Too Ugly to Look Up from the Bible: Trump, Israel, War, and the Making of the Exvangelical Conscience

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July 31, 2026

Google Drive: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15Kd8bUjm7zVaKdVIwbPhqjjV68aUZQvc

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Many Americans are leaving evangelicalism without leaving God. Their departure is not always caused by disbelief, secularization, or rejection of Jesus. It may begin instead as a crisis of conscience: the discovery that evangelical institutions increasingly demand moral concessions that faith itself appears to forbid.

Donald Trump has brought this contradiction into public view. Evangelical leaders who once insisted that character, honesty, humility, and sexual morality were indispensable have repeatedly excused their abandonment in exchange for political power. The religious framing of war with Iran deepens the conflict by presenting presidential violence as spiritual warfare. Christian Zionist defenses of Israel's destruction of Gaza create another rupture, especially when biblical territorial claims are used to subordinate the visible suffering of Palestinians.

For some believers, these events do not disprove God. They discredit the religious authorities who claim exclusive power to interpret God. Scripture remains, but inherited readings become morally unbearable. Faith remains, but evangelical identity no longer does.

This paper argues that Trumpism, sacred-war rhetoric, and Christian Zionism are actively producing exvangelicals by forcing believers to choose between institutional belonging and the conscience their own Christianity helped form. The truth on the ground has become too ugly to ignore—and too morally consequential to keep looking down at the Bible without looking up at the human beings before it.

Abstract

The growth of the exvangelical movement is often described as a consequence of secularization, intellectual doubt, changing sexual ethics, or declining confidence in religious institutions. These explanations are important but incomplete. For many believers, departure from evangelicalism does not begin with the conclusion that God is unreal. It begins with the realization that the evangelical institutions claiming to represent God have become morally unrecognizable. The alliance between white American evangelicalism and Donald Trump has made this contradiction increasingly difficult to conceal. Trump's conduct, his surrounding circle of spiritual advisers, the religious legitimation of political aggression, the American war against Iran, and evangelical support for Israel's destruction of Gaza together create a crisis that is theological before it is political. Believers are asked not merely to tolerate morally compromised leaders but to identify their ambitions, wars, and enemies with the purposes of God.

This paper argues that Trump and contemporary Christian Zionism are producing exvangelicals by forcing a confrontation between evangelical identity and evangelical conscience. The effect does not necessarily take the form of conversion to atheism. Many who leave continue to believe in God, follow Jesus, pray, read Scripture, and understand themselves as Christian. What they reject is the interpretive system through which political power has been rendered sacred and the suffering of politically inconvenient human beings has been made invisible.

The doctrine commonly invoked to protect this system is *Sola Scriptura*, but the operative mechanism is more accurately described as closed biblicism: a self-sealing fusion of biblical inerrancy, selective literalism, dispensational prophecy, Christian nationalism, and institutional authority. In this structure, the empirical world cannot correct the interpretation because the interpretation has already determined what the world is permitted to mean. The truth on the ground becomes too ugly to acknowledge without threatening the entire theological system. Gaza, Iran, immigration, political violence, and the character of Trump therefore become tests not only of evangelical politics but of evangelical epistemology. The central exvangelical confession emerging from this crisis may be stated simply: I have not stopped believing in God; I have stopped believing those who claimed exclusive authority to speak for God.

Keywords: exvangelicalism, Donald Trump, Christian nationalism, Christian Zionism, Gaza, Iran, Sola Scriptura, biblicism, evangelical deconstruction, political theology

Introduction: Leaving Evangelicalism Without Leaving God

The term *exvangelical* contains an ambiguity. It may describe someone who has abandoned Christianity altogether, but it may also describe someone who has left evangelicalism precisely because faith remains morally important. In the second case, departure is not the final stage of disbelief. It is an attempt to rescue belief from an institution that has made belief indistinguishable from submission to political power.

This distinction is essential. Public discussions frequently treat religious departure as though a person first encounters scientific objections, textual contradictions, or philosophical doubts and then gradually loses confidence in God. That sequence certainly occurs. Yet contemporary exvangelical narratives reveal another pathway. A believer watches religious leaders excuse conduct they once condemned, praise political cruelty they once called sinful, and bless forms of violence that appear irreconcilable with the teachings of Jesus. The believer then faces an unexpected question: not "Does God exist?" but "What has happened to the people who taught me how to recognize God?"

Donald Trump has intensified that question more effectively than any abstract theological argument could. The evangelical alliance with Trump has required a sustained reversal of previously proclaimed moral standards. Character was once said to matter in public office. Sexual misconduct was once treated as disqualifying. Honesty, fidelity, humility, personal restraint, respect for law, and concern for the vulnerable were presented as evidence of Christian formation. When those standards obstructed evangelical access to political power, many prominent leaders did not merely relax them. They reconstructed Christian ethics so that Trump's violations could be interpreted as signs of strength, persecution, providential selection, or spiritual warfare.

The resulting contradiction became one of the formative conditions of modern exvangelicalism. Sarah McCammon and other chroniclers of the movement have documented how Trump's rise exposed deep conflicts between the moral language in which evangelicals had been raised and the political conduct their communities subsequently demanded that they defend. Trump did not create every cause of evangelical disaffiliation, but he made existing contradictions impossible for many believers to ignore.

Empirical research supports the broader conclusion that people often leave religious traditions because of moral and institutional conflict rather than metaphysical disbelief alone. In a Public Religion Research Institute study, 45 percent of former evangelicals identified negative teachings about LGBTQ people as a reason for leaving, while 34 percent cited scandals involving religious leaders. Loss of confidence in religious teaching was common, but that loss frequently

arose from witnessing the human consequences of the teaching and the behavior of those authorized to enforce it.

The present political moment extends this moral crisis beyond Trump's personal character. Evangelicals are increasingly being asked to provide theological legitimacy for state violence. The issue is no longer merely whether Christians can vote for a flawed candidate in pursuit of preferred policies. It is whether Christian language can be used to convert military campaigns into sacred events, national enemies into cosmic enemies, and presidential decisions into instruments of divine judgment.

That transformation is especially visible in the American war against Iran. Trump and allied evangelical leaders have described the conflict through the language of good and evil, divine purpose, spiritual warfare, and biblical destiny. Reuters reported in April 2026 that evangelical figures were amplifying Trump's explicitly religious framing of the war, presenting it as more than a contest between states and more than a dispute over security or nuclear policy. It was being interpreted as part of a struggle between the purposes of God and the forces of evil.

This rhetoric carries consequences for evangelical identity. A believer may tolerate partisan exaggeration while remaining within a church. It is harder to tolerate the transformation of a discretionary war into a divine command. Once military policy is sacralized, opposition to the war can be interpreted as opposition to God. Civilian deaths become regrettable but spiritually secondary. The moral ambiguity inherent in warfare is replaced by apocalyptic certainty. Political leaders are relieved of the obligation to justify violence in ordinary human terms because they have been inserted into a cosmic narrative whose conclusion has already been written.

