

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER:

A FRESH LOOK AT SHARED CULTURAL VALUES BETWEEN PROGRESSIVES AND EVANGELICALS

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COME LET US REASON TOGETHER:

A FRESH LOOK AT SHARED CULTURAL VALUES BETWEEN PROGRESSIVES AND EVANGELICALS

"Come Let Us Reason Together" represents a bold attempt to move beyond the stale "culture wars" rhetoric that has both skewed and stultified Evangelical social engagement. I hope that Evangelicals and progressives will both have the courage to take up this call to move toward solving real problems and beginning new conversations.

Randall Balmer, Ph.D.

Professor of Religion, Barnard College, Columbia University; author of Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America: An Evangelical's Lament

At Faith in Public Life, we are dedicated to working with religious leaders from across the ideological spectrum to expand the faith and values agenda. We have worked with courageous evangelical leaders from across the country on issues such as domestic and global poverty, immigration, climate change, and human rights—often in coalition with secular organizations. "Come Let Us Reason Together" demonstrates that our work together need not circumvent the challenging terrain of the culture issues. By understanding and respecting one another's deeply held principles, progressives and evangelicals from across the political spectrum can find common ground solutions that offer real progress, such as reducing the need for abortions, affirming an appropriate place for religion in the public square, and respecting the human dignity of our fellow gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. This course finally takes us beyond the divisive and paralyzing rhetoric of the culture wars. We can move mountains together if we engage each other in the spirit and purpose laid out by Third Way.

Katie Barge

Director of Communications Strategy, Faith in Public Life

Throughout my professional career, I have sought to build coalitions and consensus as that is how lasting efforts best are achieved. The Biblical model of interdependence is not just a nice idea; rather it's a necessary context for people working together to achieve positive results. When I was introduced to Third Way, and their desire to actually engender discussion between alienated groups, I was intrigued and happy to participate. After working with Third Way this year in crafting a response to progressives about Evangelicals, I believe that our efforts are well intentioned and deserve serious consideration by both sides of this aisle. In my world, Christ will judge the heart; others can only judge our efforts and the fruit it bears. I pray this paper will bring about good fruit and it will be received with open minds and hearts by my fellow Evangelicals.

Joe Battaglia

Founder and President, Renaissance Communications

As a co-author with Third Way of the paper "Come Let Us Reason Together," I stand proudly in solidarity with the paper's spirit and recommendations. The Bible tells us there is a time and a season for all things. For too long, we have lived in a time of extreme ideological polarization. The time is upon us now for healing. There is a new spirit of reason in America among both Evangelicals and progressives. It is evident not only in the

new guard of leaders but among the tens of thousands of Evangelical young people we have worked with in Redeem the Vote who are craving a path forward that prioritizes Americans living better lives over politicized divides. "Come Let Us Reason Together" identifies important concrete policies that Evangelicals and progressives can agree constitute progress: reducing the need for abortions, affirming unequivocally the God-given dignity of gay and lesbian persons, placing responsible limits on the treatment of human embryos, supporting fatherhood, and honoring a role for religion in the public square. These proposals provide a promising bridge from the divisiveness of the culture wars into a new day of hope and progress.

Randy Brinson, MD

Founder and Chair, Redeem the Vote

It is important that Christians be agents of reconciliation and that they overcome the belligerency that is all too common in the cultural wars. "Come Let Us Reason Together" is an important move to create common ground wherein Evangelicals and Progressives can work together to achieve a common good that they want to see realized in America. The time has come to eliminate the polarization that has so often characterized Christians on social issues. The Third Way is a move in that direction.

