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What is an ‘evangelical foreign policy?’

An interview of Mark Amstutz

by Jonathan Merritt of Religion News Service

*Jonathan asked: When one thinks about American evangelicals and politics, their minds may rush to domestic issues such as abortion and gay marriage. But what are the common characteristics of an evangelical foreign policy?*

Jonathan, I know the answer to that one: War. Always has been, still is, and always ... will be.

America is the largest Christian nation on Earth; and we are also the only nation on Earth that is in a nearly constant state of warfare.

Onward Christian Soldiers!

*Mark answered: Evangelicals’ foreign policy concerns have been motivated by core moral values rooted in a Christian worldview. Such values include the inherent dignity of all human beings,*

Mark, which Bible are you using? The ones I've seen all teach that every human being is born a filthy sinner whose only path to salvation is through belief in Jesus Christ. That isn't inherent dignity; that is the exact opposite of inherent dignity.

*the priority of social and political justice,*

Mark, I've read your 10 commandments. Your God demands execution for those who work on the Sabbath. Personally, and this is just me, I don't call that social justice. I would call that ... insanity.

*the need for communal order, the demand for human freedom,*

Mark, forget about slavery did we?

*the responsibility to care for the weak and the poor,*

Mark, yet the most vociferous opposition to caring for the weak and the poor come from American's most devout Christians ... the Tea Party.

*the importance of personal responsibility, and the universality and transnational nature of God’s love.*

Mark, we got to witness the transnational nature of God's love during the colonial period when Christian hordes swept into the New World and murdered millions of indigenous people and stole their lands. But, in their defense, the Christians did bring Bibles, so maybe we should just call it even.

*Not surprisingly, evangelicals have been at the forefront of global humanitarianism through such initiatives as caring for refugees, promoting job creation through micro-enterprise loans,*

Mark, that's a big improvement over the way Christians used to promote job creation ... by importing African slaves to pick their cotton.

*providing health care to the poor,*

Mark, the greatest obstacle to obtaining affordable health care for the poor in the United States ... has been Evangelicals. They have done everything humanly possible to prevent the poor from obtaining it. If that is an indication of how 'you people' help the poor and the sick, then foreigners would be far better off without your "help."

*and combating diseases such as HIV/AIDS.*

Mark, I thought 'you people' said AIDS was a punishment from God for the gay lifestyle? What happened to that argument? And why would you combat it, if it were God's will?

*Evangelicals have established some of the largest non-governmental relief and development organizations in the world and have played an important role in helping to pass legislation to combat human trafficking, facilitate a comprehensive peace in Sudan,*

Mark, the peace in Sudan has been about as successful as the peace in Israel.

Christians and peace go together about as well as polar bears and seals.

*highlight human rights abuses in North Korea, and even helped to bring about the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.*

Mark, how well has that worked out ... in Muslim countries?

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*Jonathan asked: Many think of evangelicalism as a 20th century movement, but you say evangelicals were active in foreign affairs since, at least, the 19th century. How so?*

*Mark answered: The evangelical movement that emerged in the l940s as a result of the split with fundamentalists did not lead to the emergence of evangelicalism. Rather, this development marked a return to classical orthodox Protestantism. This is why scholars call this movement neo-evangelicalism, to differentiate it from the earlier 19th century evangelicalism.*

Mark, the real reason is because they want to distance themselves from the horrid history of colonialism, slavery, and witch-burning. By calling themselves "neo" they hope to give themselves a clean start. Unfortunately for them, history doesn't forget.

And also, if they continue to call themselves 'neo-evangelicals' they can expect to hear from my attorneys.

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*Jonathan asked: One of the most curious trends in evangelical foreign policy is their uncritical support of what some might call “imperialistic wars.” In some cases, they’ve outright endorsed or called for war. How do evangelicals who claim to follow the “Prince of Peace” reconcile these things?*

Jonathan, good point. Christians can rationalize anything. When they need it to be "turn the other cheek" - they turn the other cheek. When they need it to be "an eye for an eye" - then it's an eye for an eye. That's the cool thing about Christianity - it can support anything you want it to support; you just have to hunt for the verses you need.