The Iran war is nevertheless exposing fractures within the evangelical coalition. A Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted in June 2026 found that 54 percent of evangelical respondents opposed Trump's use of military force in Iran. Trump's approval among evangelicals had fallen to 52 percent from 61 percent the previous August. These findings do not demonstrate that opposition to the war will produce formal religious disaffiliation, but they show that evangelical identity no longer guarantees agreement with Trump's foreign policy. More importantly, they reveal a growing constituency for whom the administration's actions conflict with the Christian values it claims to defend.

The conflict over Gaza creates an even more profound theological rupture because evangelical support for the Israeli state is not based solely on conventional strategic reasoning. For many conservative American evangelicals, modern Israel occupies a place within a prophetic account of sacred history. Biblical promises concerning ancient Israel are applied directly to a modern nation-state. Territorial claims are treated as divine grants. Political events are read as stages in

an eschatological sequence. Support for Israel therefore becomes not simply a foreign-policy preference but a test of biblical fidelity.

This theological structure has made evangelical responses to Palestinian suffering particularly revealing. The devastation of Gaza confronts believers with direct evidence of civilian death, displacement, hunger, bereavement, destroyed homes, devastated hospitals, and shattered communities. Yet within Christian Zionist interpretation, these realities may be subordinated to a narrative in which Israel represents the fulfillment of prophecy and its enemies occupy the role of biblical adversaries. Scholars of Christian Zionism have described how apocalyptic interpretations of geography can transform living landscapes into signs within a prophetic system, diminishing or erasing the people who presently inhabit them.

The rhetoric employed by Israeli political leaders has intensified this danger. On October 28, 2023, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu invoked the biblical memory of Amalek while speaking about the war. The reference was not invented by hostile commentators; it appeared in an official statement published by the Israeli government. Because the biblical Amalek narratives concern an enemy placed under total divine judgment, applying the name to a modern conflict carries unavoidable moral and theological implications, even when defenders dispute how literally the analogy was intended.

The legal characterization of Israel's conduct remains contested. South Africa's case under the Genocide Convention remains before the International Court of Justice, which has issued provisional measures but has not entered a final judgment on whether Israel committed genocide. Israel rejects the accusation and maintains that its operations constitute lawful self-defense following the Hamas-led attacks of October 7, 2023. A responsible theological argument should neither falsely report that the Court has delivered a final genocide verdict nor pretend that the allegation is unserious or merely rhetorical. The case remains active, internationally consequential, and grounded in extensive claims concerning killing, bodily and mental harm, deprivation, displacement, and conditions of life in Gaza.

For the evangelical conscience, however, the crisis does not depend entirely upon the eventual legal ruling. Christian moral reasoning cannot be suspended until every court has completed its work. The visible suffering of civilians already demands attention. A theological system that can look upon mass destruction and ask only how the events fulfill prophecy has suffered a grave deformation. It has ceased to read human beings as neighbors and has begun to read them as scenery.

This is where the question of *Sola Scriptura* becomes central. The Reformation principle is commonly understood to mean that Scripture is the sole infallible or final authority for Christian faith and practice. It does not necessarily mean that Christians must ignore history, reason,

conscience, empirical evidence, ecclesiastical tradition, or the lived experience of suffering. Protestant theologians themselves frequently distinguish classical *Sola Scriptura* from *nuda scriptura* or biblicism—the belief that the Bible can be interpreted without meaningful dependence on history, community, scholarship, or any external source of knowledge.

The system implicated in contemporary evangelical politics is therefore not simply devotion to Scripture. It is a closed interpretive architecture in which selected readings of Scripture are insulated from correction. Biblical authority is fused with pastoral authority, partisan loyalty, national identity, apocalyptic expectation, and media repetition. The believer is told that the Bible speaks plainly, yet the supposedly plain meaning almost invariably coincides with the interests of a particular political coalition. Trump becomes a divinely selected instrument. Israel becomes incapable of forfeiting evangelical approval. Iran becomes Persia. Political opponents become demonic. Palestinians become descendants of ancient enemies, obstacles to prophecy, or abstractions within someone else's sacred drama.

Within such a system, looking at the world becomes spiritually dangerous. The evidence of one's senses may provoke compassion for the wrong people. Historical knowledge may complicate the sacred narrative. International law may impose categories not controlled by the church. Testimony from Palestinian Christians may disturb the assumption that Christian solidarity requires unconditional support for the Israeli state. The suffering of children may awaken a moral judgment that the approved interpretation cannot accommodate.

The truth on the ground becomes too ugly to look up from the Bible.

This sentence does not accuse evangelicals of reading Scripture too seriously. It accuses a particular form of evangelicalism of using Scripture to prevent reality from becoming morally intelligible. The Bible functions not as a window through which the suffering world is seen more clearly but as a blindfold sanctified by the claim of divine authority.

The paradox is that the Bible itself repeatedly resists this use. The Hebrew prophets condemn rulers, priests, and nations that invoke God while practicing injustice. The prophetic tradition does not allow election, covenant, national identity, sacrifice, or religious observance to excuse cruelty. Jesus places mercy at the center of moral discernment, identifies himself with the vulnerable, blesses peacemakers, and commands love of enemies. The evangelical who looks up from an approved prophetic chart and sees the human being beneath the bomb may therefore be moving toward the biblical witness rather than away from it.

This possibility explains why exvangelicalism should not automatically be understood as unbelief. For some, leaving evangelicalism is the consequence of taking evangelical moral claims seriously after evangelical institutions have ceased to do so. They leave not because conscience has become irrelevant but because conscience has become unavoidable. They may reject

inerrancy while retaining Scripture, reject Christian Zionism while retaining Christianity, reject Trump while retaining faith, and reject the religious institution precisely because they continue to believe that God cannot be reduced to its political appetites.

The central argument of this paper is that Trump, the religious legitimation of the Iran war, and Christian Zionist defenses of the destruction of Gaza are functioning as engines of exvangelical formation. They reveal the distance between the God proclaimed in evangelical worship and the power defended in evangelical politics. They force believers to decide whether faithfulness means obedience to the institution or moral resistance to it.

The emerging exvangelical may consequently address God in language that sounds less like apostasy than confession:

I still believe in You.
I no longer believe that my former certainty was faith.
I no longer believe that cruelty becomes righteous when committed by my nation.
I no longer believe that prophecy makes dead children invisible.
I no longer believe that political power is evidence of divine favor.
I no longer believe that refusing to see is the same as trusting Scripture.
I have left the people who taught me never to look up, because when I finally looked, I found my neighbor—and perhaps I found You.

The Evangelical Court and the Theology of Providential Power

Trump's evangelical alliance is often described as a bargain. Evangelical voters accepted a morally compromised candidate because he promised conservative judges, restrictions on abortion, protection of religious institutions, support for Israel, and resistance to progressive cultural change. This transactional explanation is substantially correct, but it no longer captures the full relationship. What began as accommodation has developed into a theology. Trump is no longer presented merely as a useful politician whose defects must be tolerated. He is increasingly portrayed as a providential figure whose defects, persecutions, impulses, and military decisions belong within a divinely directed history.