Tony Campolo, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus, Eastern University; President, The Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education; author of Letters to a Young Evangelical and 33 other books

"Come Let Us Reason Together" is a fresh, clarion call to rethink old assumptions, both about who Evangelicals and progressives are and about the intransigence of the so-called culture wars. Against the stereotype of Evangelicals as a monolithic group that is obsessed with a narrow set of hot-button issues, it confirms the emergence of a strong Evangelical center that cares about transforming hearts *and* institutions, that supports a broad policy agenda, and that is committed to building bridges with others of good will. Against the stereotype of progressives as a group that is hostile to religion and deaf to many Evangelical concerns, Third Way's common ground proposals are evidence of a progressive movement that is committed to a legitimate public role of religion in American life and to finding practical solutions to difficult issues such as Third Way's proposal for reducing the need for abortions. Finally, this much-needed initiative urges both groups to moral high ground with its call to respect the human dignity and sacredness of all people, including gay and lesbian people, and the recommendation of the Golden Rule as a guide to good government. These findings and proposals based on shared values mark a new path that, if taken, would lead to more civility and new conversations at a critical time in our nation's life.

David P. Gushee, Ph.D.

Distinguished Professor of Christian Ethics, McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University; author of The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center

In a political climate where divisiveness holds too much sway, we welcome The Third Way's efforts to find common ground and to discuss our differences respectfully and responsibly. Third Way's statement on the role of religion in the public square is an

accessible, helpful starting point for dialogue that shows that religious and political leaders can have meaningful and useful conversations while respecting the constitutional separation of religion and government that is so essential to American life.

Rev. Cedric Harmon

Associate Field Director for Religious Outreach, Americans United for Separation of Church and State

I wholeheartedly endorse Third Way's project, "Come Let Us Reason Together." For too long, Evangelicals and progressives have been paralyzed by distrust of one another and have been unable to make progress on the important cultural issues of our times. Both groups have tried to lecture each other rather than focusing on solving problems together. But we can impact climate change in the political world as well as the natural world. There is a rising chorus of Evangelical Christians who want to work with God as redeemers in a messy world—who want to build toward God's ideal from the imperfect present. "Come Let Us Reason Together" is a call for courage from both Evangelicals and progressives to move beyond the old warring categories and to work for the good we can do that is right in front of us. Without either group compromising its principles, we can cooperate in that which furthers our shared goals. This paper puts forth real policy solutions on critical issues such as reducing the need for abortion and respecting the God-given human dignity of all people, specifically gay and lesbian people. It serves as a foundation for future cooperation and the common good.

Rev. Dr. Joel C. Hunter

Senior Pastor, Northland, A Church Distributed (Longwood, FL); author of Right Wing, Wrong Bird

I'm of the generation that is skeptical of labels. The way that both terms "evangelical" and "progressive" are bandied about in today's media-heavy age makes me uneasy. Yet the chord struck by "Come Let Us Reason Together" is just right: it's accommodating and nuanced, allowing for differences while seeking common ground. Honestly, the only way forward for any of us during these polarized times will be through conversations just like this. I heartily endorse this paper and the men and women who are behind it.

Tony Jones

National coordinator of Emergent Village; author of The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier

"Come Let Us Reason Together" provides just the framework we need to help people stop talking about each other and start talking with each other. Particularly around issues related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, the key agreements it suggests offer common ground for Evangelicals and progressives to begin meaningful dialogue that will build community while celebrating individual gifts.

Rev. Harry Knox

Director, Religion and Faith Program, Human Rights Campaign Foundation

As an organization dedicated to promoting improved intergroup and interreligious relations, the Anti-Defamation League welcomes the publication of the thoughtful Third Way Culture Program document "Come Let Us Reason Together: A Fresh Look at Shared

Cultural Values between Progressives and Evangelicals." The paper's creative and forward-looking approach is valuable.

"Come Let Us Reason Together" has the potential to help break down preconceived notions held by Evangelicals and progressives about the place of religion in society. The document wisely does not attempt to provide a blueprint for resolving all of the evitable disagreements about these polarizing issues—that would be impossible. But "Reason Together" provides a useful common framework for discussion—and its promotion of civility and need to search for shared values on these highly-charged issues is very welcome.

Michael Lieberman

Washington Counsel, Director, Civil Rights Policy Planning Center, Anti-Defamation League

More and more people agree: bipolar politics isn't working. We need to transcend the polarized and paralyzed discourse that characterizes both our political and religious worlds. Many of us are seeking to move to higher ground and find common ground as we work together for the common good. I am grateful for the energetic and intelligent leadership Third Way is contributing to this important work, discerning and building on shared values between Evangelicals and Progressives. Going beyond the unacceptable impasses of the past and present, Third Way's ideas and concrete proposals provide a promising beginning for new conversations in the future.