*Mark answered: Following St. Augustine, evangelicals believe that Christians are citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom where Christ’s peace reigns but are also citizens of temporal kingdoms where the use of force may be necessary to deter aggression and protect legitimate interests and values.*

See Mark, what did I tell you?

When they want peace - it's peace. When they want to take something - then it's war; and the Bible will support them ... in either case.

*To the extent that evangelicals assess the use of military force in international relations, it is largely through the tradition of just war.*

Yeah Mark, I know what you mean. Those damn Indians didn't realize that God had promised their land to the Christians; who then had every right to take it by force, and push the few survivors onto reservations where they led wonderful lives.

*Although pacifism has become more influential in recent decades, its impact on evangelical foreign policy thought remains modest.*

Mark, modest? How about non-existent?

*In general, evangelicals support coercive diplomacy and war when confronting aggression and egregious wrongs.*

Mark, how were the American Indians being aggressive? I don't recall any record of them crossing the Atlantic to attack Christians in Europe.

And when they killed hundreds of thousands of fellow Christians in order to hold on to their human slaves ... was that a just war?

*Throughout the Cold War, evangelicals were staunchly opposed to Communism because the ideology was assumed to be inconsistent with the Christian faith.*

Mark, you should google Stoicism. That ideology was outlawed by Justinian because its principles conflicted with Christianity. Want to know what principles of Stoicism conflicted with Christianity?

1. Liberty

2. Human rights

3. Equality under the law

4. Freedom of speech

Mark, Christianity doesn't look so good when its horrid history is exposed, does it?

*As a result, they not only supported the strategy of containment but were staunch defenders of America’s overt and covert wars. During the 1980s revolutionary wars in Central America, for example, evangelicals supported the counter-insurgency strategies of the Reagan administration.*

Mark, isn't that information that you would be better off hiding?

*And when Iraq intervened in Kuwait in 1990, evangelicals, like most Americans, supported the use of military force to oust Saddam Hussein’s forces from that small country.*

Yes Mark, they got one right; but as you said ... so did most Americans. In fact, so did most of the world.

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*Jonathan asked: Evangelicals of late have a foreign policy that seems to overwhelmingly support Israel. Why is this and do you think this is changing?*

*Mark answered: Evangelicals are strong supporters of Israel.*

Hey Mark, why don't you tell everyone how Evangelical Christians treated Jews for the last 2,000 years?

Because if you did, the resulting story would be even bloodier than your Bible. Christians have been discriminating against and killing Jews for centuries wherever they find them. It wasn't until the end of WW2 that the Jews were finally given back their country to live in.

Don't accept what I say Mark, try reading Martin Luther for yourself; and you can see the cancerous anti-Semitic roots of Protestantism for yourself.

*But evangelicals’ support is, on average, only 5-7 percent stronger than that of the general American public. The conventional wisdom is that evangelicals support Israel because of the influence of premillennial dispensationalism and “left behind” theological perspectives. This view is not persuasive, however, since only a small portion of evangelicals accept prophetic theology.*

Mark, are you serious?

You must operate in an unusual circle of Christians. Polls don't show a "small portion" but a rather large portion of Christians who believe in prophetic theology.

*A more convincing explanation for evangelicals’ support of Israel must include both religious and non-religious factors. At a minimum, four factors affect Evangelicals’ view of Israel: First, the belief that Jews are God’s chosen people;*

Mark, since they've been hunting them down and killing Jews for centuries, my question is - when did that change? Why weren't Evangelicals aware before, that the Jews were God's chosen people? After all ... they use the same Bible.

And if the Jews are God's chosen people, why would they need help from Evangelicals when they have the baddest dude in the universe on their side?

*second, the belief that God’s promises to Abraham and his descendants remain valid;*

Mark, God promised that Abraham's descendants would outnumber the sands on the beach and the stars in the sky, yet after 2,000 years, they remain one of the smallest ethnic groups of people on the planet.

The Mormons didn't get started until the 19th century and even they outnumber Jews.

God's promises aren't any more accurate than those of Jesus. You remember Jesus' promise don't you - that He would return?

