties in American politics and whole this book emphasized many of the reasons that is true in my life it also made me think about issues in new ways too! As a Brit, Trueman is able to view American politics a bit more objectively and as a very intelligent professor he can easily and helpfully enlighten us in how things came to be as they are. In short, this book is a needed to read for every Christian in America - I just wish he would write an update to help us realize just how much worse our straight-party thinking (or duping - for as he points out there is little thought or logic in American politics).

John Gardner says

Originally posted at **Honey and Locusts**.

If you're looking for a book that will re-affirm what you already believe about politics, this book will be a disappointment. Carl Trueman knows that, and he doesn't care. "*I am simply delighted that I will disappoint so many different groups of people in such a comprehensive manner,*" he writes in the introduction.

And he's right. Nearly every group of people will find some complaint with Trueman's arguments. The Liberal Left hates his stance on hot button issues like abortion and gay marriage. The Religious Right frowns on his refusal to walk the Republican party line. Libertarians reject his insistence that nationalized health care and welfare programs are not incompatible with liberty and the free market.

Perhaps those most off-put by this book will be the politically apathetic, who cry "can't we all just get along?" while steering clear of argument and conviction. If there is one thing Trueman makes crystal clear, it is that if we care about the world and the people around us — and as Christians, this is non-negotiable — we must care about politics.

Few, if any, will find wholesale agreement with Trueman's political views. He is prone to overstate his case (which he himself admits in the book), and is intentionally provocative. He sets up strawmen and rips them apart. Surprisingly, all of these factors work together to hammer home the central theses of the book, "*that conservative Christianity does not require conservative politics or conservative cultural agendas*" and that Christians need a much more nuanced understanding of politics and political issues than is typical in today's America, when aesthetics (the character and rhetoric of politicians and pundits) have replaced discourse and debate is framed as a **Manichean** struggle of good versus evil in which candidates and parties must be either totally right or totally wrong.

The intensely logical Carl Trueman knows exactly what he's doing when he resorts to the use of logical fallacies. He *wants* readers to disagree with him. He *wants* to roil American Christians out of our comfort with the system of "politics-as-usual" that we've grown up with (Trueman immigrated to the United States from England about ten years ago). This is a good thing. We need to be roiled, and his status as an outsider (not to mention his lack of hesitancy to engage in confrontation) gives Trueman a unique position to do it.

Besides a general encouragement to pick up this book and read it (which will only take an hour or two, as the entire thing is only 110 pages), I have just a few comments on the actual content of the book. While Trueman's trenchant critique of American politics begins with the Left — and he is brutal in his condemnation of the modern Liberal agenda — much of the book is aimed directly at the political heart of conservative Christians who identify themselves with the Republican party. This is not necessarily because he aligns himself more with today's Democrats, but because his intended audience is conservative Christians, and the reality is that most of these also consider themselves politically conservative. Thus, he spends the bulk of his time addressing the particular weaknesses of this audience.

What most interested me was his description of the plight of the "Old Liberal", which is how he describes himself. Old liberals used to be those who concerned themselves most with improving the condition of the poor, something that was close to his own heart as a Christian. Over time, however, with the utter failure of Marxism as an all-encompassing political system based on the welfare of the economically oppressed, Liberals began to mesh their ideas about poverty and oppression with Freud's psychoanalysis, leading to a redefinition of oppression. Now, instead of being primarily concerned with aiding the poor, the "New Left"

exists to promote the agenda of those who define their own victimhood (women who believe abortion is a right, homosexuals who want to marry, etc). Democrats still promote themselves as the party of the working class, but these social issues are of little concern to those who struggle to provide for their families, and often clash with the values of the average poor person.

While I personally believe that conservative fiscal policies and free markets *can* be most beneficial to the poor, Dr. Trueman's question is a valid one for discussion. Who is now the advocate for the economically oppressed? Where do those whose primary political concern is the condition of the poor turn?