Rev. Brian McLaren

Author, speaker, pastor, and networker among innovative Christian leaders, thinkers, and activists; author of Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope

In my early days of ministry I focused on what I believed, who agreed with me, and how we would network. The only problem is, it led to living an isolated, if not monastic, and cocooned faith in a globalized and connected world. I learned if I wanted to be a part of shaping ideas and the landscape, it wasn't enough to hang out with people who agreed with me—I had to learn to interact with those that took opposite positions and hear them out. That can be scary, because in the process of wanting to change others—we sometimes wind up changing! There has never been a time when cultures and people are more divided while at the same time being more connected than today. Isolation is not an option. We cannot communicate with the world if we cannot communicate with one another.

I love what Third Way is doing and their paper, "Come Let Us Reason Together." I definitely find myself on the evangelical side of the equation. Having worked with people of different religions and governments and nationalities, I love it when I can sit down and talk without there being defensiveness—just converse and ask hard questions without being labeled—and let others ask me their hard questions. It's actually fun, and often it leads to close friendships. I definitely don't always agree with someone who may have a different position from me, but I can learn from everyone. Sometimes it's easier to talk to

a third party than a relative! As people who call ourselves believers, it's time we start talking. Thanks, Third Way.

Rev. Bob Roberts

Pastor, Northwood Church (Keller, TX); author of Glocalization: How Followers of Christ Engage the New Flat Earth

There are real and important differences between many evangelicals and progressives on issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and religious liberty. But, as "Come Let Us Reason Together" demonstrates, those differences do not mean that there is no common ground on these matters, and it certainly does not mean that there is no point in talking to one another. For example, I applaud Third Way for noting that we can affirm a vital role for religion in the public square, while respecting the constitutional prohibition on government-backed religion, and I look forward to further conversations in this area. On these and other matters, this document helps us to reach across religious and political lines for conversation, identify places where common ground has been hidden by mistrust or mischaracterization, and foster a climate of respect. Thanks to Third Way for its leadership on all these fronts.

Melissa Rogers, J.D.

Visiting Professor of Religion and Public Policy, Wake Forest University Divinity School; former Director, The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

This remarkable paper represents a vitally needed breakthrough in reshaping the political and religious discourse of America. As one associated with a segment of the American community that is notably progressive politically and long engaged with interfaith dialogue and coalition building, I know that the values, goals and policies suggested here will resonate deeply with the American Jewish community. That this call for common ground is set in the context of commitment both to vibrant religious expression and the establishment clause (an idea first propagated in this nation by Evangelicals) will be a source of great encouragement to, and will evoke engagement from, a wide range of progressive religious communities including my own.

Rabbi David Saperstein

Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

I not only endorse but celebrate the effort of The Third Way Culture Program to work at finding common ground where evangelicals and progressives can stand arm in arm. The polarization in American life profits none of us. In the end we will not all agree, nor should we. To get together across the Grand Canyons that divide us will be wrenching work. But working together on our shared convictions seems the only way forward. This is a creative effort that offers concrete proposals to bridge these divides, and it will open the door to real steps forward. It can mean a better America for our grandchildren. It is an effort worth failing at!

Walter B. Shurden, Ph.D.

Callaway Professor of Christianity and Executive Director, The Center for Baptist Studies, Mercer University; author of Not An Easy Journey: Some Transitions In Baptist Life and numerous other books

"Come Let Us Reason Together" is a significant effort with potential to contribute substantially to improving understanding, deepening dialogue and locating common ground between two communities who mistrust and are ignorant of each other. One need not agree with every word or claim in this document to recognize that such growing understanding would improve the conversation about public policy and thereby contribute to the common good of our nation. Whether the results of such an honest, open dialogue would eventually help Democrats or Republicans depends on future decisions of both parties and is not in any way why I think large numbers of evangelicals should read this document and engage in the dialogue it recommends. Rather, I support "Come Let Us Reason Together" both because I think honest, respectful dialogue is always good and second because I believe that identifying more clearly the common ground that does exist on the issues discussed in this document would contribute to the well-being of our country.