The distinction matters. A political bargain remains open to moral evaluation. Its benefits can be compared with its costs, and allegiance can be withdrawn when the costs become excessive. A providential interpretation is much harder to challenge. Once a leader is believed to have been selected by God, evidence against him can be reinterpreted as confirmation of his calling. Opposition becomes persecution. Criminal accusations resemble the trials of biblical heroes. Political defeat becomes demonic attack. Recklessness becomes courage. Aggression becomes

strength. The leader's apparent unfitness becomes evidence that God has deliberately chosen an unlikely vessel.

This reasoning initially allowed evangelicals to support Trump without pretending that he exemplified evangelical virtue. He was compared with Cyrus, the non-Israelite Persian king described in Isaiah as an instrument of divine purpose. The analogy permitted a clean separation between personal holiness and political usefulness. Trump did not need to be righteous. He needed only to perform the tasks assigned to him by providence.

The "imperfect instrument" argument appeared modest because it acknowledged Trump's faults. In practice, however, it created a nearly unlimited moral exemption. Once God's purposes were believed to operate through Trump, criticism of his behavior could be dismissed as an inability to understand the mysterious means by which God acts in history. The more improbable the instrument, the more remarkable the providence. Trump's lack of evangelical character therefore ceased to count decisively against the claim that he represented evangelical interests.

This was a momentous reversal. Evangelicalism had long emphasized personal conversion, visible moral transformation, sexual restraint, truthfulness, humility before God, and the importance of a public Christian witness. These standards were not merely private aspirations. Evangelical leaders had repeatedly applied them to presidents, candidates, clergy, teachers, and ordinary believers. The Trump alliance demonstrated that these principles could be suspended when their application threatened access to political power.

The suspension did not remain an acknowledged compromise. It gradually became a virtue. Trump's refusal to repent could be recast as strength. His disregard for ordinary restraint could be celebrated as freedom from political correctness. His attacks on opponents could be described as courage in spiritual warfare. His legal troubles could be incorporated into a narrative of persecution. His lack of familiarity with Christian theology became irrelevant because his instinctive combativeness supposedly served Christian ends more effectively than the carefully formed convictions of less aggressive believers.

The result was not simply hypocrisy in the ordinary sense. Hypocrisy occurs when people fail to observe their own standards while continuing to recognize those standards as valid. The Trump-era transformation went further: evangelical authorities modified the standards themselves. Dominance became evidence of leadership. Loyalty to the leader displaced accountability. Victory became a sign of divine favor. The capacity to injure one's enemies became proof that one was willing to defend the faithful.

Trump's victory in 2024 reinforced this transformation. Reuters reported that he won white evangelical voters by 81 percent to 16 percent, according to Pew's analysis of exit-poll data. The

scale of this support made the evangelical coalition more than one constituency among many. It became an indispensable source of political legitimacy, while Trump became the indispensable vehicle through which many evangelical institutions expected to exercise national power.

The institutional relationship was formalized during Trump's second administration. On February 7, 2025, Trump established the White House Faith Office within the Executive Office of the President. Its stated functions include advising on policies affecting faith-based organizations, coordinating religious-liberty initiatives, facilitating access to federal programs, consulting religious leaders, and working with agencies throughout the executive branch. The office was placed within the Domestic Policy Council, giving religious outreach an organized position inside the administration rather than leaving it solely within the campaign apparatus.

Nothing about governmental consultation with religious organizations is inherently improper. Previous presidents of both parties maintained faith-based initiatives, and religious organizations perform extensive charitable and community work. The theological significance of the Trump office lies less in its formal description than in the relationship between the president and the religious personalities empowered to interpret him.

Trump appointed Paula White-Cain, his longtime spiritual adviser, as senior adviser to the Faith Office. The White House described her as a "spirit-led preacher" and emphasized her previous leadership of Trump's 2016 Evangelical Advisory Board. Other appointments connected the office directly with the Trump campaign's faith-outreach network. The result was an arrangement in which religious affirmation, partisan mobilization, policy access, and theological interpretation became difficult to separate.

The term *spiritual adviser* can give the impression that such figures confront a ruler with transcendent moral demands. In the biblical imagination, the faithful religious adviser does not merely reassure the king that God approves of him. Nathan confronts David. Elijah condemns Ahab. Micaiah refuses to repeat the favorable predictions of the royal prophets. Jeremiah warns rulers who assume that possession of the temple guarantees divine protection. John the Baptist rebukes Herod at great personal cost.

The adviser who performs only affirmation occupies a different role. Rather than bringing the ruler under judgment, that adviser brings divine language under the ruler's control. The political leader is not asked to repent; his opponents are asked to recognize his anointing. His ambitions acquire sacred meaning, while religious authorities gain proximity to power.

This arrangement may be called **court theology**. Court theology develops when religious leaders gather around political authority and interpret the ruler's success, suffering, policies, and enemies as parts of a sacred narrative. Its central function is not necessarily to formulate

systematic doctrine. Its function is to reduce the moral distance between what the ruler wants and what God is said to require.

The danger is clearest when biblical analogy gives way to personal sanctification. At a White House Easter gathering in April 2026, White-Cain compared Trump's experience with that of Jesus, saying that both had been betrayed, arrested, and falsely accused. At the same event, pastors placed their hands on Trump in prayer. Robert Jeffress subsequently described the Iran conflict as a spiritual war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

These statements do more than praise a president. They organize political reality through sacred equivalences. Trump's prosecution is placed beside the passion of Christ. America's military adversary is placed within Satan's kingdom. The president's policies are thereby elevated from decisions that Christians may evaluate to manifestations of a conflict whose moral sides have already been determined.

The comparison between Trump and Jesus is especially revealing. Christianity traditionally understands Christ as the one before whom rulers are judged. Court theology reverses the direction. Christ becomes a symbolic resource through which the ruler's innocence and persecution are narrated. The Gospel does not interrogate Trump; selected elements of the Gospel are recruited to vindicate him.

This does not require an explicit declaration that Trump is divine. The more common process is functional rather than doctrinal. Trump acquires attributes normally reserved for a sacred figure. He is uniquely chosen, persistently persecuted, miraculously preserved, indispensable to the survival of the faithful, opposed by forces of darkness, and authorized to defeat enemies whom ordinary moral rules cannot restrain. His supporters may deny that they worship him while constructing a political identity in which rejection of Trump increasingly resembles betrayal of the religious community.

The language of spiritual warfare is crucial to this transformation. Spiritual warfare divides the world into agents of divine purpose and agents of demonic resistance. Within personal religious practice, the metaphor may refer to temptation, injustice, despair, or the struggle against evil. Applied indiscriminately to partisan politics and international conflict, it suppresses moral ambiguity.

Once war against Iran is framed as warfare between God's kingdom and Satan's, ordinary questions become spiritually suspect. Was military force necessary? Were peaceful alternatives exhausted? Were intelligence claims reliable? Were civilian risks proportionate? What interests influenced the decision? What regional consequences followed? Did the administration possess lawful authority? Such questions do not disappear, but they are subordinated to the claim that one side represents divine good.

Religious framing also changes the meaning of casualties. If the conflict is a tragic contest between human governments, every death constitutes a moral demand for justification. If the conflict is an episode in cosmic warfare, death can be absorbed into providence. The enemy population becomes associated with the evil attributed to its rulers. Compassion is permitted, but it no longer controls the interpretation.