On the negative side, Trueman is at his overstated best (or worst) in devoting an entire chapter to Fox News. While you'd be hard pressed to find a conservative who thinks less of Fox News and pundits like **Glenn Beck** than I do, even I think this assault on Fox is a bit over-the-top. Yes, conservative Christians tend to have a very unhealthy attachment to Hannity, O'Reilly, and company. Yes, the belief that Fox is in any way "the unbiased news channel" is absolutely ridiculous (and deserves to be ridiculed). Yes, Rupert Murdoch is a sleazy and unscrupulous businessman who knows pandering to the Religious Right makes him a lot of easy dollars. But Trueman could easily have made these points in much less than the twenty pages he devotes to them. He accuses the Left of having "*lost all sense of proportion with regard to what is and is not of most pressing importance*," but surely the same can be said of an author who devotes 20% of his book to the faults of a single news organization.

It can be maddening to read at times, but this book *will* make you think. It is not likely to cause anyone to totally change his mind about any important issues, or to radically change her political philosophy. But hopefully it will help to start a discussion we've needed for a long time. As he writes, "*politics is an art, not a science*". Like any art, politics deserves careful consideration, interaction, and debate. And, just as people will have different preferences and appreciations for art, there is no reason to believe that all Christians must hold exactly the same position on every political issue. It is okay for Christians to disagree about the best way to further God's Kingdom (just ask **Paul and Barnabas**) and to live as citizens in a fallen world. In the end, God will be glorified. In the meantime, healthy debate and civil discourse make us all better.

Read this book. You'll be glad you did. Buy it **here**.

Mark says

A good book and easy read. Trueman lays out a straightforward critique of how Christianity and certain beliefs/behaviors/politics are tied together, without the Biblical basis for such a bond. I may have rated it lower simply because it merely reconfirms beliefs I already hold, and thus I'm reticent to label it as particularly enlightening or challenging. However, it's a quite short book, perfect for a plane ride, and I would definitely recommend it for that.

Bob Hayton says

Sacred cows die hard. And tipping them is not just anyone's game. When it comes to conservative American evangelicalism, there may be no cherished belief that needs to die more than its explicit allegiance to one political party.

An evangelical attachment to the history of America and to patriotism has colored its views on how the church should interact with the political sphere. And in the past few decades, with the meteoric rise of "the

religious right”, the result has been an American version of Christianity which mixes zeal for conservative politics and Christian virtues. Along the way, a popular misconception has arisen on the part of secular and non-evangelical alike: the evangelical gospel is confused with a moralistic concern for “family values”.

Carl Trueman, a witty and winsome Brit, tackles this problem in a new book recently released by P & R Publishing. In *Republocrat: Confessions of a Liberal Conservative*, Trueman speaks from an outsider’s perspective on the political landscape facing American Christians today. He understands that some of his views will be frowned on from both sides of the American aisle, but he pushes forth in an effort to challenge the tendency toward a one-sided approach and overly simplistic view of politics which he sees as so prevalent in the conservative circles in which he ministers today (as dean of Westminster Theological Seminary).

Written in a witty and personal fashion, with a Brit’s sense and control of the English language, the book draws one into the discussion even as it disarms the would-be critic. I found it a quick and engrossing read, even if the argument seemed to overreach on some points. He offers pertinent and sometimes disturbing examples from recent political history to drive home his points, and in the end is quite convincing.

He starts out with a criticism of today’s “left”. He shows how originally the liberal concern for the marginalized and the poor spurred British Christians to political involvement and an embrace of classic liberalism. Since then, liberalism has grown to treat any perceived marginalization and threat to be equivalent with the real economic and physical problems, for example, that were caused by industrialization in the late 1800s. So the mother of an unwanted child is facing undue pressure to keep her child, and she along with a gay person who wants full acceptance by society both deserve the protection of modern liberals. Meanwhile, the true problems of poverty and economic marginalization which continue to plague our world get left behind in the posturing and the fuss over the more visible, concerns of today’s liberals.

