

POLITICS AND RELIGION: LIBERALS WILL BE LIBERALS

By Dub McClish

Introduction

Railroad tracks run parallel to each other, as do numerous other things (e.g., lines on a music staff, window blinds, prison bars, et al.). Such items are not only aligned; they go in the same direction and generally have the same terminus. Parallels exist not only in the area of physical phenomena, but in the realm of ideas as well.

The “no holds barred” intensity of the 2004 [and current) presidential campaign served to accentuate the deep political rift in our nation. Numerous seasoned presidential campaign observers agree that this was one of the most bitterly fought races ever. This highly-charged atmosphere has provoked a few thoughts concerning some ideological parallels. Generally, the national political division breaks along “conservative” and “liberal” lines, often identified as the “right” and the “left,” respectively.

Some General Parallels

Some general parallels are obvious between the political and religious landscapes. Professed believers in God, the Bible, and the Christ are also divided along the lines of the “right” and “left” dichotomy that is observable in politics. This conservative-liberal division is quite apparent in both the Roman Catholic Church and in Protestant Denominationalism (with pronounced liberal dominance in the latter). So we see these parallel “rails” of politics and religion: both are very much divided along conservative and liberal lines.

Even closer to home, it is no secret that the church of Christ is also **deeply divided** along conservative and liberal lines. (I do not employ the term *liberal* to be unkind or unfair, but to be accurate. *Liberal* accurately describes those who take liberties with God’s Word.) What began in a seemingly small way about half a century ago has steadily developed into a cleavage with no foreseeable prospect of repair. The church is moving inexorably toward a repeat—in the not-too-distant-future, I fear—of the tragic complete sundering of the body of Christ that occurred a century ago (some seem never to learn or care about the lessons of history). Not a few believe said division has already occurred. As sad as it is to contemplate, the conservative- liberal tension has already produced internal schism in hundreds of congregations. The number of entire congregations that have moved or are

moving leftward is surely in the hundreds—if not more. It is only a matter of time now until the reality of this division is undeniable—even by the most dedicated religious “ostriches.”

Those who have read any of my writings or who have heard me preach for any length of time are aware of my unashamed conservative perspective. Liberals fail who seek to slander me by throwing this label my way. To me, *conservative* is neither pejorative nor demeaning; it is complimentary. For my part, the true meaning of this term has only positive connotations. I do not claim to speak for them, but I believe there are still many faithful saints whose only interest in religion is mine—to simply **conserve** or **preserve** that “once-for-all-delivered” faith (Jude 3) for which the Lord died. Conservatives are the real restorers. We seek no more and no less than the unadulterated doctrine and practice of the New Testament.

The proclivity of liberals to categorize all who object to their schemes as “antis” stems from the misconception that conservatives like to “make laws.” Notwithstanding this frequent accusation, I am not the least bit interested in making any new laws for God (If I have ever done so, it was not because of, but in spite of, any such intent). This charge accurately describes genuine “anti-ism,” not genuine conservatism. (By *genuine anti-ism* I refer to the practice of making personal scruples about such things as church support of children’s homes, church co-operation, eating in the church building, the time of meeting, or even the color of the carpet, grounds of fellowship. All other things being equal, such scruples [whether held by congregations or by individuals] are of no consequence to a genuine conservative—as long as they remain just that—personal scruples.)

When one objectively considers the correct definition of *conservative*, he will realize that personal-scruple-enforcing “anti” brethren are no more conservative than liberals and that liberals are as much in the law-making business as are extreme “antis.” Liberals just make their laws **broader**, whereas said “antis” make theirs **narrower**, than God’s law—but both are law-makers. The implication of the foregoing remarks is clear: Liberalism and anti-ism are both extremes; conservatism occupies the happy middle ground of Truth. If I did not believe this, I would seek other ground.

Liberal innovators drove the wedge that eventually split the church a century ago. They began it all by introducing the missionary society and the instrument of music a half-century earlier. Until then, the church was marching as a solid, united phalanx and making

great gains for the Truth on every hand. Ironically, those conservative brethren (whose only aim was the restoration of primitive Christianity) who resisted the innovators and their innovations were shown the door and blamed for the division.