Ronald J. Sider, Ph.D.

President, Evangelicals for Social Action; author of The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience and 28 other books

There is one Lord Jesus Christ, and He has many issues for all peoples. Tragically, the Democratic and Republican parties each have an attenuated sense of some - but are tone-deaf to the others. Nowhere has the failure to be faithful and to listen to one another been more acute than on issues underlying the so-called culture wars. Now is the time to call for reconciliation of differences and to hold both the Republicans' and the Democrats' feet to the Fire, the Holy Spirit of Truth.

Third Way's "Come Let Us Reason Together" is a timely, heroic, small but significant step in that direction. Evangelical Biblical teaching has been a progressive force in American history. Evangelicals were key supporters of civil rights, economic-empowerment, public schools and religious freedom to name just a few. Historic Evangelical teaching is radically progressive – not conservative or liberal – so political progressives can certainly be natural co-laborers for the Lord's issues. Therefore, without qualification I heartily endorse the vision and initial efforts of *Third Way*, and offer my encouragement and assistance in whatever means possible.

Paul de Vries, Ph.D.

President, New York Divinity School; Board member, National Association of Evangelicals

"Come Let Us Reason Together" is a hopeful and productive effort to bring people together to work on some of the difficult, but crucially important, issues of public policy. Recognizing that religion informs many policy debates and should be treated respectfully is a prerequisite for moving beyond stereotypes and building bridges in ways that Evangelicals and Progressives say are important.

J. Brent Walker

Executive Director, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

As one who has been labeled a "progressive Evangelical," I applaud this effort by Third Way to develop common ground between the two. The public discussion about and between Evangelicals and progressives has been dominated by too many false

choices and too much mutual misunderstanding. Third Way's statement on the role of religion in the public square is an important foundation for creating better understanding and clarifying real choices. And the heart of the paper, "Come Let Us Reason Together," provides significant common ground that opens the door for serious dialogue on divisive issues. Progressives and Evangelicals are people who care deeply about the justice and health of our society; and potential alliances between us on key issues could provide a genuine convergence for the common good. This paper is a clear step forward and I look forward to further conversations.

Jim Wallis

President and CEO, Sojourners/Call to Renewal; author of God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It

"Come Let Us Reason Together" is the result of careful research, creative policy thinking, and frank dialogue. It shows that there is common ground on many socially divisive issues, and that if people of good faith talk together they can craft proposals that might heal the wounds created by the culture wars. I highly recommend this study to Americans of all political and religious backgrounds who want to find a way to craft policy on social issues from the reservoir of shared American values.

Clyde Wilcox, Ph.D.

Professor of Government, Georgetown University; author/editor of more than 20 books including Onward Christian Soldiers: The Christian Right in American Politics

Third Way is on the right track. Exodus and Sinai conjoin. Serious Biblical (and rabbinic) teaching meets progressive political action. As a post-Reform rabbi, I move right theologically and left politically, like Niebuhr and Heschel, my teachers. Third Way inspires hope that believers may become activists, and activists come to respect the faithful. Nuanced and learned, you unite us in love and commandment both.

Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf

Rabbi Emeritus, KAM Isaiah Israel Congregation

The relationship of Evangelicals and progressives has been seriously polarized in recent years, many Evangelicals thinking of progressives as anti-religion, many progressives thinking of Evangelicals as benighted authoritarians. "Come Let Us Reason Together" shows that these stereotypes are in good measure false; by no means are all progressives anti-religion and by no means are all evangelicals benighted authoritarians. It then takes the important next step of identifying certain wedge issues on which Evangelicals and progressives can reason together and agree on steps forward, instead of simply locking horns. As a progressive Evangelical, I strongly support this statement.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, Ph.D.

Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology, Yale University; Senior Fellow, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia; past president of American Philosophical Association and Society of Christian Philosophers; author (with Robert Audi) of Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate