

# THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF DIXIELAND POSTLIBERALISM

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## Introduction

Postliberalism, as the name implies, is a critique worked out in relationship to a presumably waning dominant world view. Its rhetorical power and its concepts depend on the reality of liberalism as a prevailing social and cultural reality and common assumptions about the nature of liberalism. But what happens when a critique crafted for one context (northeastern liberal Protestantism) is adopted by others in a different context (white Southern Evangelicalism)?

In this article we argue that the current dominant forms of “Dixieland Postliberalism,” the product of the migration of postliberal theology from North to South, may embody unintended and largely undesirable consequences. First, we sketch the tenets of postliberal theology as a critique of liberalism. Second, we outline briefly some continuities and shifts in southern politics and culture over the last 50 years. Third, we examine the inroads postliberal theology has made among the largest Protestant denomination in the country and the largest single religious group in the South, southern Baptists. We argue that postliberalism’s southern context threatens to transform it from a valid critique of northern liberalism to a sectarian ideology of dominance among white southern Evangelicals.

This analysis provides a lens for seeing how George Lindbeck's and Stanley Hauerwas's longstanding insistence that their positions are not "sectarian" and James M. Gustafson's charge that postliberalism threatens to turn God into "a tribal God of a minority of the world's population" (Gustafson 1985, 92) may both contain kernels of truth: the former in postliberalism's original context of the disestablished North, the latter in the new South. We argue that the vacuum created by the absence of an established liberalism in the southern evangelical context brings out a latent tendency within postliberal theology; southern evangelicalism works as a solvent to erode the already tenuous bonds between a hermeneutics which defines the church against the world and any substantive commitments to pacifism and anti-nationalism. Once weakened, this hermeneutical framework becomes viciously self-justifying and permits white southern evangelicals to marshal a persecuted identity as a means of wielding power. If postliberals are indeed serious about their substantive commitments, they will need to do a better job than they have hitherto at defending against these tendencies.

### **Postliberalism as critique**

Postliberalism arose as a response to the decline and cultural disestablishment of the mainline denominations that began in the middle of the twentieth century. The postliberal critique of liberalism is that it promotes isolated individual selves endowed with rights but few responsibilities, universal truths independent of particular narratives, and an almost-blind optimism about progress and the promise of human reason; above all it is a tradition that has lost a distinctive theological voice through cultural accommodation. Postliberalism resists each of these and emphasizes community, narrative, skepticism about human reason, and distinctiveness. If the motto of modern liberal Christianity was to "Christianize the social order" through work for social justice, the motto of postliberal theology is "to let the church be the church" (Hauerwas 1983).

The major voices of a postliberal theological movement in Christianity have been Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, and most of all, Stanley Hauerwas. For example, Frei argues that seventeenth-century liberalism precipitated a complete "reversal" in how people read the Bible. Before that, the Bible was read to give shape to the "real world" of Christians. Readers adjusted their lives and experiences to fit the forms of life rendered through Biblical narratives. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the European male became an individual self with unalienable rights. This European male "learned a new way

to read the Bible: not as a character in the world structured by the text, but as an individual to whom the text had to speak,” (Frei, 318; Tilley: 1995, 94). Liberals reject the view of humanity as grounded in scripture, and instead seek a foundational worldview. Religious truth becomes something that can be abstracted from the text, and therefore universal spiritual truth can be known independently from a narrative. The Bible is no longer seen as normative, but rather as a source which supports the modern narrative of reason and progress. Frei instead argues for reading the scriptures as a narrative with their own linguistic rules and integrity. This intratextual approach presents the Bible as a story in which contemporary Christians dwell.

George Lindbeck develops Frei’s narrative criticism into a systematic theology whereby he promotes ecumenical unity for all Christians through a cultural-linguistic understanding of religion. While Frei emphasizes the primacy of the biblical narrative, George Lindbeck expands the metaphor and emphasizes the primacy of language over experience. To support his turn from the subject to language, he proffers a theory of religion as a cultural-linguistic complex. Religion is like a language or culture into which a member is born and subsequently trained. Sociality precedes individuality.

Stanley Hauerwas combines Frei’s and Lindbeck’s critique of liberalism and their cultural-linguistic epistemology with John Howard Yoder’s Mennonite separatist ecclesiology and commitment to pacifism. Hauerwas believes that the demise of a Constantinian world view, where the church relies on a surrounding “Christian” culture to prop it up is “not a death to lament” (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 18). He calls the church to embrace its true status as “a colony of heaven,” a group of “resident aliens,” in a strange land (11). The church must put on the armor of God—the defensive armaments of helmet, shield, breastplate—if it is to survive as a counter-culture in a hostile world.

Thus, postliberalism positions itself as a corrective to a dominant liberal ethos that is marked by individualism, universalism, faith in human reason, and optimism in human progress that waters down the distinctive narrative of Christianity. If this characterization of liberal theology is correct and liberalism in this form is uniformly present as a dominant cultural modality, a form of postliberalism can be appreciated as a healthy critique.

A much overlooked and critical fact, however, is that the region of the country with the highest rates of Christian religious affiliation, the South, has never embraced liberalism’s alleged heresies. The seductive attraction of postliberalism in the South stems from a parallel sense of disenfranchisement, but one

that is provincial rather than ecclesial. This crucial difference allows postliberalism to function in strikingly different, sometimes contradictory, ways in the southern context. In order to understand this paradox, we first need to note some peculiarities of southern culture and identity.

### **Southern culture and politics: continuities and transformations**

In C. Vann Woodward's classic treatment of southern identity, he notes the distinctive collective experience of the southern people, especially in contrast to the dominant national myths. The national myths correlate rather tightly with those characteristics of liberalism critiqued by postliberalism: optimism expressed in myths of abundance and success, innocence and virtue, and individualism (Woodward 1993). Rather than economic abundance, Woodward notes that the South has had "a long and quite un-American experience with poverty;" (17) "That they should have been for so long a time a 'People of Poverty' in a land of plenty is one mark of enduring cultural distinctiveness" (18). While the rest of the country has not lost a war, the southern experience of losing "the war of Northern aggression" is emblematic of a southern history that "includes large components of frustration, failure, and defeat" in a number of areas of life, and a litany of "lost causes": the Civil War, slavery, agrarianism, and segregation (19).

And the national myth of innocence and virtue that underwrote the concept of America as the "new Israel" stands in stark contrast to the South's conflicted conscience over slavery, its "Peculiar Institution," which caused it to be preoccupied with guilt and the reality of evil, not with innocence and a quest for perfection (21). Finally, the mobility demanded by Northern industrial society that engendered the notion of an unencumbered and unfettered individual did not resonate in the South. By contrast, southerners have held (often idealistically) to a sense of place and community. As Eudora Welty noted, "Like a good many other [southern] writers, I am myself touched off by place. . . . Place opens a door in the mind" (24).

Two general southern attributes can be extrapolated from these more specific characteristics: a sense of disenfranchisement and a sense of defensiveness. First, the litany of lost causes prevented the optimism of liberalism from ever taking root in the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as it did in the North. Woodward summarizes southern distinctiveness as follows:

In that most optimistic of centuries in the most optimistic part of the world, the South remained basically pessimistic in its social outlook and its moral philosophy. The experience of evil and the experience of tragedy are parts of the Southern heritage that are as difficult to reconcile with the American legend of innocence and social felicity as the experience of poverty and defeat are to reconcile with the legends of abundance and success (21).

Second, the southern defensive posture included the raising of “intellectual barricades against the ideas of a critical and unfriendly world” and the internal “repression of heresy” (199) whenever some key attribute of southern society was challenged. This posture was assumed in both culture and religion. For instance, Woodward notes how, in the years leading up to the civil war, loyalty to the South came to be defined as loyalty to the institution of slavery, despite a plurality of opinions and vibrant debates on the issue prior to the 1840’s. Steven E. Woodworth notes that even after the war, this determination to vindicate “The Cause” resulted in the twentieth-century South becoming the nation’s “bastion of Christian orthodoxy, a role that had never been particularly its own in the nineteenth” (Woodworth 2001).

The South has repeated this sectarian strategy often in its responses to the dismantling of slavery, Reconstruction, and more recently, desegregation and civil rights. In each of these cases, the South found itself under moral attack and increasingly isolated from the world community. It responded by developing “a suspicious inhospitality toward the new and the foreign, a tendency to withdraw from what it felt to be a critical world” (Woodward 1993, 201). These tendencies toward internal purity and external hostility are classic traits of sectarian or enclave culture (Douglas 1998).

