

HH: Kicking off a series of conversations today, conversations with leading Evangelical figures about politics under President Obama for people who are Evangelicals, and previously either not involved or deeply involved in politics. It doesn't matter where you are. To kick that off, I went to my friend, J.P. Moreland, J.P., a prolific author. Many of you know his work. He's a professor of philosophy at the Biola University at the Talbott School of Theology there, prolific writer, his most recent book is *The God Question: An Invitation To A Life Of Meaning*. J.P. Moreland, welcome to the Hugh Hewitt Show.

JPM: It's great to be with you, Hugh.

HH: Thanks for joining me, J.P. The point of this series of conversations is to reorient people who are a little bit confused, I guess that's right. What do you see in reaction among Evangelicals as President Obama takes power?

JPM: Well, I think Evangelicals have failed to develop a political philosophy that's holistic. I think instead, they've tended to be issue-based rather than having an entire approach to government. And so I have a lot of concerns as an Evangelical about the Obama presidency precisely because I'm a Christian Evangelical.

HH: What kind of concerns?

JPM: Well, the first, as a Christian, the first thing that I see can be understood by the difference between negative and positive rights. A negative right is a right for me to be protected from harm if I try to get something for myself. A positive right would be my right to have something provided for me. If health care is a negative right, then the state has an obligation to keep people from preventing me from getting health care and discriminating against me. If health care's a positive right, then the state has an obligation to provide it for me. As I read the New Testament, the government's responsibility, and by the way, I think the Old Testament prophets say this, too, is I read the prophets in the New Testament, the government's job is to protect negative rights, not to provide positive rights. So as a Christian, I believe in a minimal government. It's not the government's job to be providing

the health care benefits for people. So I will be looking to see if Obama does things to minimize the role of government in culture, and to provide for as much human freedom as possible.

HH: Now we'll go down a couple of issues after the break, but I'd like to begin because a lot of pastors look to you, J.P. Moreland, they've been reading your work for years, you're out there in the churches throughout the United States giving seminars, et cetera. What kind of role do they have going forward? Obviously, a lot of them are very leery about touching on politics in the pulpit. **What do you expect of pastors in this new age?**

JPM: Well, I think they've got to do the opposite. **I think that Christians believe the Bible has something to say about everything.** The Bible has something to say about science, it has something to say about sex in marriage, it has something to say about money. **Well why wouldn't the Bible has something to say about the state? It doesn't make any sense to me that the Bible would be silent about this one topic when it has something to say about virtually everything else including art, history and so on. So I think what pastors have to do is to simply teach their congregations and lead by example about what the Bible says about the role of the state in public life.** I think it's more important to teach a general political theology than it is to get involved in specific issues from the beginning, because it's going to be your political philosophy that informs those issues. And so **if I were a pastor, I would begin to develop a theology about what the Bible says about the role of the state.**

HH: And that's where we started this conversation. Obviously, you started from that first principle of negative/positive rights. But if you're just a pastor out there, or you're someone who wants to go to their pastor and say you know, we really, we blew it, we didn't get involved in politics, we didn't take a stand on anything, and now we're in the most left-leaning moment in American history. Would you agree with that, J.P.?

JPM: I would absolutely agree with it, and I think that we have to understand today, and this is something that pastors need to understand, that to be left-leaning in these days means to be

secular. And so one concern that the Christian Church will have towards the movement of politics to the far left is that this represents the secularization of American culture, and the minimalization of religious ideas. You know, Richard John Neuhaus made the point that once religion is taken out of the public square, the state will become totalitarian, because according to Neuhaus, it was the state's job to protect and preserve human rights, and to mediate the authority of the state to the people and conversely. And I think pastors have a responsibility to teach about a whole range of issues from a Christian perspective. Let me give you another example, Hugh. As I understand that love and compassion have to be voluntary, you can't force someone to show compassion to someone, but the state does its job by coercion in taxes, and it forces money in one direction as opposed to another. It follows from this that the state can't show compassion. The state can mete out justice, but it cannot show compassion if compassion is in fact voluntary. It would seem to me, then, as a Christian view of the state, that it is not the state's job by and large to be showing compassion, but rather to be enforcing criminal justice and so on. If I were a pastor then, I would be emphasizing the fact that it is primarily charities' job to show compassion, not the state's.