He then moves on into the conservative kitchen, and tackles American exceptionalism, and the patriotic flavor of American Christianity responsible for such absurdities as *The Patriot’s Bible*. Where he really scored points with me was in his treatment of the Fox News channel. He drives home his point that no news media outlet can be completely unbiased. He also shows how the founders of Fox were moved by the almighty dollar, like anyone else in the secular world. His cautions on this point deserve notice:

When it comes to listening to the news, Christians should be eclectic in their approach and not depend merely on those pundits who simply confirm their view of the world while self-evidently using terminology, logic, and standard rules of evidence and argumentation in sloppy, tendentious, and sometimes frankly dishonest ways.... (pg. 56)

That the free market, capitalist system was a Christian concept derived from studying Scripture was one of the high points of my own Christian education. And Trueman takes aim at that whole idea. The system runs on good old fashioned, greed (which is actually sinful, mind you). And not just greed — discontent and dissatisfaction are built into the structure of our American economic system. The solution to economic hard times is for us consumers to show more confidence and fork out more money. *And exactly how is this is a Christian concept, again?* Let me allow Trueman himself to speak to this point more directly:

...we have no basis for absolutizing the social organization and the attendant institutions, practices, and values of our passing present than anybody in ages past. Feudalism seemed like the wave of the future when it was at its zenith, yet it has passed away, at least in the West. European imperialism seemed set to dominate the world forever and a day at the end of the

nineteenth century, but along came two world wars that put an end to that notion.... (pg. 67)

Viewing our system as the best there ever was, is also a bit evolutionary in nature, Trueman contends. Somehow man has figured everything out now and our system is the best hope for the world. We need to liberate the world from their a-capitalism, and bring salvation by means of the free market.

He rounds out the book by discussing how democratic politics in our modern age are positioned such that every difference between the parties has to be emphasized and enlarged so that they can gain power. Careful, nuanced political debate is not served by today's sound bites and smiling photo ops, either. Trueman's postscript argues that the abortion issue doesn't have to be the be-all, end-all political issue for Christians in a fallen society like ours. He says, "It seems clear that the democratic legislative path to reducing or even outlawing abortions is proving remarkably unfruitful... following from this... is there any point in allowing the matter to be the make-or-break issue on which individuals make their voting decisions at election time?" (pg. 106). He argues that incremental change can be pursued within either party, and before abortion will be outlawed a majority of Americans need to view it with distaste.

You won't appreciate, or agree with, all Trueman's concerns, but you will be challenged to think about what role the church should have in the political sphere. Should a church side with the conservative agenda so explicitly that non-conservatives are unwelcome, even if they also believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ? I think not. And if you pick up Trueman's short book (only 110 pages), I suspect you'll at least admit this much by the time you've read it. The Church of Jesus Christ should be wide enough to accept Christians of various political persuasions. The gospel, not politics or national pride, should unite us.

I want to close with an extended excerpt from Trueman's conclusion. I don't want to steal his thunder, but I feel this is the best way to give Trueman the hearing he may need for you to actually pick up his work and give it a listen.

Christians are to be good citizens, to take their civic responsibilities seriously, and to respect the civil magistrates appointed over us. We also need to acknowledge that the world is a lot more complicated than the pundits of Fox News (or MSNBC) tell us.... Christian politics, so often associated now with loudmouthed aggression, needs rather to be an example of thoughtful, informed engagement with the issues and appropriate involvement with the democratic process. And that requires a culture change. We need to read and watch more widely, be as critical of our own favored pundits and narratives as we are of those cherished by our opponents, and seek to be good stewards of the world and of the opportunities therein that God has given us.

It is my belief that the identification of Christianity, in its practical essence, with very conservative politics will, if left unchallenged and unchecked, drive away a generation of people who are concerned for the poor, for the environment, for foreign-policy issues.... We need to... [realize] the limits of politics and the legitimacy of Christians, disagreeing on a host of actual policies, and [earn] a reputation for thoughtful, informed, and measured political involvement. A good reputation with outsiders is, after all, a basic New Testament requirement of church leadership, and that general principle should surely shape the attitude of all Christians in whatever sphere they find themselves. Indeed, I look forward to the day when intelligence and civility, not tiresome cliches, character assassinations, and Manichean noise, are the hallmarks of Christians as they engage the political process. (pg. 108-110)

Disclaimer: This book was provided by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing for review. The reviewer was under no obligation to offer a favorable review.

Caity Gill says

Slightly obnoxious but I just so appreciate a Christian who is not a die hard conservative Republican. I don't feel like I belong in either political party, and I appreciated hearing from someone who felt similarly. Even though I thought he was too obnoxious at times or I didn't agree, I did like how he called everyone on their crap. His call for Christians to be good citizens by thinking deeply and with precision/subtlety about politics as opposed to the current simplistic thinking out there (i.e. abortion is the only issue that matters), spoke to my soul.