Like their earlier counterparts, today's liberals, with their host of innovations—all symptomatic of their rejection of the authority of Scripture—are completely culpable for the division now occurring in the church. The list of strange practices and doctrines they have imposed— and are imposing—on the Lord's people is as long as my arm (and I have long arms). The only sense in which those who endeavor to preserve the ancient landmarks are guilty of the current division is that we have dared expose and oppose the nefarious machinations of the liberals. Many of us plan to continue doing so.

Some Specific Parallels

With the foregoing as background, let us now consider a more specific set of parallels—the one that exists between liberals/leftists in politics (including the major news media) and their liberal/leftist counterparts in the church (including the “news media” operated by brethren). These two groups of liberals run on parallel “rails”—they just circulate in different spheres of activity. Liberals in the church mirror the nature, attitudes, and tactics demonstrated by politicians and media principals on the left (especially in the recent and current) presidential campaigns. Consider the following:

Liberals do not like to be called “liberals”

A politician may spend twenty years amassing the most liberal voting record in the US Senate. Yet, when his opponent emphasizes this, correctly labeling him a “liberal,” the liberal (and the “establishment” media) will shame the exposé for daring to call him what he is. In politics, liberals know that they rarely win unless they can somehow disguise their liberalism, so they try to hide under such terms as *moderate*, *progressive*, or *centrist*.

Liberals in the church object to this term also, and for the same reason. Preachers, professors, and editors who no longer love the Truth and who seek to turn the church into a denomination (which they already believe it to be), do not like to be identified for what they are—liberals. They know that faithful brethren will not tolerate their shenanigans if convinced of their liberalism. They thus prefer *moderate*, *progressive*, and *centrist*, just as politicians do.

Liberals are elitists

Liberal politicians are generally arrogant and puffed up with their own importance. They believe they are better, smarter, and wiser than “ordinary” people. They exhibit a “nose-in-the-air” condescension toward their constituents that smacks of an ancient landlord’s attitude toward his serfs. The “common people” would hardly know how to tie their shoes or chew gum without their patronizing advice and oversight.

Liberals in the church are eaten up with arrogance and elitism. This is especially so if they have earned a PhD, and even more so if they occupy a professorship in one of the universities founded by brethren. Many of them have been off to Harvard, Princeton, or some other school full of infidel theologians, and have come back enlightened. They have escaped the shackles of simple faith in the Bible as God’s verbally and plenary inspired Word. Reminiscent of the Gnostics of old, they know it all—even more than God has revealed. Job’s mordant response to Zophar nails them: “No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you” (Job 12:2).

We pitiful souls who have only been studying and preaching the simple Truth for forty, fifty, sixty, or more years are just ignoramuses. We are not linguists or theologians, and they are. My, my, such Neanderthals as we still believe that **faithful** churches of Christ today are the one church of the New Testament in our time, that one must be in it to be saved, and that the only way one can enter it is by obeying Jesus’ plan of salvation, culminating in baptism unto remission of sins (Acts 2:37–47).

Liberals profess themselves to be supremely tolerant

In their campaign speeches, liberal candidates typically boast of their tolerance for all viewpoints, lifestyles, behaviors, and attitudes. Their practice, however, reveals that their “tolerance” definitely has limits. It comes to an abrupt halt when one dares question and/or expose the fallacies and/or evils of such things as abortion and homosexual behavior. Verily, liberals are among the most intolerant people on earth—just resist one of them or his policies if in doubt.

So it is with liberals in the church. They are so sweet and profoundly tolerant that they would not dare offend anyone by preaching on the errors of denominationalism, the sin of using instrumental music in worship, or the necessity of baptism for remission of sins. They would not think of saying or doing anything that might cause some sinner to get the

idea he is lost. They see no problem with “social drinking,” near-nakedness in public, adulterous marriages, or buying a lottery ticket—they are so tolerant, you see.

Or are they? Actually, they are only tolerant of almost everything and anyone, **except** sound doctrine and those who preach and defend it. They have an extremely low tolerance threshold for any teaching that counters their agenda. For decades such places as Pepperdine U, ACU, LCU, Lipscomb U, and the Tulsa Workshop have not tendered invitations to conservative preachers to speak. Liberal churches years ago closed their pulpits to any but liberal preachers. I suppose it is because liberals are so exceedingly tolerant that they do not extend these invitations. “But conservative congregations do not invite liberals into their pulpits, either,” someone observes. The difference is that we do not pretend or profess to be super-tolerant of all views. We make it known plainly that we are consciously **intolerant** of and will not provide a platform for false teachers, as the Scriptures obligate us to be and do (Rom. 16:17–18; 2 Tim. 4:2–4; 2 John 10–11; et al.).