Since Woodward first distilled these attributes of southern identity in 1958, the region has undergone tremendous upheaval. By 1990, for example, only the state of Mississippi retained the Old South demographic characteristics of high percentages of Blacks and a majority rural population. The rest of the South had experienced large population growth (during the 1990’s alone the region’s population grew by 19% versus 11% for the rest of the country) and tremendous expansion of the economy, which attracted a more diverse population (Black and Black, 5). Also, population growth has been concentrated in urban and suburban areas; for example, from 1960 to 2000, the population of Atlanta tripled from 1.3 million to 4.1 million. According to the 2000 Census,

more than 84 million people live in the eleven states of the Old Confederacy, making it the most populous regional area in the country. In all of these ways, then, the South now looks more like the rest of the country than at any time in its history.

The South, however, has responded to these changes in ways that carry the mark of its distinctive history, especially the history of race relations among whites and blacks. The most remarkable example of both transformation and continuity can be seen in a shift that just forty years ago would have been unthinkable: the political transformation of “the Solid Democratic South” to a Republican-dominated South. Political scientists Black and Black describe this remarkable transformation as “the Great White Switch” and identify its source as a backlash against civil rights legislation, something seldom explicitly acknowledged by contemporary white Republicans. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, despite the fact that no Deep South Democrat supported it (160), more whites have voted Republican than Democratic in every presidential election, and by the time of Reagan’s presidency in 1984, more southern whites began to think of themselves as Republicans than Democrats (205).

Thus, resentment from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and sustained federal interventionism ran so deep that in the space of less than twenty years, southern whites abandoned the party of their ancestors (something not easily done by southerners) and embraced the party of Lincoln, remade in the image of Barry Goldwater (139). Such a swing made earlier warnings by Democratic leaders ring prophetic, such as the following speech that Josiah Bailey of North Carolina gave in 1938 during a filibuster of an anti-lynching bill:

In the hour that you come down to North Carolina and try to impose your will upon us about the Negro, so help me God, you are going to learn a lesson which no political party will ever again forget. That is the truth. Some may not like me for saying it now, but one of these days those who do not like it will say, “Would to God that we had listened to the warning.” The civilization in the South is going to be a white civilization; its government is going to be a white man’s government. . . . Just as when the Republicans in the [1860’s] undertook to impose the national will upon us with respect to the Negro, we resented it and hated that party with a hatred that has outlasted generations. . . . but we hated it because of what it had

done to us, because of the wrong it undertook to put upon us; and just as that same policy destroyed the hope of the Republican Party in the South, that same policy adopted by the Democratic party will destroy the Democratic party in the South (32).

Black and Black conclude emphatically that “sustained federal intervention was the key to establishing the New South. Nothing was more important” (374). Although southern whites switched parties, their tactic remained “the oldest story in southern politics; securing white majorities in virtually all-white districts”—a strategy Black and Black term “the rule of white majorities” (387).<sup>1</sup> The strategy of harnessing a white backlash against federal interventionism for civil rights—a strategy that finds its contemporary targets in judicial interventions on abortion and school prayer—has proven wildly successful in the new South.

White evangelicals in the new South have two conflicting identities, persecuted minority and establishment, and they have learned to operationalize both, sometimes simultaneously. On the one hand, as Woodward argued, southern identity has been forged historically through experiences of failure, persecution, and guilt brought on by an oppressive external power; on the other hand, it has more recently experienced record growth and power, and the South is now in the position to control the national political agenda. Janet Jakobsen has noted the deception involved in assuming both identities: “The Christian Right is particularly adept at the magic act which constructs the body politic, by managing to be in two places at once, both public and counterpublic, like a phantom which rises behind and, thus, manages to overshadow each” (Jakobsen 1997, 130). Evangelicals such as Baptists in the South have learned to tap both identities; they marshal the persecuted identity as a tool for reasserting their dominant cultural status.

Consider the following remarkable excerpts from the editor of *The Baptist Record*, the state paper of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, which has a circulation of over 100,000. Southern Baptists are by far the dominant religious group in the state, weighing in at just under four times as large as the next largest group, United Methodists (Finke 2001). Ironically, even here the persecuted identity is first asserted and then wielded to reinscribe and extend power:

Such is the sorry state of affairs in America today. We’ve almost returned to the point where Christians have to meet in catacombs and exchange secret symbols for safety. We live in a country that prohibits

the name of God in schools unless that Holy Name is used profanely. We live in a country where the Ten Commandments are outlawed in schools, but children as young as the first grade must take mandatory sex education classes. . . . We live in a country that promotes a special form of elitism and segregation by allowing a separate high school for practicing homosexuals. . . . For a host of reasons, it's not going to be pretty when God rains down His judgement [sic] on America (Perkins 2003a, 2).

Now is not the time in the history of the Christian church to allow internal strife to separate us. The Evil One has made deep inroads into so many parts of our world, including America. With the planet presently awash in warmongering, paganism, perversion, false doctrine, and personally destructive behavior, we must remain unified against the enemy and unafraid of the battles to come. Thank you, Mississippi Baptists, for looking like Jesus to a lost world. It's enough to make a Father proud (Perkins 2003b, 2).<sup>2</sup>

Postliberalism appeals to southern evangelicals not because of an experience of lost ecclesial power, something that never occurred in the South; rather, postliberalism resonates with a provincial cultural worldview forged by a sense of disenfranchisement due to repeated federal interventionism and bolstered by a tendency to sectarian defensiveness in the name of these lost causes. Specifically, by transposing the countercultural orientation to southern regional identity, a move that has a powerful history in the South, white evangelical postliberals can tap the epistemological core of the postliberal worldview; this affinity is so powerful that it eclipses the loss of key northern postliberal commitments, such as pacifism and anti-nationalism that have been sheared off by the transposition. The resulting southern postliberalism is capable of claiming simultaneously to be against “the world” while comfortably upholding the status quo.

### **Dixieland postliberalism**

While the affinities between aspects of southern culture and aspects of Postliberalism should be suggestive at this point, two examples of its operation and presence help illustrate our claims: the clear postliberal influence in a new Baptist confession of faith and the rising number of Baptist students at



Duke Divinity School in North Carolina, arguably the epicenter of postliberal theology.

A prominent example of the adoption of Postliberalism among white evangelicals is a document entitled, “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America” (RBI), written by five southern Baptist men and circulated widely among moderate southern Baptists (Broadway et al. 1997). “The Baptist Manifesto” is largely consistent with Hauerwas’s vision of the church. It is replete with statements about the sins inherent in “the accommodations to modernity and its Enlightenment assumptions” such as “individualism” and “rationalism,” and it ends with a call to “fellow Baptists to say farewell to modernity and its theological offspring” (310). In an early circulated version, the authors note that the purpose of Baptist theology is not to “Christianize the social order” but “to be for the church and the gospel in a hostile world” and they describe the relationship of the church to the world in the following way:

We believe that when God's people live together as a colony of heaven (Phil 1:27; 3:20; Col 3:1-4; Heb 11:8-10), the gift of God's freedom will keep them from the reach of all worldly rulers, powers, and authorities . . . We believe that in the pluralistic society of North America, only a church that is politically and culturally independent can convince its own and others of gospel truth (Rom 1:16). . . .

We reject any attempt to establish a vision of the church, whether Baptist or any other, by means of civil or political power. We thus reject all such Constantinian strategies (5.1-5.3).

Thus, RBI is consistent with Hauerwas’s call for a politically and culturally disestablished church as a “colony” of aliens, and they share Hauerwas’s rejection of the “Constantinian” approach of the Social Gospel movement.<sup>3</sup> While RBI had only a moderate public influence in the late 1990’s, it highlighted a growing network of influential moderate Baptists in the South who were attracted to a postliberal framework.

A second concrete manifestation of the link between Baptists in the South and postliberal theology is the increasing enrollment of Baptists at Duke Divinity School, Hauerwas’s home institution. In 1988, Duke Divinity School opened its Baptist House of Studies with 25 students. By 2004, that number had grown to 117, roughly one-fourth of the Methodist divinity school’s student

body; more than 200 Baptists have graduated from the divinity school in the past decade. The numbers are remarkable enough that they have garnered the attention of the local Raleigh news (Staff 2005). Moreover, in 2001, Curtis Freeman, one of the authors of *RBI*, became the director of the Baptist House, solidifying a postliberal perspective at the school (Wells 2005).

Given the distinctive history of the South, however, this postliberal influence among white Baptists seems peculiar. The rejection of the Social Gospel call to “Christianize the social order” is a rejection of a liberal strategy for social justice that never took root in the South. Its call to valorize cultural disestablishment, to be separate from the world, is almost nonsensical in the southern context; *if anything, southern Baptists have been the world*, the carriers of culture in the region. The Dixieland call to cultural disestablishment by a group of Baptists in the South comes from members of the largest Protestant denomination in the most powerful country in the world. During the second Clinton administration, seven of the eight top elected officials in the United States, including the President and Vice-president, were southern Baptists.<sup>4</sup> In the South, postliberalism loses its critical edge and slides into what can only be called an ideology.