Reuters reported that Franklin Graham praised the Iran strikes through biblical analogy and compared Trump with Esther, who saves the Jewish people from destruction in ancient Persia. A pro-Trump pastor described Trump as a worldly man whom God was using, while Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth compared the recovery of an American pilot with resurrection imagery. Reuters also noted that experts regarded the administration's stark religious justification of violence as unusually explicit in modern American political rhetoric.

The analogies are not interchangeable, but they perform the same political work. Trump can be Cyrus, Esther, a persecuted sufferer resembling Jesus, or the leader of a nation acting against Satan's kingdom. The inconsistency of the comparisons is not a defect because their purpose is not careful biblical interpretation. Their purpose is authorization. Each analogy provides a different route to the same conclusion: Trump's authority participates in a story larger than democratic politics and should therefore be trusted beyond the limits ordinarily placed upon political leaders.

This is where the evangelical bargain begins to produce exvangelicals. A believer may accept that every president is morally flawed. A believer may even conclude that voting requires choosing between compromised candidates. But the demand becomes qualitatively different when the church asks the believer to sanctify what was initially defended as a regrettable compromise.

The progression can be stated plainly:

First, Trump is supported despite his character.

Then Trump is supported because God uses imperfect people.

Then his imperfections become evidence that God alone deserves credit for his success.

Then attacks on Trump become attacks on God's chosen instrument.

Then Trump's political instincts are interpreted as providential discernment.

Finally, wars initiated by Trump are narrated as battles between God and Satan.

At each stage, the space for Christian dissent narrows. A believer who objects is no longer merely disputing policy. The dissenter may be accused of weakness, disloyalty, deception by

secular media, hostility toward Israel, or resistance to God's purposes. The institutional cost of moral disagreement rises until departure becomes easier than remaining silently complicit.

Sarah McCammon has described Trump's rise as a moment that forced many younger evangelicals into soul-searching and fracture. Her reporting does not reduce exvangelicalism to a single political cause, but it shows how the support of familiar religious authorities for Trump compelled believers to reconsider what the evangelical world actually valued. Trump may not have changed every evangelical institution so much as revealed which commitments would survive a collision with power.

The Iran war has made that revelation more severe. In a June 2026 Reuters/Ipsos survey, 54 percent of evangelical respondents said Trump's use of military force in Iran was inconsistent with their understanding of Christianity; 41 percent said it was consistent. Fifty-one percent likewise found the administration's immigration approach inconsistent with Christian values. Trump's approval among evangelicals had fallen to 52 percent, down from 61 percent the previous August.

These figures should not be mistaken for evidence that most evangelicals are leaving their churches. Political disapproval and religious disaffiliation are distinct. Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate the existence of an internal moral constituency that has not surrendered Christian judgment to the administration. More than half of the surveyed evangelicals looked at American military action and concluded that it conflicted with their faith.

That judgment creates a potentially destabilizing question: when a believer's understanding of Christianity conflicts with the conduct blessed by prominent evangelical leaders, which identity must be surrendered?

Some will remain evangelical and oppose the war. Some will change churches. Some will retreat from politics. Some will reinterpret events until the contradiction disappears. Others will conclude that the word *evangelical* has become inseparable from a political theology they cannot affirm.

For this final group, becoming exvangelical is an act of moral differentiation. The person separates God from Trump, Christianity from Christian nationalism, Scripture from court theology, and faith from partisan obedience. The former evangelical may still recognize enduring elements of evangelical formation within the self: biblical language, conversion experience, prayer, reverence for Jesus, concern for salvation, and a desire for personal relationship with God. What can no longer be accepted is the demand that these elements culminate in submission to a political ruler.

Trump therefore produces exvangelicals not only through scandal but through sacralization. His personal behavior creates the initial contradiction, but the religious explanation of his behavior

deepens it. The believer is not merely told to forgive Trump. The believer is told to see providence in him. The believer is not merely asked to tolerate war. The believer is asked to see God's kingdom advancing through it.

The most dangerous spiritual advisers are consequently not those whose language appears strange to outsiders. Unconventional prayer, charismatic worship, prophecy, speaking in tongues, or belief in miracles does not by itself make a religious leader politically dangerous. Dismissing such advisers merely as "crazy" may obscure the structural problem.

The decisive question is what their spirituality does in relation to power.

Does it confront the ruler or flatter him?

Does it defend the vulnerable or make them disappear?

Does it call the nation to repentance or assure the nation of innocence?

Does it submit war to moral judgment or turn war into evidence of divine purpose?

Does it preserve the distinction between God and the president, or does it make the president's cause increasingly indistinguishable from God's cause?

A spiritual adviser becomes dangerous when access replaces prophecy—when proximity to the throne is purchased by assuring the ruler that the throne stands within the will of God.

The exvangelical conscience begins to awaken when that assurance becomes impossible to believe.

The Iran War and Evangelical Moral Injury

The war with Iran represents a threshold in the relationship between Donald Trump and American evangelicalism. Supporting a politician despite his character requires compromise. Describing that politician as providential requires theological reinterpretation. Blessing a war undertaken by that politician demands something more: the transfer of religious authority from the Christian moral tradition to the decisions of the state.

This transfer creates conditions for what may be called **evangelical moral injury**.

The term *moral injury* originated primarily in the study of military experience. It refers to the lasting moral, psychological, relational, or spiritual consequences of perpetrating, witnessing, failing to prevent, or learning about actions that violate deeply held moral commitments. It can also arise from a sense of betrayal by trusted authorities who violate the values they were expected to uphold. Moral injury is not itself a formal psychiatric diagnosis, and it should not be

casually applied to every experience of political disappointment. Its usefulness here lies in describing a wound to moral identity: the discovery that one's community has demanded participation in, consent to, or silence about conduct that the community's own teachings had prepared one to regard as wrong.

The evangelical who experiences this injury need not have fought in Iran, directed a missile, or participated personally in military planning. Political and religious communities distribute responsibility symbolically. Citizens are asked to approve, fund, justify, vote for, pray over, and spiritually identify with the actions of their government. Churches can intensify that identification by presenting national violence as righteous, necessary, biblically anticipated, or divinely commissioned.

The believer may therefore experience several layers of moral conflict at once. The government commits violence in the believer's name. The president demands loyalty to the policy. Religious leaders provide sacred authorization. Fellow church members repeat that authorization. The believer's own conscience then protests using moral convictions that were originally formed inside the same religious community.

The resulting wound is not merely ideological disagreement. It is a rupture in religious trust.

The person who was taught that every human life bears divine significance now watches civilians become strategic abstractions. The person taught that truth matters hears uncertain claims presented with apocalyptic confidence. The person taught that peacemakers are blessed encounters pastors praising overwhelming force. The person taught to resist the world's corruptions discovers that the church has become one of the principal institutions through which the world's violence is sanctified.

In such circumstances, the religious institution does not merely fail to prevent moral injury. It becomes one of its sources.