Liberals are experts at applying a double standard

Liberal politicians demonstrate this practice in various ways (including their professed tolerance, discussed above):

First, political liberals project themselves as great champions of the First Amendment of our Constitution, part of which guarantees free speech. They are all for free speech as long as they and their media sycophants are viciously **lying** about their conservative opponents. However, they suddenly care not so much for free speech when opponents come forward with the **truth** about their dangerous policies, major character flaws, and inconsistencies. By threat and intimidation they seek to silence conservative voices in the media. By long serving as the unpaid voice of liberals the “major” news media have outrageously abused the very free speech right under which they operate. Amazingly, they do such in the name of “objectivity,” while denying their glaring bias. They are pleased to mitigate, slant, and/or even withhold significant conservative facts and voices from the public.

Liberals in the church are not interested in freedom of expression. The closing of most of the university lectureships and liberal big church pulpits to all but their kind (all the while professing tolerance) is a case in point. *The Christian Chronicle* bills itself as “An international newspaper for members of churches of Christ.” It boasts of its “balance” and

“objectivity,” yet its pages are filled with promotion—paid and unpaid—of the most liberal institutions, projects, and men among us. Its editors misname “liberals” as “progressives” and refer to those seeking to conserve New Testament teaching and practice as “traditionalists” (Oct. 2004:30). Where were “balance” and “objectivity” when its editor described conservatives as those who exclude all but those who “worship as the church did in the early decades of the last century” (July 2004:30)? Contrariwise, we charge them with rejecting the plan of salvation and the pattern for the church of the **first** century.

Second, as mentioned earlier, political liberals object to those who correctly label them *liberals*. Labeling, they say, is unfair and prejudicial. Yet, in another application of the double standard, they are the biggest labelers around. They refer to political conservatives as “the radical right,” “the vast right-wing conspiracy,” “the religious right,” and similar terms with a curled lip and an unbatted eye.

So it is with liberals in the church. As mentioned above, they do not want to be called what they are—*liberals*. They self-righteously and indignantly decry the awful practice of *labeling*. I have even heard some conservative brethren mistakenly join the voices of liberals in this respect, declaring, “The New Testament does not contain the words, *conservative* or *liberal*, so we should not use them.” No, not explicitly, but it does so **implicitly** in every passage that warns of apostasy and enjoins faithful adherence to the Gospel, which passages permeate the inspired volume (as even neophyte Bible students should know). Nonetheless, liberals have proved themselves very prolific, adept, and imaginative in labeling their opponents (e.g., “legalists,” “five-steppers,” “brotherhood watchdogs,” “witch-hunters,” “keepers of orthodoxy,” “Pharisees,” “traditionalists,” “commandment keepers,” “new antis,” et al.) It is not that liberals do not like labeling; they just do not like to be on the **receiving** end of labels that truly characterize them.

Conclusion

The truth of the matter is that liberals will be liberals, wherever one finds them. If political liberals should someday gain control of all branches of our government and if they watered-down our constitution and the God-given rights and freedoms it guarantees, we could still live as God’s people and be saved at last. Of course, we would likely be under severe opposition and duress (political liberals have generally demonstrated that they think believing in God is a joke, the Bible is a fairy tale, and alley cats and barnyard animals are proper role models for “morals”—with my apologies to the animals in some cases).

However, liberals in the church will cause souls to be lost. They have no more respect for the inspired constitution of the kingdom of Heaven than political liberals have for the US constitution. They have an amazing ability to ignore Paul's mandate: "And whatever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). They preach a diluted message that is destroying the church everywhere men implement it. Their message robs men of the plan of salvation from sin, and ultimately, therefore, of Heaven itself. *Liberalism* is simply another word for *apostasy* and *heresy*. Paul described those who thus walk as "holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof," and enjoined: "from these also turn away" (2 Tim. 3:5).

[NOTE: I wrote the foregoing MS while editor of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*. It appeared in a slightly different form as my "Editorial Perspective" in the November 2004 issue of said publication, of which I was editor (revised/updated 2/17/16). DM]