Paul says

Books on Christ and culture or Christianity and politics are all the rage these days. While some publishing houses are churning out New Atheist book after New Atheist book, other houses are getting who's who in Christian circles to write on Christ and culture or politics and religion. Both are hot ticket items these days. Thankfully, the former's popularity seems to be waning (too boorish), while interest in the latter is rising. But, there's more to be thankful of. The latest author to enter this ever-growing market is Carl R. Trueman. As a Professor of Historical Theology and Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), Trueman is qualified to write on this topic; not only that, he brings a fresh and unique perspective to the American debate, writing as a Englishman who has lived in America for the past several years. He describes himself as a British round peg jammed into an American square hole.

Trueman's basic thesis is that being theologically conservative does not entail being unconditionally politically conservative (or liberal). His main motivation for writing the book is that he fears Christianity is in danger of alienating members of its population, especially the younger members, by drawing too close a connection between the essentials of the faith and our current American expression of political conservatism. Though he did not say this, I can safely assume that he feels the same way about any connection between Christianity and liberal politics too. While I applaud this motivation, it is noteworthy that similar motivations drive the publication of books like Peter Enns's *Inspiration and Incarnation*, as well as the current surge in books seeing to show the harmony of Christianity with Adam-denying evolutionary theory. I am not trying to poison the well here, and I am not sure there is anything of interest in pointing out the similarities in motivation, but I wonder if there's a slippery slope somewhere nearby? Are we in danger of alienating members for teaching that man has an immaterial soul? How about teaching eternal retributive punishment in hell for the reprobate? Same with inerrancy and evolution. Are these "essentials" that make up "Christian fidelity" (xx)?

In Chapter one, "Left behind," Trueman begins by critiquing the "New Left," wisely softening the blows he will later deal to conservatives. The basic criticism given to the "New Left" is that it in leaving behind the "Old Left" it has become preachy and has opened the door for "everyone to become a victim and for anyone with a lobby group to make his or her issue the Big One for this generation." Whereas the "Old Left" was concerned with oppression, it limited this oppression to "material, empirical issues—hunger, thirst, nakedness, poverty, disease . . ." The "New Left" expanded the category of oppression to "psychological categories," where this category is conceived in terms of "'Authenticity' and 'inauthenticity'" which is an entirely subjective way to categorize (p.17). For example, homosexuals have been oppressed and thus not allowed to live a lifestyle that is "authentic" (p.12). Another example is to consider the women have been "oppressed"

and not allowed to live “authentic” lives because they might be bogged down by a child. Thus, abortion allows women to be “authentic,” and the “New Left,” ironically, fails to give a voice the voiceless, which is the origin of the left (p.12-13).

Trueman also applies this criticism to many evangelical liberals who vote Democrat “in a kind of schoolboyish ‘Aren’t I naughty?’ kind of way.” The psychologizing of oppression allows them to self-righteously critique others in a way that doesn’t cost anything. He cites, as a recent example, how many left leaning evangelicals criticized Wheaton College’s appointment of Philip Ryken to college president. Trueman notes that while they complained “about how dreadful it was that the job had been given to a middle-class white male intellectual rather than a representative of a minority,” none of these middle-class white male intellectuals “gave up their own job to make way for a minority candidate and to help with the ending of oppression.” Trueman notes that these kind of complaints make the evangelical left “look ridiculously sanctimonious and self-important.” It is the type of complaint that, “costs the whiners nothing and [is] therefore worth nothing” (p.15-17).

Conservatives might rightly scratch their head at what Trueman takes to be the “Old Left.” Conservatives (and capitalists) have long tried to point out that they are “concerned with oppression . . . limited to material, empirical issues—hunger, thirst, nakedness, poverty, disease . . .”, or at least that they can be so concerned (cf. Thomas Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*). Indeed, many have pointed out that the numbers seem to suggest that when government taxes less and gets out-of-the-way, charitable giving goes up. Plenty of conservatives have been charitable; very charitable. So, some might claim that Trueman is not playing fair. That is what I was thinking while reading this chapter. However, I believe Trueman sets himself apart from those conservatives at the end of the chapter when he writes that he believes “society and government . . . has a role to play in health care and helping the poor” (p.18, emphasis mine). Now, it should be admitted that “has a role” is vague, but I think Trueman thinks the role should be more involved than most conservatives would like to admit. Trueman does not get specific here—that’s not the point of his book—and so there is nothing to critique. It should be pointed out that for what this chapter intends to do—critique the “New Left”—it succeeds.

