

"In an election year, we badly need this careful, reasoned reflection on how Christians should confront the pressing moral issues of our time."—Philip Yancey

"A 'must read' for anyone interested in American Evangelical political engagement."—Ron J. Sider

Activist, scholar calls for a rethinking of Evangelical engagement in public policy

According to a July 2007 Associated Press report, religion will play a more prominent role in the 2008 presidential election than it has in the past four decades. Candidates will want to appeal to religious voters and should be aware of a previously unacknowledged group that has the potential to change the dynamics of the next election—the Evangelical Center.

Americans are no longer simply divided into the secular left and the Religious Right, claims David P. Gushee, professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University. In his new book, **The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center** (Baylor University Press, January 2008), Gushee identifies a third group—the Evangelical Center—that combines the social interests of the left with the religious values of the right.

Gushee introduces this group as a viable alternative to the often-polarizing politics of the secular left and the compassionate conservatives of the right. "This Evangelical Center offers the best way forward in the notoriously controversial engagement of faith with American public life." An architect of many key statements made by the Religious Right in the 1990s, Gushee is now the voice of the Evangelical Center, and this book could be its manifesto.

Instead of focusing on the "old" religious issues that divide American into red and blue—e.g. abortion, same sex marriage, the death penalty—the Evangelical Center addresses a "new" set of social issues—e.g. the environment, immigration, torture—with a faith-based approach.

The Evangelical Center is a group that has subsisted without public recognition for a long time, but Gushee claims this anonymous status is about to change. "I think this emergence is one of the most promising (and under-reported) developments in evangelical life today—and therefore in American public life."

This unacknowledged group combines social vision with a moral vigor and is quickly advancing its politically moderate, yet biblically-conscience social views. "It has the ability to pull together a muscular coalition that includes voices from the evangelical right and the evangelical left," says Gushee. "It is winning the hearts and minds of younger evangelicals, and thus represents the likely future of evangelicalism far more than the graying right."

Why should the 2008 Presidential candidates take note of the Evangelical Center? Evangelicals comprise nearly 25 percent of the voting public, notes Gushee. Thus, their political influence is impressive: "As we go, so goes the nation." Politicians would be well advised to familiarize themselves with this Evangelical Center, an emerging contingent that is quickly becoming the "American mainstream."

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Press Release

Praise for *The Future of Faith in American Politics*

In this important book David Gushee gives the lie to the sorry myth that Evangelicals are all right-wing extremists. Not only does he show that many are politically progressive, but also that most of them are actually or potentially political moderates with a strong biblical conscience.

—**George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary**

...offers a cogent review of contemporary political engagement among evangelical Protestants. Gushee's description of an "emerging evangelical center" displays the diversity of this engagement, while his advocacy for such a center reveals its vitality. This book deserves to be taken seriously by evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike.

—**John C. Green, Distinguished Professor of Political Science,
University of Akron**

The Future of Faith in American Politics challenges Jim Hightower's famous maxim that the only things in the middle of the road are yellow stripes and dead armadillos. Gushee offers here a cogent and balanced agenda for evangelical activism, a most welcome addition to this important conversation.

—**Randall Balmer, Professor of American religious history at
Barnard College, Columbia University**

Will there be a kinder, gentler, wiser Evangelical ethos in the future - less strident, rigid, politically entrenched, and reactive, and more thoughtful, robust, politically independent, and constructive? If so, I believe it will develop in large part because of David Gushee and the new/renewing identity articulated in this important book.

—**Brian D. McLaren, Author (brianmclaren.net)**

Gushee makes a strong case for an emerging evangelical "middle" in American politics. For that middle to become more than an occasional, aggregate voice, however, its constituents will have to take more seriously than they do now the responsibilities of citizenship and government. Today, that middle lacks leaders in government and the political process with the comprehensive agenda Gushee advocates.

—**Jim Skillen, President, The Center for Public Justice**

Endorsements



Introducing David Gushee

A Christian ethicist, Dr. David P. Gushee seeks to balance a life of scholarship, teaching, activism, and service in the life of the church. He is the author or editor of ten books in Christian social ethics as of January 2008, including *Kingdom Ethics* (Intervarsity Press, 2003), which won the Christianity Today theology/ethics book award and is used widely in the U.S. and around the world in multiple translations. He is also an op-ed columnist whose work is published nationally via Religion News Service and Associated Baptist Press, as well as a contributing editor for Christianity Today magazine.



In recent years, Gushee has become deeply involved in leadership of conscience-driven evangelical activism focused on climate change and human rights. He was the principal drafter of the Evangelical Climate Initiative (2006), an influential declaration which brought evangelicals deeply into the climate change debate. He also served as principal drafter of “An Evangelical Declaration against Torture,” a 2007 statement which again engaged evangelicals in a major public policy debate, this time related to the use of torture in the war on terror. He continues his work on such issues as president of Evangelicals for Human Rights, a nonprofit educational organization.