From Political War to Sacred War

The Trump administration has described its military objectives in sweeping language. An official White House account of Operation Epic Fury stated that the United States intended to "obliterate" Iran's missile capabilities, "annihilate" its navy, sever its support for armed proxies, and ensure that Iran never acquired a nuclear weapon. Whatever strategic arguments may be offered for these objectives, the vocabulary communicates totality, domination, and destruction rather than reluctant recourse to limited force.

Religious rhetoric then adds a second layer. Reuters documented prominent evangelical figures placing the war within narratives of divine purpose, biblical destiny, and spiritual conflict. Robert

Jeffress described the confrontation in terms of warfare between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom. Franklin Graham invoked biblical analogy. Trump's religious defenders repeatedly portrayed him as an instrument selected for an exceptional historical task.

This framing alters the structure of moral judgment. A conventional political defense of war must offer evidence, specify objectives, consider alternatives, estimate consequences, distinguish combatants from civilians, and explain why the expected benefits justify the foreseeable harms. A sacred defense can evade many of these burdens. Once a conflict is placed within a cosmic struggle, the righteousness of one side and wickedness of the other appear to precede the evidence.

The danger is not that religious people bring moral convictions into public affairs. All political judgment depends upon moral assumptions, whether religious or secular. The danger arises when religion removes political action from meaningful moral scrutiny.

A theology of sacred war does not necessarily announce itself by proclaiming a formal crusade. It may emerge through a series of suggestive equivalences. Iran becomes ancient Persia. Trump becomes Cyrus or Esther. Military recovery becomes resurrection. Political enemies become agents of Satan. Strategic success becomes evidence of divine approval. Skepticism becomes weakness or unbelief.

These analogies are rhetorically powerful precisely because they provide moral conclusions before the contemporary facts have been examined. They transform interpretation into recognition. The believer is not asked to determine whether the war is just. The believer is asked to recognize the biblical pattern supposedly unfolding before his eyes.

Once the pattern has been recognized, contrary evidence loses authority. Civilian deaths are tragic but do not alter the narrative. Failed predictions become temporary setbacks. Expanded objectives become necessary adaptations. Diplomatic alternatives appear naïve because the conflict is understood as spiritual rather than political. Escalation can be described as courage, while restraint can be portrayed as surrender to evil.

The biblical analogy therefore does not simply illuminate the war. It encloses it.

The Disappearance of Christian Restraint

Christianity has never spoken with one voice about war. Christian traditions include pacifism, nonresistance, just-war reasoning, nationalism, imperial theology, revolutionary theology, and at times explicit holy-war traditions. Protestant denominations have differed widely in their relations to state power and military force. Nevertheless, serious Christian reflection on war has generally recognized that violence creates an extraordinary burden of justification.

Classical just-war reasoning does not treat the invocation of a righteous objective as sufficient. It asks whether force is a last resort, whether it is authorized by legitimate authority, whether the cause is just, whether the intention is directed toward a defensible peace, whether the anticipated harms are proportionate, and whether noncombatants are protected. These principles have often been violated or manipulated, but their very existence expresses an important theological recognition: political leaders cannot simply declare their violence righteous.

Court theology weakens this restraint by shifting attention from the justice of the action to the providential status of the actor. Once Trump is accepted as God's chosen instrument, his decisions acquire a presumption of sacred legitimacy. The question "Is this war just?" is gradually displaced by the question "Why would God have preserved and empowered Trump for this hour?"

This is not traditional just-war reasoning. It is providential voluntarism. The leader's success and survival become evidence of divine selection, and divine selection becomes evidence that the leader's use of power serves a hidden good.

The circularity is nearly perfect. Trump is successful because God chose him. We know God chose him because he is successful. His military decisions must serve providence because providence placed him in authority. Resistance to those decisions must therefore arise from ignorance, fear, partisan hatred, or spiritual blindness.

The evangelical conscience may initially tolerate this reasoning because it appears to affirm divine sovereignty. Over time, however, the moral cost becomes visible. If everything done by the providential leader can be integrated into God's plan, then Christian ethics no longer limits power. It merely explains why power should be trusted.

Betrayal by Moral Authorities

Moral injury is especially severe when the violation comes from a trusted authority. The injury does not result only from the harmful act; it results from the collapse of the relationship through which moral meaning had previously been learned and sustained. Research on moral injury repeatedly identifies betrayal by leaders, organizations, or other legitimate authorities as a central pathway by which distress becomes a lasting wound to identity and trust.

This helps explain why evangelical responses to Iran may produce deeper disaffiliation than ordinary disagreement over foreign policy. The believer may already expect politicians to manipulate facts and justify their decisions. The injury occurs when pastors, theologians, broadcasters, and spiritual advisers assist the manipulation.

These authorities are supposed to preserve a moral language that transcends the state. Their task is not to guarantee that the nation is innocent. It is to remind the nation that it is not God.

When religious leaders instead present military aggression as a manifestation of spiritual warfare, they reverse their prophetic responsibility. They do not carry judgment from the Gospel to the state. They carry the preferences of the state back into the church and label them biblical.

The believer then confronts betrayal at the level of interpretation. Scripture, prayer, sermons, prophecy, and worship—the very practices through which conscience was formed—are redeployed against the conscience. Religious language becomes the mechanism by which moral alarm is suppressed.

The betrayed believer may ask whether the pastor who once taught mercy actually believes in mercy when mercy becomes politically expensive. The believer may wonder whether the church's opposition to killing was ever universal or whether it applied only to selected forms of killing. The church may condemn abortion in absolute language while treating civilian deaths in war as regrettable statistics. It may proclaim the sanctity of life domestically while celebrating the annihilating power of the state abroad.

The contradiction is not resolved by observing that abortion and war present different moral questions. They do. The contradiction arises from the unequal distribution of grief. One class of life is rendered sacred and individually imaginable; another is rendered foreign, threatening, collective, and expendable.

An evangelical culture that has trained its members to see every unborn child as a unique person before God should possess unusually strong resources for recognizing the individuality of children living beneath American bombs. When that recognition does not occur, believers may reasonably suspect that the operative principle was never simply the sanctity of life. It was the sanctity of life as organized by partisan identity.

The War as a Test of Evangelical Independence

The Iran war has exposed a substantial division inside evangelicalism. In a Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted June 3–8, 2026, 54 percent of evangelical respondents said that Trump's use of military force in Iran was inconsistent with their understanding of Christianity. Forty-one percent regarded it as consistent. The same survey found that 51 percent viewed the administration's immigration approach as inconsistent with Christian values. Trump's approval among evangelicals stood at 52 percent, down from 61 percent the previous August.

These findings do not show that evangelical support for Trump has collapsed. A 52 percent approval rating still indicates a large constituency, especially compared with his standing among the public as a whole. Nor does opposition to a war automatically lead someone to abandon a religious identity.

The findings nevertheless reveal something the court theologians cannot easily admit: evangelical moral judgment has not been fully absorbed by Trumpism.

A majority of evangelicals surveyed could look at a military policy undertaken by the president most closely associated with their political movement and conclude that it contradicted their faith. This judgment preserves a distinction that court theology attempts to erase—the distinction between the actions of the ruler and the requirements of Christianity.