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HH: And before I go back to my topic, J.P., what's this all about? Is this an answer to the Hitchens gang?

JPM: Yeah, The God Question is primarily a book that I wrote to be used as a handout to an unbeliever who is skeptical about Christianity or God's existence, thinks God's Santa Claus, but would be willing to read something. And what I try to do is I try to express the idea in here that it is extremely rational to believe there is a God, and that Christianity is really true. And then I close the book with five chapters on now that I'm convinced that there may very well be a God, and that Jesus Christ may be His Son, how can I enlist as Jesus follower without becoming religious. And so it's largely a book that's addressed to that cynic or that critical uncle that shows up at Thanksgiving and has skeptical problems with religion, but would be willing to read

something.

HH: Interesting, The God Question is linked over at Hughhewitt.com. Now J.P., back to the motive I had in calling you, and there will be other people like you in the weeks ahead on the Hugh Hewitt Show, which is I think the Evangelical movement has hit the rocks. I think they don't know what to do politically, and I think that there are a lot of people who are wondering what to do politically. And in a very practical sense, I think there are a lot of pastors and a lot of lay leadership wondering what should we do. In a very practical way, what's your recommendation to a pastor who thinks that okay, the country's gone very far to the left, or to his lay board that thinks he needs to step up and get involved without endorsing people from the pulpit which is verboten under the tax code.

JPM: Sure.

HH: What practical steps do you advise?

JPM: **First practical step is that we simply have got to realize that we must mobilize our people to vote.** Being involved in politics is not unchristian. In fact, it's a part of our calling as Christians. Why? Because we are supposed to do good to all people including the household of faith. And to do good to all people means establishing just laws and a just and a stable social order. And that's the job of the state. It's political. **So the first thing a pastor should do and the Church should do is to enlist people like the dickens to be involved in the political process and vote. It is unconscionable that we have these rights, and that we have an obligation as disciples of Jesus to try to bring goodness and truth to society, that we don't use all means available to promote just laws and a just and stable social order through the political process. And so voting is absolutely critical. That's step one.**

HH: Would you recommend pastors preach from the pulpit on the necessity of registering to vote?

JPM: Oh, there's no question about it. Absolutely. In fact, it's a

derelict of duty if a pastor does not, in a free society like ours, where we have an opportunity to be a part of promoting a just society and good, stable and social order with regard to laws and politics not to encourage from the pulpit that people become informed on these issues, vote, and so on. Absolutely.

HH: All right, step two?

JPM: Step two, there should be teaching about four topics – first, the culture of life. It is important to vote for a political party that seeks to promote a culture of life. That's a Christian value. Second, we ought to be promoting a minimal view of the government that follows from my distinction about negative and positive rights. The government has a very limited role in culture as far as the New Testament is concerned. Third, we ought to promote a government that seeks to maintain control over crime and has a strong anti-crime policy. And then finally, it is primarily the job of charity and the local church to care for the poor, and to be involved in that kind of outreach. It is not primarily the state's job. And so what a pastor should be doing is teaching and leading by example in his church about reaching out to the poor, providing education, food, clothing and job training, and doing it through charities rather than the coercive machinery of the state.

HH: Now J.P. Moreland, if there's a liberal driving around, and I know there are, there are hundreds of thousands of them, actually, driving around and listening to you, and I hope they read your book, The God Question, but that's a recipe for having Evangelical pastors endorsing the Republican Party.

JPM: Well, if the Republican Party is closer to a Christian view, then so be it. If the Democratic Party's closer, then so be it. I'm a Republican at this point, because I find that its policies, when Republicans are acting like Republicans, tend to be closer to my read of the Old and New Testaments than the Democratic Party. So I don't vote Republican because I care about Republicans, or because I'm politically conservative for its own sake. I'm political conservative because I think that's the view that the Old and New Testaments teach, and I've done a fair amount of study about this. Now I could be wrong, but that's my conviction. And I

think I've read the Scriptures fairly clearly on these questions.