Well, it's been over 2,000 years now ... and we're still waiting.

*third, the common bond between Israelis and Americans arising from shared values rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition;*

Mark, what common values?

The Old and New Testaments couldn't be much more different. About the only thing they share in common is support for human slavery.

*and fourth, the common bond between the two nations arising from the shared commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.*

Mark, there is nothing in the Bible that even remotely supports Democracy.

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*Jonathan asked: You have an entire chapter on the shortcomings of evangelical foreign policy advocacy. What are two or three of these that people might never have considered?*

*Mark answered: A common shortcoming of evangelical foreign policy advocacy is the effort to use the Bible to justify public policy prescriptions. Since the Bible is not a manual on international relations, Scripture should not be used for political ends.*

Mark, it's a little late for that. Scripture is constantly invoked in America in support of Republican goals. But I agree with you that it should not be.

*Biblical principles should of course be used to structure the analysis of issues and to influence public policy debate, but Scripture should not be used to justify foreign policy positions. For example, some Evangelicals supporting Comprehensive Immigration Reform have unwisely used the biblical phrase “welcoming the stranger” to imply that the regulation of international migration is inconsistent with Scripture.*

Mark, you know as well as I do, that for every verse you can find, you can find another verse that will say the exact opposite. In this case, there are loads of verses that allow you to discriminate and kill strangers. 'You people' simply pick the one you want and ignore the others.

*But the use of Scripture to justify amnesty for undocumented aliens is unpersuasive and is likely to undermine the moral authority of the church.*

Mark, the church has no moral authority. Your Bible is the most vile, inhuman collection of morals ever recorded at any time in history at any place on Earth. Can you name another moral code that supports slavery, genocide, genital mutilation, human and animal sacrifice, and execution for petty offenses?

No, you can't. Because no such other moral code exists (thank God).

*Another shortcoming of evangelical foreign policy advocacy is the tendency to oversimplify global issues. For example, when highly-indebted poor countries were facing difficulties in meeting debt obligations, some evangelical groups attributed the obstacles to debt repayment to the structural injustices of the international economic order. And when the National Association of Evangelicals took up the issue of nuclear arms in 2011 by adopting a resolution that called for a reduction in strategic weapons, it did so by viewing the problem as an excess of weapons, not the inherent conflictual relations of global politics. Rather than integrating a Christian perspective with the problem posed by nuclear arms, the NAE oversimplified the issue.*

Well Mark, you can't expect clear, rational thinking from adults who have imaginary friends. In a sane world, you people would be receiving the mental help you so desperately need. But in the world we live in, that isn't happening because the vast majority of humanity is infected. That doesn't mean it's hopeless - it only means that we have an awful lot of work to do, if we are ever going to get this place cleaned up.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

What's the Deepest a Fish Can Swim?

Ocean-going fish can’t live any deeper than 8,200 meters. All fish have their limits—you’ll never find sharks below 4,000 meters, for example—but why there aren’t any fish at all below 8,000 meters remains a mystery.

The threshold is set by two competing effects of trimethylamine N-oxide (TMAO), a chemical in fish cells that prevents proteins from collapsing under high pressure. While fish should need more and more TMAO to survive ever greater depths, higher concentrations of the compound also draw in more and more seawater through osmosis, the process by which cells regulate their water content. In the deepest waters, high TMAO levels reverse osmosis pressure, swelling brain cells to the point that they stop working and, in principle, burst red blood cells open. Scientists are still working on how other marine creatures like anemones and bacteria avoid such gruesome fates at the most extreme depths, but they suspect that those organisms produce more efficient protein boosters than fish.

Researchers looked 7,000 meters down in the Kermadec Trench north of New Zealand. There, they captured 5 snailfish whose record TMAO levels and osmosis pressures matched projections the researchers had made based on shallower dwelling fish. Extrapolating the new results just a bit further, they found that osmosis should reverse itself at a depth of 8,200 meters—right about where fish no longer swim the sea.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

Robert Ingersoll

(no biography - previously quoted)

“It may be ...

that ministers really think that their prayers do good

and it may be ...

that frogs imagine that their croaking brings spring.”