The institutional question is whether evangelical churches can tolerate that distinction.

If dissenting believers can oppose the war, criticize Trump, question Christian Zionism, mourn Iranian civilians, and remain recognized as faithful Christians, the crisis need not produce exvangelicals. Evangelicalism could contain its internal opposition and perhaps be corrected by it.

If, however, dissent is treated as betrayal, the institution will force the identity crisis it claims merely to observe. The believer will be told, explicitly or implicitly, that evangelical belonging requires not only faith in Christ but also loyalty to a political coalition, acceptance of its enemies, and submission to its interpretation of world events.

At that point, “exvangelical” becomes the name not of a theological conclusion but of an institutional expulsion.

The individual may continue to believe nearly everything that once defined evangelical faith: that God is real, that prayer matters, that Christ reveals God, that Scripture bears sacred testimony, that repentance is necessary, and that human beings possess irreducible moral worth. Yet the person can no longer affirm the political obligations that now function as unofficial tests of evangelical authenticity.

The individual leaves because the church has changed the entrance requirements.

Public Opposition and the Failure of Clarity

The broader American public has also become increasingly skeptical of the war. A late-July 2026 Reuters/Ipsos poll found that only about one-third of Americans supported it and that 69 percent believed Trump had failed to explain its objectives clearly. The poll was conducted after

five months of conflict, rising economic costs, American military deaths, and extensive regional casualties.

Earlier polling likewise showed substantial opposition. Pew reported in May that 62 percent of Americans disapproved of Trump's handling of the military action and 59 percent believed the United States had made the wrong decision in using force. Pew also found that relatively few regular worship attenders had heard clergy take a position from the pulpit: 8 percent reported hearing opposition to the war, 4 percent reported hearing support, and another 9 percent heard discussion without a declared position.

The relative silence of churches deserves attention. Silence may represent prudence in communities containing genuine disagreement. Pastors should not turn every worship service into partisan commentary. Yet silence can also become a means of preserving institutional unity at the cost of moral clarity.

The decision not to discuss war is itself consequential when the political movement closely associated with the church is waging it. A pastor who speaks constantly about sexuality, abortion, religious liberty, Israel, national decline, and elections but becomes cautious only when American bombs fall abroad has not withdrawn from politics. The pastor has selected which political matters may receive theological judgment.

Silence also leaves the field open to the loudest court theologians. Congregants searching for Christian interpretation encounter televangelists, presidential advisers, partisan broadcasters, prophetic personalities, and social-media ministers willing to explain the conflict with absolute certainty. The moderate pastor's silence does not create neutrality. It creates an interpretive vacuum.

Into that vacuum enters sacred war.

The Unstable Ceasefire and the Illusion of Providence

As of late July 2026, attacks had temporarily paused while diplomatic efforts sought an off-ramp, but the situation remained unstable. The United States and Iran had moved between escalation, temporary restraint, renewed missile attacks, threats against infrastructure, and efforts by intermediaries to restore negotiations.

This instability matters theologically because providential narratives are usually constructed faster than history unfolds. Every apparent victory is announced as confirmation of divine favor. Every setback is blamed on enemies, insufficient loyalty, or incomplete obedience. The interpretation remains intact regardless of the outcome.

If Iran is weakened, Trump was chosen to defeat evil. If the conflict expands, Satan is resisting God's plan. If negotiations succeed, Trump becomes the providential peacemaker. If negotiations fail, the enemy has revealed its wickedness. If American casualties rise, the nation is called to sacrifice. If the war becomes unpopular, the righteous leader is being abandoned by the fainthearted.

A system capable of interpreting every possible outcome as confirmation cannot meaningfully discern providence. It merely baptizes events after they occur.

The believer who notices this may suffer not only political disillusionment but epistemic shock. The prophetic authorities who claimed privileged understanding appear unable to identify what evidence would prove them wrong. Their certainty is therefore revealed not as knowledge but as immunity from correction.

This realization is often decisive in religious deconstruction. The believer does not merely conclude that a particular prophecy failed or that a particular war was mistaken. The believer discovers that the method used to produce certainty was never capable of recognizing error.

From Moral Injury to Religious Reconstruction

Moral injury does not dictate a single religious outcome. It can produce guilt, shame, anger, betrayal, alienation, loss of trust, spiritual crisis, or withdrawal from the community. It can also provoke moral repair: renewed attention to responsibility, lament, truth-telling, restitution, repentance, and dialogue with a compassionate moral authority. Clinical and pastoral literature on moral injury recognizes that spiritual resources can either deepen the injury or contribute to repair, depending upon whether they deny the violation or enable honest confrontation with it.

For the emerging exvangelical, leaving may become part of that repair.

The person refuses to call evil good merely because trusted authorities have done so. The person withdraws consent from a religious vocabulary that has been used to obscure suffering. The person begins to distinguish repentance from partisan humiliation, faith from certainty, providence from success, and God from the ambitions of the United States.

This reconstruction may involve returning to texts that evangelical politics neglected. The Sermon on the Mount can be reread not as an impossible private ethic but as a judgment upon the Christian desire to dominate. The prophets can be heard not merely as predictors of modern geopolitics but as accusers of rulers who combine worship with injustice. The crucifixion can be understood not as a symbol of presidential persecution but as God's identification with a victim of religious and state power.

Such rereading does not require the conclusion that every use of military force is prohibited. It requires the more elementary conclusion that no president's violence becomes holy merely because Christian leaders stand around him and pray.

The decisive break occurs when the believer recognizes that the voice demanding absolute loyalty is not the voice of God but the voice of the court.

At that moment, the exvangelical may no longer experience departure as abandonment of faith. Departure may become an act of fidelity to a conscience that the church helped create and then asked the believer to betray.

The Iran war therefore produces exvangelicals through a sequence of moral recognitions. The believer sees violence. The believer hears it sanctified. The believer experiences resistance from within the Christian conscience. The believer discovers that the institution sides with the sanctification rather than the resistance. Finally, the believer concludes that remaining inside the institution would require a deeper departure—from compassion, from truth, from moral responsibility, and perhaps from God.

The church may call this person fallen away.

The person may understand it as finally looking up.

Gaza, Christian Zionism, and the Theological Disappearance of the Palestinian

The Gaza catastrophe presents American evangelicalism with a crisis more fundamental than disagreement over a foreign government. It tests whether evangelical interpretation can recognize a human being whose existence complicates a favored biblical narrative.

For many conservative evangelicals, support for the modern State of Israel is not merely strategic. It is theological. Israel is understood as the contemporary continuation, restoration, or prophetic fulfillment of biblical Israel. Promises made within ancient Scripture are transferred directly to a modern state, and political control of territory is treated as evidence of divine intention. Some Christian Zionists consequently regard support for Israel as a religious obligation whose legitimacy does not depend entirely upon the conduct of any particular Israeli government. The Associated Press summarized this position as the belief that Scripture grants the land eternally to the Jewish people and that those who support Israel will receive divine blessing.

