



“Third Wayism”: The New Evangelical Excuse for Retreating From the Political/Cultural War

Pontius Pilate has a unique place in history; every even quasi-serious Christian knows his name. Pilate was, of course, the Roman governor who condemned Jesus to death despite acknowledging His innocence. It was easier, you see, and more expedient to publicly wash his hands and declare, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves” — and therefore avoid Jewish leaders’ agitation and maintain political stability and “neutrality.” It was easier to, instead of taking an unpopular stand and an underappreciated side, choose a third way.



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Thus is it intensely and sadly ironic that many Christians today are, with a like motivation, using a similar rationalization to avoid taking unpopular stands. Why, they even call it “a third way.”

A Way — but Not His Way

The Standing for Freedom Center’s Ryan Helfenbein [reported](#) on this recently:

What happens when we separate God’s law from His Gospel in the name of political neutrality? If you’ve been paying attention to Evangelical discourse recently, you’ve likely encountered what’s now called “Third Wayism” — a term for the modern Evangelical approach to political and cultural engagement without the baggage of moral or political absolutism.

The premise sounds reasonable enough on the surface: Occupy a middle ground between the Left vs. Right culture war, avoiding strong alignment with either major political party, platform, or group.

Proponents claim they’re simply being “winsome” and “balanced” — rising above tribalism and transcending versus trendsetting in order to proclaim a pure Gospel untainted by political entanglements.

Third Wayism often sounds like this: “Jesus is neither right nor left.” Or “Jesus wasn’t an elephant or a donkey. [sic] but the Lamb.” Or “Jesus would be too liberal for conservatives and too conservative for liberals.”

That’s true enough, but is that all that needs to be said about our cultural and political divide? What actually [is] happening here? Third Wayism has become a Trojan horse for laundering progressive ideas into the Evangelical churches under the guise of neutrality.



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on November 28, 2025

There's much to unpack here. First, Jesus is truly neither right nor left, but we shouldn't be, either — not for the reason most think, however.

That is, the right/left yardstick is a [French Revolution-born human measure](#). It reflects the political spectrum, which is determined by the people's range of beliefs. Christians, however (and everyone, in fact), should make *Truth* their yardstick. This inerrant guide doesn't compromise and build consensus, either; it's not a politician. It dictates where reality lies. And in a civilization claiming $2+2=5$, it's with the "extremist" who insists it's 4. For God's realism so often is man's radicalism.

Cowardice Dressed Up as Clear-sightedness?

Helfenbein makes some other good points, too. For example, he states that Third Wayism

- relentlessly critiques traditional Christians (especially "Christian nationalism"). Yet it remains mum or goes soft on far-left evils: prenatal infanticide, child "transgenderism," classroom sexual indoctrination, political violence, illegal migration, socialism, etc.;
- is a modern [Marcion, neo-gnostic heresy](#) that attempts to detach God's law from His Gospel — seeking the comfort of grace without the confrontation of God's moral standards;
- refuses to implicate and confront progressive "defeater beliefs" (e.g., labeling biblical sexuality "transphobic"). Third Wayism thus makes evangelism harder and the church culturally irrelevant. Helfenbein notes that the most liberal areas are also the least-churched ones; and
- causes pastors to stay neutral/silent on defining moral issues, disarms Christians, and renders the church lukewarm and irrelevant rather than prophetic.

Helfenbein also cites biblical warnings such as Galatians 4:16, Luke 6:26, and Revelation 3:15-16. Message: Truth-tellers are hated, not praised — lukewarmness gets spat out.

Virtue in Being Apolitical?

Related to this is the notion (not necessarily embraced by Third Wayists) that the church shouldn't be "political." Regarding this, consider: It's Christian dogma that "male and female He made them." Yet if Christians then say that for this reason "transgenderism" is morally illicit, they're accused of being "political." After all, the government legislates in this area and "transgenderism" is debated in the political arena.

It's Christian dogma that God said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." Yet if Christians then say that for this reason abortion is evil and must be disallowed, they're accused of being "political." After all, the government legislates in this area and abortion is debated in the political arena.

It's Christian dogma that any marriage beyond the one-man/one-woman model is ungodly and destructive to society. Yet if Christians then say that for this reason same-sex "marriage" mustn't enjoy state endorsement, they're accused of being "political." After all, the government legislates in this area and marriage is debated in the political arena.

The point: One *perhaps* could've made the case for the church not being "political" many centuries ago, when government (royals) was quite distant and very hands-off, and when the worst that happened was that, as Mark Steyn once put it, an "emissary in pantaloons" came around every 10 years and gave you a hard time. (Although the church was political even back then.) But today the government is involved in most *everything*; therefore, most everything is "political." So the Church is getting political if it's involved in *anything*. This means that the only way for it to not be political is to be involved in nothing.



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If the Church is involved in nothing and stands for nothing, it is nothing of great value. It then has little reason to exist.

A Dangerous but Well-trod Path

There is another irony here, too. By refusing to take difficult, counter-cultural stands, the church is acting like what?

A politician!

So in reality, Third Wayists — and again, they ostensibly emphasize being non-partisan, not apolitical — end up being political in what is, to a principled person, a most unappealing way. In fact, what essentially was this strategy was popularized politically during the Bill Clinton years as “triangulation.” What’s more, its architect, Dick Morris (Clinton’s de facto propaganda minister), even [called this ploy](#) the “Third Way.”

Is this the lead you really want to follow, Evangelical leaders, that of an unprincipled, Machiavellian political operator?

And how may history judge you? Consider that some WWII-era churchmen are now criticized for taking the easy way out and not forcefully confronting Nazi tyranny. ([Other churchmen did better.](#)) Will the Third Wayists be thus judged 70 years hence for not confronting today’s evils more forcefully?

Apropos to this, there’s a final irony here. From their movement’s very inception in the early 1900s, fascists called their ideology *la terza via* — “the third way.” In speeches, Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini repeatedly called fascism “neither capitalist nor socialist,” but “a third way.”

None of this is to say that Third Way Christianity’s leaders are fascist. That would be unfair, as, among other things, they’re apparently far too weak to qualify. It is to say this:

When someone starts talking about a “third way,” you’d better watch out. The forces of darkness may just be taking you the wrong way.



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