Because postliberalism assumes a defensive posture against the political powers of this world, our critique points to an interesting irony. For example, Hauerwas’s call for the church to “put on the armor of God” is clearly meant as a defensive tactic for the already culturally disestablished northern churches. Freeman, however, acknowledges explicitly “the ironic cultural establishment of evangelical Christianity ‘in Dixie,’” noting that “no group exemplified the Christianized culture better than the Baptists, especially in the southern United States” (Freeman 1997, 276). Even though Hauerwas notes that “military metaphors and marching songs for Christians are frightening when Christians are in the majority,” he underestimates the alarming pervasive and subversive power of the southern evangelical context and fails to guard against it (Hauerwas 2001, 150).

### **Locating the problem**

Evangelicals’ affinity for Hauerwas’s postliberalism reveals a problem with his project: his self-referential and self-justifying affirmations that the church is itself constitutive of the gospel are too easily separable from his substantive views on pacifism and his critique of nationalism. As Jeff Stout has argued, Hauerwas’s “excessive pride in the visible church as a virtuous community” (Stout 2004, 156) and his refusal to emphasize his commitment to any substan-

tive definition of church (other than the church as separate from the world) leaves his position open to cooption by white evangelicals who are all too happy to hear that “they should care more about being the church than about doing justice to the underclass” (158).

The partial appropriation of Hauerwas’s postliberalism by a Texas Baptist church near the U.S. Army’s Fort Hood demonstrates how effortlessly postliberalism’s epistemology can be not only separated from its substantive commitments but also subverted into direct support of the world’s most powerful military, even while paying lip service to Hauerwas’s pacifism. In March 2003, as the U.S. was embarking on what Hauerwas was elsewhere decrying as an unjust war in Iraq, Trinity Baptist Church (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship) in Harker Heights, TX, organized a “Disarming the Powers” prayer rally for families of military personnel who were deployed to Iraq. According to the pastor David Morgan, “the event grew out of an eight-week study of the Lord’s Prayer, relying heavily on the writings of Duke Divinity School theologians William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, a pacifist” (Camp 2003). While the prayer service included prayers for the Iraqi people and a time of repentance for “complicity in the sinful attitudes that lead to war,” the order of worship included prayers “taken directly from old armed forces hymnals,” the lighting of votive candles in the sanctuary to honor military personnel, and the singing of “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” Morgan concluded, “It was one of the most meaningful services I’ve ever been involved in” (Camp). The service was indeed literally “full of meanings,” but they were certainly not all compatible. Hauerwas certainly would have been uncomfortable for his work to be used as a justification for melding Christianity and military might. As Stout has observed, however, Hauerwas has not adequately insisted upon the practical connection between the two, and therefore his pacifism “has more often come across as a quixotic gesture than the demanding doctrine he intended it to be,” with most of his readers treating it as a quaint “side issue” (Stout 2004, 158).

The problem of Hauerwas’s self-referential identification of the church with the gospel can be seen in the striking contrast between Hauerwas’s description of the church’s virtue and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s 1963 description of the white churches of the South from his cell in Birmingham jail:

On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. . . . Over and over I have found myself asking, "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of Governor Barnett dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when Governor Wallace gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest? . . . Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists. . . . Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent and often even vocal sanction of things as they are. But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before (King 1963, 95-96).

Hauerwas's argument that the principle task of the church is to be "a witness" of the gospel to the world strikes a stark contrast with King's indictment of the southern segregationist church—an experience that undoubtedly plays no small role in the lack of traction that postliberalism has in African-American Christian theology. It also contrasts sharply with the posture of Hauerwas's mentor, H. Richard Niebuhr, who argued that "the standpoint of the Christian community is limited, being in history, faith, and sin" (Niebuhr 1941, 86). For Niebuhr, this position implied that an adequate moral vision and witness is only possible when the church is capable of taking in other "revelations" or "external histories" about the world and God's activity in the world in a way that is capable of transforming and even chastening its own "witness":

We have found it necessary in the Christian church to accept the external views of ourselves which others have set forth and to make these external histories events of spiritual significance. To see ourselves as others see us, or to have others communicate to us what they see when they regard our lives from the outside is to have a moral experience . . . Such external histories have helped to keep the church from exalting itself as though its inner life rather than the God of that inner life were the center of its attention and the ground of its faith. They have

reminded the church of the earthen nature of the vessel in which the treasure of faith existed (Niebuhr 1941, 84-85).