That belief does not determine the views of every evangelical, every Christian Zionist, every Jew, or every Israeli. Nor does support for Israel necessarily entail indifference toward Palestinians. A person may defend Israel's continued existence because of Jewish historical vulnerability, the

Holocaust, antisemitism, national self-determination, or ordinary geopolitical reasoning without adopting a prophetic theory of the modern state.

The specific problem examined here is narrower: **a form of Christian Zionism in which biblical entitlement functions as a moral exemption for state power**.

Under this interpretation, the principal question is not whether a government acts justly. The principal question is whether the government occupies the side assigned to it within sacred history. Once that assignment has been made, political conduct becomes secondary. Israel may be criticized tactically, but its fundamental claim to evangelical allegiance remains insulated from events on the ground.

The theological structure can therefore survive almost any evidence. Settlement expansion may be described as the recovery of biblical land. Military domination may become necessary defense. Palestinian displacement may be interpreted as an unfortunate obstacle to prophecy. Civilian deaths may be mourned while leaving the governing narrative untouched. The continued existence of Palestinian society may itself be experienced as a difficulty because Palestinians occupy land that the interpretive system has already transferred to someone else.

The Palestinian does not need to be explicitly hated to disappear.

He need only be made theologically irrelevant.

The Difference Between Biblical Israel and the State of Israel

The word *Israel* performs several different functions that are frequently collapsed into one another.

It can name the patriarch Jacob.

It can name the descendants associated with him.

It can name an ancient people, covenant community, kingdom, or kingdoms.

It can name the Jewish people within later biblical and theological tradition.

It can name the modern State of Israel established in 1948.

It can also name a theological symbol within Christian accounts of covenant, election, church, prophecy, and redemption.

These meanings are related historically and religiously, but they are not interchangeable. A biblical text concerning ancient Israel does not automatically settle the legal boundaries, military policies, constitutional character, or moral standing of a twenty-first-century nation-

state. The modern state possesses governmental institutions, political parties, armed forces, courts, economic interests, competing ideologies, and citizens who disagree among themselves. Like every state, it makes choices for which human agents are responsible.

To identify the modern state too completely with biblical Israel risks granting it something no government should possess: immunity from ordinary moral judgment.

The problem is not distinctively Jewish. Christian empires committed the same theological error when they identified their own expansion with divine providence. European colonizers invoked Scripture to justify conquest. American settlers interpreted territorial expansion as destiny. Christian nationalists treated their nations as chosen instruments whose victories confirmed divine favor.

Whenever a state is inserted directly into sacred identity, criticism of policy begins to resemble hostility toward God.

This fusion is particularly powerful because it protects itself through a legitimate moral concern. Antisemitism is ancient, adaptive, and deadly. Jewish history gives abundant reason to distrust movements that deny Jewish safety, demonize Jews collectively, or single out Jewish political agency as uniquely illegitimate. The October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack, including the killing and abduction of civilians, reinforced the reality that Israeli and Jewish fears cannot be dismissed as inventions.

Yet the existence of antisemitism cannot make an Israeli government incapable of wrongdoing. Nor can criticism of Israel be presumed innocent merely because it presents itself as human-rights advocacy. Both truths must be held together.

A morally serious Christian position must oppose antisemitism without converting opposition to antisemitism into unconditional support for state violence. It must defend Jewish life without treating Palestinian life as a competing theological claim. It must reject collective blame against Jews while also rejecting collective punishment of Palestinians.

The distinction is not evasive moderation. It is the minimum requirement of moral thought.

The Biblical Map and the Living Population

Christian Zionist rhetoric often transforms geography into revelation. Names such as Judea and Samaria are preferred to the West Bank not only because they possess historical roots but because biblical vocabulary places contemporary territory inside a sacred story. American political proposals have even sought to require those names in official usage, while Christian

Zionist leaders have supported annexationist claims on the ground that God gave the land to Abraham and his heirs.

Names are never neutral, but the theological problem does not lie in using an ancient name. It lies in permitting the name to decide the rights of the people currently living there.

Once land is experienced as a divine title deed, the Palestinian appears as a late and inconvenient presence in someone else's inheritance. His family history, village, farm, church, mosque, cemetery, legal claim, and memory become less authoritative than an interpretation of an ancient promise. His existence is empirical; the entitlement asserted against him is sacred. He therefore enters the argument at an insurmountable disadvantage.

This produces a peculiar inversion. The Christian who insists upon biblical literalism may become unable to see the literal human body standing before him. The map becomes more real than the inhabitants. Prophecy becomes more real than hunger. Archaeological memory becomes more real than a living child.

The theological imagination travels backward thousands of years to determine whom God granted the land, yet it refuses to travel a few miles to hear the people presently confined, displaced, bereaved, or dispossessed upon it.

The truth on the ground becomes too ugly to look up from the Bible because looking up would introduce morally disruptive facts.

A Palestinian family has lived here.

A child has died here.

A church has worshiped here for centuries.

A home stood here yesterday.

A person being described as an obstacle to prophecy is a neighbor.

Gaza as Material Reality

Any theological account of Gaza must begin by resisting abstraction. Gaza is not merely a symbol of Hamas, a prophetic stage, a security problem, or a disputed territory. It is a place inhabited by human beings whose lives cannot be reduced to the government or armed group exercising power over them.

The scale of destruction has made such abstraction harder to sustain. In July 2026, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that Gaza contained more

than 60 million tonnes of conflict-generated debris, of which only a small fraction had been cleared. It described repeated displacement, continuing insecurity, damaged services, severe shortages, visible sewage in many displacement sites, and growing health risks for women and children.

These conditions do not by themselves answer every legal question concerning military intent, proportionality, or genocide. They do establish the material world against which theology must be tested.

A religious interpretation that can absorb more than 60 million tonnes of ruins without undergoing moral disruption has become exceptionally difficult to falsify. If destroyed neighborhoods do not alter it, if displaced families do not alter it, and if the prolonged collapse of civilian life does not alter it, one must ask what conceivable event could.

The problem is not that theology speaks beyond what can be seen. Faith necessarily concerns realities that are not reducible to immediate observation. The problem arises when belief is used to nullify what can be seen.

Christianity does not authorize the believer to become less responsive to suffering because a prophetic explanation is available. A theology that makes the wounded person less visible is not transcending the world. It is evading it.

Amalek and the Language of Total Enmity

The theological stakes became especially clear when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu invoked the biblical memory of Amalek in an official statement on October 28, 2023. The reference drew upon a scriptural tradition in which Amalek represents an enduring enemy placed under severe divine judgment.

Israel later argued before the International Court of Justice that the quotation had been taken out of context and that Netanyahu was referring to Hamas rather than expressing an intention to destroy the Palestinian people. That defense matters and should be represented fairly.

Yet contextual qualification does not make the analogy harmless. The name *Amalek* carries a history of total enmity. It identifies an adversary not merely as dangerous but as occupying a transhistorical category of evil. When applied during a war fought within a densely populated civilian territory, such language can weaken the distinctions upon which moral restraint depends.

A modern military campaign requires distinctions between fighters and civilians, political responsibility and ethnic identity, present danger and inherited guilt. Amalek language moves in

the opposite direction. It gathers contemporary enemies into a collective biblical identity and surrounds violence against them with the atmosphere of sacred judgment.