Chapter two is titled, “The Slipperiness of Secularization.” In this chapter Trueman looks at the issue of “secularization” and wonders whether America has escaped it as much as some on the religious Right seem to think. Now, Trueman admits that there is a difference between the secularization that happened, and continues to happen, in Europe, and what is going on in America. America is definitely more “religious.” Trueman reports the lament of a pastor in Grand Rapids who said that only half of the local population would be in church on Sunday. “Wow, Trueman thought to himself, “that’s a tragedy? Back home we’d call that a revival beyond our wildest dreams.” Still, Trueman wonders if a secularization hasn’t happened in American churches. The main question he asks in the chapter is to wonder whether the “American church has maintained the loyalty of the population by essentially becoming a secular institution” (p. 26-27). Trueman’s answer is: sure looks like it.

While he begins by picking on soft targets like Hinn and Osteen, he claims that many of the more conservative churches have bought into a more sophisticated version of the prosperity gospel. Trueman agrees with David Wells’s critiques of Evangelical mega and emergent churches, but wonders if similar critiques could be offered of protestant churches Wells might favor. Trueman thinks so. He begins by pointing out that the secular idea of “rights” spills over into church membership, such that church vows are not taken seriously at all. We’re individuals with rights and we have no problem ditching a church if it offends our rights, perhaps even in ways that are theological counterparts to those who sue fast food restaurants for not telling them the coffee is hot (p. 28-32). Another indication of secular values is that celerity syndrome, a “preoccupation with superstars” (p.37). Secular society has Access Hollywood, “the church has—well, insert your name here” (p.39).

“Not-so-Fantastic Mr. Fox,” is the title of chapter three. I have to admit, this chapter was a little weird for me.

Not because I like Fox news—far from it—but because not only did it seem like Trueman was settling a personal score (Rupert Murdoch is blamed for Trueman’s exiting the conservative party, p. xxiii), I’m not sure the intended target of his critique will read this book. Much of this chapter reads like a gossip column. Rupert Murdoch does not come out looking good. The gist is that those who think Fox news is a bastion of family values need to recognize that it is owned by a guy three times divorced and who had nude images published in one of his British newspapers.

Having said that, I should add that, Trueman rightly points out that news organizations are all biased, and all trade in offering substanceless soundbites masquerading as sophisticated and rigorous analysis of current events. Trueman also disabuse people of the notion that Fox is the paragon of religious virtue some seem to bestow on it. Furthermore, Trueman is also correct in pointing out that those like Beck and O’Reilly make wild claims and poor arguments, not to mention employing conspiracy theories scare viewers.

Trueman then goes off on a little conspiracy theory of his own, where he concludes that maybe “Fox’s political posturing as the brave advocate for and defender of conservative values is just that—a piece of posturing.” This is shown by using anti-family values shows like *The Simpsons* and their 6:00 PM time slot, the time families are supposed to be eating dinner together (p. 54-55). Conspiracy, you decide? As I said, it got a little weird for me, but maybe Trueman was just having fun, mocking the conservative “birthers” and MSNBC-leads-to-homosexuality-if-you-watch-Rachel-Maddow crowd.

Whatever the case, the conclusion of the chapter was solid: Trueman pleads with Christians—conservative or liberal—to use their God-given critical thinking faculties when watching any news show. Not only that, Christians need to look at all sides of the issue, rather than “surround ourselves with things that confirm our prejudices” we should “seek to listen to a variety of viewpoints” (p.58). This perspectivalism is a useful tool in getting Christians to be what the old Greek apologists said of the ancient Christians: they were “the best and most informed and thoughtful citizens there are, not those whose stock-in-trade are clichés, slander, and lunatic conspiracy theories” (p.59). On second thought, I guess Trueman doesn’t buy *The Simpsons* conspiracy theory after all!

In the next chapter, “Life to the Max,” Trueman looks at Capitalism. He begins by offering some critiques of Max Weber’s popular, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Insofar as one doesn’t put much weight into Weber’s arguments, the criticisms won’t bother their conception of capitalism. Next, Trueman moves from Weber to a more general critique, the tendency to see capitalism as God’s system of economics and our American successes as proof that capitalism is the epoch of history. The basic criticism here is that we shouldn’t absolutize the moment of our passing present. Trueman admits that contemporary capitalism is the best means of producing wealth that we know of, but that doesn’t mean it is “reality” period. It does not represent “the end of history” (p.68).

Capitalism has one basic principle, according to Trueman, “profit” (p.68). However, this might seem simplistic when compared to what we might read in, say, Thomas Sowell’s *Basic Economics* (see especially ch. 6). Trueman also engages in many slippery slope arguments in his critiques of capitalism, i.e., “it can lead to x.” Besides the claim that capitalism produces little Pelagians, Trueman also points to what he sees as the creation of a “consumer culture.” Regarding this latter claim, Jay W. Richards notes that the argument “identifies the symptoms of a real disease, but, unfortunately, misdiagnosis the disease” Richards goes on to point out that this “critique of capitalism reduces to little more than aesthetics masquerading as economics” (cf. Richards, *Money, Greed, and God*, ch.7). Though I don’t agree with all of Richards’s claims, I think he successfully rebuts the whole “capitalism creates consumerism” critique. Indeed, it seems Trueman isn’t entirely consistent in this chapter. He switches back and forth between the terms ‘capitalism’ and ‘contemporary capitalism.’ His advice was not to absolutize any particular historical circumstance, but he seemed tempted to want to absolutize some of the problems he sees with a particular capitalist culture with capitalism per se.

Another criticism of his is that capitalism “creates one of the kinds of societies where discussions of [euthanizing the unproductive old and using abortion to lower welfare costs] might well take place” (p. 76). I don’t entirely follow this criticism. Certain Eskimo tribes are known for leaving their elderly to die, and many ancient societies took part in the practice of either abortion or abandonment. These societies were not capitalistic. Again, it looks like a symptom has been attributed to a wrong disease.

Trueman ends on a good note, but it seems out of touch with the chapter. Trueman says that we must not think capitalism “is the gospel” (p.78). I can give an “Amen!” along with three cheers to this. But it doesn’t seem to me the arguments in the chapter were aimed toward this conclusion. I also agree with Trueman that we should not “engage in the idolatry of assuming that the capitalist way is God’s way in any absolute sense” (p.78). Again, “Amen!” But these points are of a different nature than much of the chapter. If Trueman meant for his criticisms of capitalism to support the claims that capitalism has problems so it can’t be God’s way, I’ll grant him a couple of points, but some of his critiques were, in my opinion, wide of the mark; or, at least, non-sequiturs.

Chapter five deals with democracy and is titled, “Rulers of the Queens Navee.” The basic theme of this chapter is raised by the question, “Why do those who have a great capacity for subtle thinking in matters of theology seem to prefer to think in terms of very straightforward, black-and-white, if not Manichaeian, categories when it comes to politics” (p.80)? Trueman notes that politics is very complicated and representative democracy does not offer an outlet where the complexity and nuances are able to be considered. It is not “conducive to subtlety” (p.81). Thus, a check in a ballot box should bring pain because of the “trade-offs they are having to make as they do so, and how their action belies the complexity of reality” (p.83).

Along with this, Trueman notes the many cultural conditions that are not conducive to thoughtful engagement with the issues. One such problem is the television, which gives us televised debates where sound-bite answers are considered conclusive and where only the most tanned and sexy politician wins the debate. Thus, aesthetics has become more important than substance. Along with this, contemporary politics are about story telling. There are stories that people buy into and that color their perception of policies and the days events. The “maverickism” of McCain and Palin played into the rugged individualism story, such as we might see in a John Wayne film.

Coupled with this story telling culture is that the political battle has become a battle over character. Political candidates or policies are shot down or built up by linking it to bad or good character traits. So those on the left try to point out that someone has the character that is oppressive to women, and some on the right point out that Al Gore flies gas guzzling planes to lecture us on saving the environment. Trueman notes that these points might “speak to issues of personal integrity and consistency, . . . [but it] does not necessarily render [the] arguments garbage” (97). The point here is that arguments are being ignored and avoided, it is pointing out sins or failings is what matters most. I agree with this, but I wonder if Dr. Trueman applies this point to his criticism of Rupert Murdoch when he writes, “Bottom line: Murdoch himself does not embody the kind of family values that are so near and dear to many conservatives.”

Trueman concludes this chapter by distancing himself from any Utopianism, he doesn’t offer an alternative to these problems. But he does want to help people “realize the truth of what [he] is describing in order that we, as Christians and as citizens, are able to engage both politics and the political process in such a way that we are aware of the problems, limitations, and realistic expectations of what they can deliver” (p.98). Trueman wisely notes that as Christians we should not carry around pictures of the president looking like the Joker from *Batman: The Dark Knight*, nor engage in the kind of sound-bite, sophisticated rhetoric that characterizes much the political “dialogue” today. “The Christian in civic society should set an example to others of what the best citizen looks like, not simply reinforce stereotypes of what the worst appears to be. And that applies across the political spectrum” (p.99). Again, “Amen!”

Chapter six is a “Concluding Unpolitical Postscript.” Trueman reiterates some of his points and worries. He presses home that we should not expect more out of politics and politicians than is warranted. He points to the failures of republicans to do (much of) anything about abortion, as well as the limits our political system places on any elected official, and so we need to have “a realistic understanding of what is and is not possible” (103)—this includes “Yes we can!” and “Change we can believe in” mantras. Trueman also repeats his worry that Christians are being driven away by too close a connection between Christianity and Right wing politics. But I add that we must remember that God’s elect persevere, though we should also recognize God uses means. Trueman also repeats his worry that Christians avoid a politics that accuse our leaders as criminals or “scream mindless abuse at those they disagree with” (109). He ends with what he hopes to see: “I look forward to the day when intelligence and civility, not tiresome clichés, character assassinations, and Manichaeism, are the hallmarks of Christians as they engage the political process” (110). To that we can, again, say, “Amen.”

Despite my registering some areas of disagreement with Trueman, I would recommend *Republocrat* without reservation. I would especially recommend getting it for your more “American Evangelical” friend or neighbor, especially if they align themselves with the “Religious Right.” Not that those who read P&R don’t need to hear what Trueman has to say, I think most of us are more nuanced than the positions Trueman attacks. And so to bring up another criticism: I fear those who most need to read this book most will not, and that may be the biggest flaw. If you buy this book and read it, please give it away to those I mentioned above—or, better, buy them their own copy. That is better because this way Trueman can make a larger profit! Kidding aside, I think this book will prove helpful for Christians, especially those in the above categories, and the kind of help it offers is, despite my unsettled views on the Christ and society/politics debate, the kind of help I strongly believe we desperately need.

Mark says

I wish I could get anyone who pays attention to politics in America to read this book! Written by a conservative evangelical professor of church history and a man raised in the British Reformed Church tradition, Dr Trueman presents a cogent, thought provoking critique of the American political process and how our parties have shifted focus over the years bringing us to this point in history when reasoned discourse seems nearly impossible. He skewers sacred cows on both the left and right sides of the debate and presents the reader with a good solid starting point to begin to rethink long cherished notions of the Christian's role in the political arena. At 110 pages, it is a short read, but packed with plenty to chew on. Seriously. Read this book!

Timothy Maples says

While the subject of this book, that Christians should be more thoughtful in their political life and not merely a pawn of one party or another, was a good idea, I was disappointed in its execution. The author was trying too hard to be "fair" to both sides, which caused some of his valid criticisms to be weakened. By thus deluting his argument, I think the writer missed a opportunity to teach American Christians a much-needed lesson.

Paul Kent says

It seemed to be merely a caution to be more discerning of the political news and commentary that you digest. I guess it may have been eye opening for some, but I found it something that could have been said in a couple pages, and not worthy of an entire book.

Noel Green says

This book explains, probably more clearly as anything I could ever say, why I can vote, faithfully, for someone of the Libertarian party. It explains, well what I believe our stance as gospel believing Christians should be towards politics.