HH: Do you think pastors will get into trouble ... I mean, they're all going to say to you, that's very nice, but I'm going to have my Democrats leave, and they're going to take their contributions with them, and then they're going to call the IRS and I'm going to get audited. And I just as soon talk about the Beatitudes, and not connect them up to voting.

JPM: Well, if you keep doing that, then what you're creating is a secular-sacred split in the lives of your parishioners. They can allow Jesus Christ to have something to say about their private spiritual lives, but Jesus Christ is not allowed to say anything when it comes to their public life. I find that kind of discipleship to be completely unacceptable. If as a Christian, and those who are listening aren't Christians need to understand, that those of us who are Christians want to seek to follow Jesus as best we can with all our flaws and all of our problems, but that's our goal. It would follow, then, that we should want to follow Jesus throughout all of life including life as citizens of the state if the New Testament and Old Testament teach on that, and it does.

HH: Is it malpractice, J.P. Moreland, for an Evangelical pastor to be silent on such things?

JPM: Well, absolutely. I mean, how could a pastor refrain from teaching what the Bible has to say about the important issues of our day that his or her parishioners have got to face? The Bible is not silent on these matters. I say again, Hugh, Christians believe the Bible has something to say about science and religion. Christians believe the Bible has something to say about abortion and euthanasia, about economics, about money, about marriage. Why all of a sudden do we think the Bible doesn't have anything at all to say about the state and the political life? Why that just makes no sense whatsoever. The problem is not that the Bible doesn't teach about these things, the problem is that the Church is illiterate because there's been a lack of teaching on it.

HH: This is not a religious program. This is a secular program. But the Evangelicals have been routed. They've been absolutely destroyed at the polls, and they're sitting there on the sidelines wondering what happened, where did we go wrong, why is this government so far left. And J.P., how urgent are the times? And how urgent the repair of the Evangelical project in politics?

JPM: It's extremely urgent, Hugh, for precisely the reason that you signaled. Evangelicals have withdrawn, they have been routed as you pointed out, and the culture is moving rapidly toward Europe. It's becoming increasingly secularized. And anyone who's concerned about the secularization of culture should be concerned that a major portion of the population, the Evangelical vote, be increasingly articulate and understand what it believes and why in this arena.

HH: And do you see hopeful signs in that regard?

JPM: I do see hopeful signs, because I think more and more Christians are tired of having Jesus Christ simply be a private part of their lives, and they want to be involved in the public arena. I will say there's one important link to this whole thing that I haven't mentioned yet, and that is that the key to an Evangelical political involvement is what is called natural moral law. Natural moral law is the belief that there is objective morality that can be known by all people from Creation, without the Bible. Natural moral law teaches that there is a right and wrong in the Created world, that can be known by people, without having to turn to the Bible. This is important because the Evangelical does not want to place the state under Scripture. That would be to create a theocracy, and that has never been a good idea. What we want is we want to place the state under the natural moral law. Therefore, if an Evangelical is going to be for traditional marriage, and it's going to be against gay marriage, it cannot use Scripture to argue that case in the public square. It can be preached from the pulpit that this is a Biblical view, but when it comes to political engagement, it is not our attempt to place the state under the Bible, but to place it under the natural moral law. So it would follow, then, that Christians need to learn how to provide independent arguments for traditional

marriage that do not require premises from the Scriptures.

HH: And on any other issue as well.

JPM: Say it again?

HH: And on any other issue.

JPM: Oh, yeah, I was just using that to illustrate, absolutely on any other issue. So it's perfectly legitimate for pastors to teach what the Bible teaches about a range of issues, but if we're going to be involved in a pluralistic culture, we want to bring the state under the objective natural moral law rather than bring it under Scripture, because we do not want to create a theocracy.

HH: J.P. Moreland, I appreciate so much your time. I look forward to reading your new book, The God Question, and I'm so glad I got you to kick this series of conversations off. Well done and thank you.

End of interview.

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