Claiming that Niebuhr's "distinction between inner and outer history seems to me to cause more trouble than it is worth" (Hauerwas 1983, xx), Hauerwas counters that "only by writing history on their terms can Christians learn to locate the differences between the church and the world" (Hauerwas 2001, 234).

Niebuhr, however, clarifies that the church's task of "[seeing] ourselves as others see us" is in some sense an "effort to see itself with the eyes of God" (Niebuhr 1941, 88). Furthermore, Niebuhr claims that what the church sees when it looks through such external histories is not a pure church separate from and with a clear witness for the world, but a "finite, created, limited, corporeal being, alike in every respect to all the other beings of creations" (Niebuhr 1941, 89). This human institution must take into account the limited, human character of its founders and sustainers, and must make itself see the inconvenient, frightening connections between such things as southern Christianity and racism or nationalism.

Let us not also forget that Hauerwas's hero, Karl Barth, had to contend with the "German Christian" movement that called Hitler "a prophet" and literally emblazoned the swastika at the center of the Christian cross as its banner. As Stout points out in a critique of Hauerwas, "[Barth] wanted both to utter an absolutely unequivocal 'No!' to Nazism and to counteract the tendency of the confessing church to believe that it could have the gospel without progressive politics. Hauerwas utters his 'No!' to liberalism, but there is little in his work that resembles Barth's active commitment to democracy and socialist reform" (Stout 2004, 155). For Barth, Niebuhr, and King, the postliberal suggestion that the task of the church is simply to "witness" to the world puts the church on a course perilously close to idolatry. Because they clearly saw the danger inherent in any human institution that claimed to constitute "the good news" of God, they could never have recommended that the church simply define itself against the world via a history written on its own terms; rather, they insisted that the church be open to external critique and correction.

Theologies must always be enculturated. Like most cultural transplants, postliberalism produces some unintended and even contradictory results when reproducing itself in the belly of its southern host. In the culturally-disestablished North, the postliberal definition of the church as a separate institution that is constitutive of a separate gospel remains a healthy critique of some

aspects of liberalism and remains tethered to substantive commitments to pacifism and anti-nationalism. When transported South, however, the establishment Christianity of white evangelicalism quietly clips this tenuous link. The elective affinities between the southern sense of defensiveness and postliberalism's self-referential call to distinctiveness are so powerful that postliberalism's substantive commitments themselves become lost causes. If postliberals are serious about pacifism and anti-nationalism, and if they want to continue to receive the benefit of the doubt that the loss of these commitments are indeed unintended consequences, they will need to open their understandings of church to external critique and say more carefully why pacifism and anti-nationalism are integral to the postliberal view. And if white southern evangelicals want to adopt postliberal theology with integrity, they must refuse to pose as the "persecuted majority," a status claim that uses a contrived persecuted status to wield power, and must instead speak with a prophetic voice that critiques the temptations to idolatry inherent in American militarism and nationalism.

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## Notes

1. Black and Black delineate three distinct "political universes" that developed in the 1990's: 1) the rule of black majorities among Black Democrats; 2) the rule of white majorities among White Republicans; and 3) the rule of biracial coalitions among white Democrats (Black and Black, 386).
2. It is not insignificant that the lead article on the page following this editorial was a page-length story by the Baptist Press promoting the nomination of Charles Pickering, former Mississippi Baptist Convention President, to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. The article sharply condemns Democrats for filibustering to delay the vote, and tellingly notes that the only two Democrats to vote with all 51 Republicans to end the filibuster were two southern Democrats, John Breaux of Louisiana and Zell Miller of Georgia (*Baptist Press* 2003, 3).
3. For a more thorough treatment of the postliberal strains of "The Baptist Manifesto," see (Jones 1999).
4. *Baptists Today* listed the following in 1998: President Bill Clinton (D-AR), Vice President Al Gore (D-TN), ex-Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-GA), Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS), President *Pro Tempore* of the Senate Strom Thurmond (R-SC), House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO), and Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Robert Byrd (D-WV). In addition, Baptists also claim House Minority Whip Tom DeLay (R-TX), Senate Minority Whip Wendell Ford (D-KY), and Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Jesse Helms (R-NC) (Perry 1998, 3).
5. Ted A. Smith has persuasively shown how Hauerwas, although claiming to extend Barth's

thought, has actually inverted it. Smith states, “For Barth church was constituted *by* the gospel; for Hauerwas church was constitutive *of* the gospel. With this distinction Hauerwas crystallized a turn to culture in one of its strongest forms: The culture of church was not only necessary for the knowledge of the Word but therefore and also the very substance of the word” (Smith 2004, 92).