I really can't recommend this book enough. You may not agree with it all but as The Gospel Coalition review of the book says, "Christians do need to think more. We need to refrain from drawing ecclesiastical lines with political pencils. We need a little less us-versus-them rhetoric. We need to allow that good people work on the other side of the aisle. We need to recognize that not every issue has a quick and easy "Christian" solution. And even political conservatives need to take Fox News with a generous grain of salt."

Thinking about how we think and understanding that the president is far more (and far less) than someone who is going to make that "one thing" either happen or stop happening is crucial and Trueman lays out the argument and pulls back the veil very clearly.

My biggest, if not only, criticism of the book is that he mixes the use of the word "rhetoric" sometimes meaning actual rhetoric but more often than not meaning sophistry.

I'll close my review with a quote from Trueman that I share strongly with in sentiment. "I look forward to the day when intelligence and civility, not tiresome clichés, character assassinations, and Manichaeian noise, are the hallmarks of Christians as they engage the political process."

Tom F says

I'll probably write more later. But, I'll say this. I enjoyed the book, especially the historical views Trueman explains in the first couple of chapters. The historic Left and what they have become, along with Trueman's analysis as to how, and why is quite interesting, and I think this on its own, though it would make for a very short book would be worth the read. Then you have the wit and sarcasm that Carl Trueman is known for and it makes for an entertaining read, while having your own political presuppositions challenged, and your idols smashed.

At times reading this you don't know whether to laugh or to cry. How can one react to a rational take on what are political system has become?

Trueman's view as somewhat of a foreigner, though he has been here long enough to understand it, in our system is helpful. Sadly, I think the one failing in the book is that Americans don't read books anymore: the few that do read only that which they know will serve to confirm their biases (just like the news networks they watch); and the few that will read this probably are the ones who mostly would already for the most part be in agreement with the author, at least in acknowledging the problems, if not in agreement with the

individual issues.

Well worth the read, and I hope others will pick it up.

Andrew Flanagan says

This was a great read. I don't agree with all the political views of Carl Trueman nor did I agree with all the arguments he made, but I found his overall philosophy and his urgent warnings to the church to be perfectly on mark. As a British expat, Truman's humor, clear and succinct style, and grasp of both British and American politics, gives him a unique perspective. When I was growing up, Trueman is what I would have called a liberal. As my views and understanding of the relationship between politics and Christianity (which were beautiful captured in this book in much better language than I ever expressed) have shifted, I feel comfortable merely saying that Trueman is an intelligent and deeply thoughtful Christian.

And that, I think, is the point. Christians have swallowed, hook, line, and sinker, most of the nonsense that the Republican party and its various vociferous talking heads ramble on about. Socialism is evil, Obama is a modern-day Marx (or Hitler depending on who you ask), government health care is unbiblical, capitalism is biblical, and so on. There has been little thought as to what is really true versus what we hastily discard as being "liberal" and therefore (as conservative Christians are so oft to label) "evil".

The book has 6 sections:

Left Behind: provides an initial critique of what's wrong with the Left in America. Trueman finds plenty to complain about.

The Slipperiness of Secularization: discusses how America has secularized to an amazing degree but maintains an illusion of being a Christian nation because of how it couches things in religious idioms.

No-So-Fantastic Mr. Fox: discusses the role of Fox News, championed by many Christians as "unbiased". Trueman pokes both at the silliness of unbiased reporting along with many clear examples of the inconsistencies in the "conservative" status of the organization.

Living Life to the Max: talks about Max Weber's discussion of capitalism in the context of Christianity and the modern-day perception by many Christians that capitalism is Biblical and in fact the pinnacle of Christian government.

Rulers of the Queen's Navee: speaks to the disturbing trend in modern American politics of "never thinking for yourself at all" but toeing the party line. It also discusses the problem of meaningful and serious discourse on any political topic.

Concluding Unpolitical Postscript: closes out the book with Trueman's thoughts on what can be done about the issues and his recommendation to fellow Christians on how they ought to deal with politics and with their fellow Christians.

Overall, I was impressed. This book makes you think, it makes you doubt what you have been told, and it provides solid and Biblical advice for living in a society where you don't necessarily agree with your neighbors (Christian or otherwise).

I believe that Christians who read and understand Trueman's message will be blessed, but also challenged.