Besides considerable local preaching and teaching, Gushee (an ordained Baptist minister since 1987) serves the Baptist family through work on the Baptist World Alliance Christian Ethics Commission as well as efforts to advance the New Baptist Covenant. He has lectured at several dozen Christian colleges and seminaries, and consults frequently with the Washington office of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Gushee, a native of Virginia, was educated at the College of William and Mary (B.A., Religion, 1984, Phi Beta Kappa), Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div., 1987), and Union Theological Seminary in New York (M.Phil. 1990; Ph.D. in Christian Ethics, 1993). After teaching three years at Southern Seminary and eleven years at Union University, Gushee became Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University in 2007. He is based in Atlanta at the McAfee School of Theology.

Gushee’s current research interests center on the challenge of bringing Christian faith to bear on American public life. This theme will be the subject of his new book, *The Future of Faith in American Politics* (Baylor University Press, 2008), as well as his next work, a major scholarly treatment of the sanctity of human life (Eerdmans).

Gushee lives in Atlanta with Jeanie, his wife of 23 years, and their two high-school age children, David and Marie.



Author Biography

Who is David Gushee?

David Gushee is the Jim Wallis of the Evangelical Center.

In the 1990s, David Gushee was an architect of many of the key statements of faith and practice made by the Religious Right. Now he is the voice of the Evangelical Center.

Gushee is the Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University.

What is the Evangelical Center?

Gushee argues that the choices are not simply between the secular left and the compassionate conservatives of the right. Instead, Gushee identifies a third group: the Evangelical Center.

The Evangelical Center comprises Christians that marry a robust commitment to a historic faith with an imaginative social agenda for the 21st century.

The Evangelical Center thus effectively combines the social interests of the left and the religious values of the right.

Why should politicians and leaders in American public life take notice of the Evangelical Center?

The Evangelical Center has the potential to change the dynamics of the next election.

Instead of focusing on the “old” religious issues that divide America into red and blue—e.g. abortion, same sex marriage, death penalty—the Evangelical Center addresses a “new” set of social issues—e.g. the environment, immigration, torture—with a faith-based approach. This unacknowledged group combines social vision with a moral vigor.

The emergence of the Evangelical Center is one of the most promising and under-reported developments in American public life.

Main Points



David Gushee in the News

On the Evangelical Center:

Mark Pinsky. “Meet the New Evangelicals.”

LA Times, 16 Sept 2006.

Pinsky, religion writer for the *Orlando Sentinel*, quotes a forthcoming article by Gushee and Justin Phillips, stating “within evangelical Christianity there exists a greater multiplicity of political opinions than is widely assumed. . . In our view, the subtle emergence of a robust evangelical center is one of the most promising developments in evangelical life today—and therefore in American public life.”

On Ministry and Politics:

Chuck Raasch. “When preachers endorse, is it good for religion or politics?”

Gannett News Service 12 December 2007.

Gushee comments that he believes ministers should not endorse presidential candidates.

On Torture:

Peter Steinfels. “Topic in the Air that Politicians Didn’t Touch: Torture.”

The New York Times, 11 November 2006.

Steinfels quotes Gushee’s article that comments on the U.S.’s tenuous current position on torture: “We know that torture is wrong, but just not now, not in our exceptional case, not in this global war on terror. Yet we are queasy enough, that we do not want to call torture, torture.”

Alan Cooperman. “Religious Leaders Urge U.S. to Ban Torture.”

The Washington Post, 13 June 2006.

Cooper refers to Gushee’s 2006 *Christianity Today* article on torture in which Gushee states, “I’m not persuaded that this issue has been put to bed yet by the Bush administration. I’m worried that we still don’t truly know what is going on in all our detention centers around the world.”

On War/Terrorism:

Robert Marus. “Candid Exchange Between Professors Shows Baptist Rift Over Israel-Lebanon.”

Associated Baptist Press, 27 July 2006.

Marus quotes Gushee’s letter to Martin Accad, a Lebanese Baptist seminary dean. In the letter Gushee writes, “My sympathy for Israel—which is indeed deep, a mix of all kinds of factors, some rational, some emotional—does not extend to support for what has clearly become a massive and disproportionate military offensive.”

Hannah Elliott. “Ethicists Weigh In On Court’s Decision to Protect Guantanamo Detainees.”

Associated Baptist Press, 11 July 2006.

In an interview with Elliott, Gushee says he “would like to see [the Guantanamo Prison] closed. If the prisoners there have committed a crime punishable by U.S. law, then they should be prosecuted on U.S. soil. If not, they should be returned to their own countries.”

Greg Warner. “Falwell Comment on Terrorism Draws Response From Fellow Baptists.”

Associated Baptist Press, 2 November 2004.

Warner quotes Gushee refuting Jerry Falwell’s claim that the U.S. should kill Osama bin Laden “in the name of the Lord.” Gushee states, “If we do capture Osama bin Laden, for example, or even if we kill him, it will not be ‘in the name of the Lord.’ It will be in the name of justice, and in the defense of the United States. There is a difference, and one that is easily overlooked when passions run high in times of war.”

On the Environment:

Bradford Plumer. “Greener Pastors: Inside the Evangelical War Over Climate Change.”

Faith in Public Life, 15 March 2007.

Plumer, a reporter-researcher for the *New Republic*, cites Gushee as a drafter of the Evangelical Climate Initiative, a report that has accepted the scientific consensus on climate change and urges the rest of the evangelical community to do so as well. “The instinctive view that scientists are trying to rob people of their faith is fading,” Gushee says.



As Quoted in...

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