The danger is intensified when Christian audiences, already trained to read current events as prophecy, encounter such rhetoric. They may receive it not as an unstable political analogy but as confirmation that a biblical conflict has reappeared. Palestinians then become adjacent to Amalek even when the speaker formally limits the term to Hamas. The boundaries between armed organization, civilian population, ethnicity, territory, and ancient enemy begin to blur.

The Old Testament—or, more appropriately in interreligious discussion, the Hebrew Bible—should not itself be blamed for this misuse. The texts contain multiple voices, genres, historical settings, internal arguments, prophetic condemnations, laments, legal restraints, memories of trauma, and unresolved moral problems. Jewish interpretation has debated difficult texts for centuries. Treating an ancient command as a simple authorization for modern state violence is not reverence for Scripture. It is the erasure of interpretation.

The problem is therefore not that evangelical Christians take the Hebrew Bible seriously. It is that they may take selected conquest narratives literally while taking prophetic justice, protection of the stranger, limits upon kings, and the moral accountability of Israel itself much less seriously.

The selectivity reveals the political function of the reading.

Texts that authorize possession are treated as permanent.

Texts that condemn oppression are spiritualized.

Texts that define enemies are literal.

Texts that expose national sin are redirected toward someone else.

Christian Zionism as Christian Supersession of Jewish Interpretation

Christian Zionism is often presented as the opposite of Christian antisemitism because it affirms Jewish return, Jewish statehood, and the historical significance of Israel. In important respects it has indeed fostered political support for Jewish security and opposed older Christian hostility toward Jews.

Yet Christian Zionism can also contain a subtler form of appropriation. Christians claim to know the divine meaning of Jewish history, the purpose of the State of Israel, the future destiny of Jewish people, and the eschatological role they are expected to perform.

In some dispensational systems, Jewish restoration is necessary because it advances a Christian end-times sequence. Israel matters, but its meaning is determined within a Christian prophetic chart. Jewish people become indispensable actors in a drama whose conclusion Christians have already specified, sometimes including mass conflict and eventual Jewish conversion.

This is not straightforward solidarity. It can be a form of theological possession.

The Christian Zionist declares intense love for Israel while retaining the right to explain what Israel ultimately means to God. Jewish agency is affirmed politically but enclosed eschatologically. Palestinians are marginalized because they obstruct the scenario, while Jews themselves may be instrumentalized as prophetic evidence.

The result is a theology capable of loving an abstraction called “Israel” more intensely than it listens either to Palestinians or to actual Jewish disagreement.

American Jewish opinion is not identical to white evangelical opinion. Pew’s May 2026 survey found that 83 percent of Jewish Americans viewed the Israeli people favorably, but only 47 percent viewed the Israeli government favorably. White evangelical Protestants were the only religious group surveyed in which a majority—57 percent—held a favorable view of the Israeli government.

This divergence is instructive. It demonstrates that criticism of an Israeli government is not inherently hostility to Jews or rejection of Israel’s people. Jewish Americans themselves distinguish between a people and a government. White evangelicals, by contrast, remain unusually supportive of the government, even though their approval has declined from earlier levels.

The strongest Christian Zionist identification may therefore be found not among those whose lives are most immediately implicated in Jewish history, but among Christians who have inserted the modern state into their own doctrine of Scripture.

The Palestinian Christian as a Theological Scandal

Palestinian Christians create a special problem for Christian Zionism because their existence disrupts the imagined division between biblical Israel and a uniformly hostile non-Christian population.

They are not foreign observers of the land. They belong to ancient Christian communities rooted in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Gaza, Nazareth, and the wider region. They read the same Bible invoked by American evangelicals. They confess Christ. They worship within the geography treated by outsiders as a prophetic stage.

Yet their testimony is frequently less influential in American evangelical churches than that of politicians, prophecy teachers, tour leaders, and organizations aligned with the Israeli state.

This reveals an extraordinary hierarchy of Christian credibility. A Palestinian Christian living beneath occupation or amid war may describe the consequences of Christian Zionism, but an American Christian thousands of miles away claims greater authority because the American possesses the supposedly correct prophetic framework.

The person on the ground supplies experience.

The outsider supplies meaning.

This is colonial theology in its most refined form. It does not merely govern territory. It governs interpretation. The Palestinian Christian is permitted to suffer but not to explain the suffering.

In 2025, Kairos Palestine released a new theological declaration presenting Gaza as a crisis requiring repentance by the global church. The document accused Christian Zionism of making Scripture an instrument of ethnic supremacy and asked how Christian communion could remain credible when churches justify or remain silent before what the authors call genocide.

The legal conclusion embedded in that document remains the position of its Palestinian Christian authors, not a final judgment of the International Court of Justice. The Court's case concerning the Genocide Convention remains pending, with provisional measures and ongoing proceedings but no final merits ruling as of July 31, 2026.

That distinction should be preserved. But preserving it cannot mean refusing to hear the theological testimony. Palestinian Christians are not required to wait for the final page of international litigation before describing what their communities have experienced and what Western theology has done to them.

Their accusation is directed not only at Israel. It is directed at churches that provide religious protection for political violence.

The question they raise is devastating:

What does Christian fellowship mean when one Christian community turns another Christian community into collateral material within its theology?

The Genocide Question and Christian Responsibility

The word *genocide* carries legal, historical, and moral weight. It should neither be used carelessly nor made unspeakable whenever it concerns an allied government.

The International Court of Justice has not ruled that Israel committed genocide. It has issued provisional measures in the case brought by South Africa, while the final determination remains unresolved. Israel rejects the charge, argues that it is conducting a lawful war against Hamas after the October 7 attack, and denies genocidal intent.

A responsible paper must state those facts clearly.

Yet Christian moral responsibility cannot be reduced to predicting a court's final terminology. The believer is not relieved of discernment until judges complete every filing. Questions concerning indiscriminate destruction, deprivation, forced displacement, civilian protection, rhetoric of collective enmity, and the long-term possibility of Palestinian life remain morally urgent regardless of the eventual legal label.

Theology becomes evasive when it treats uncertainty about the strongest accusation as a reason to avoid the visible facts beneath it.

One may dispute whether genocide has been legally proved while recognizing that Gaza has endured immense destruction.

One may condemn Hamas's atrocities while refusing to make Palestinian civilians responsible for them.

One may affirm Israel's right to protect its population while denying that any claimed right of defense is unlimited.

One may oppose antisemitism while condemning state policies.

One may believe that Jewish people possess a profound historic connection to the land while rejecting the proposition that biblical connection cancels the rights of those who also live there.

These statements are not contradictions. They are what moral adulthood requires when two peoples possess histories, fears, injuries, claims, and futures that cannot be reduced to a single sacred entitlement.

When Prophecy Replaces Ethics

Prophecy can orient hope, expose injustice, and remind political power that history is not ultimate. But prophecy becomes dangerous when it predicts events in a way that removes responsibility from the people causing them.

If war must happen because Scripture foretold war, then peacemaking begins to appear futile or even contrary to God's plan.

If Israel must expand because biblical possession remains politically operative, then Palestinian displacement becomes unavoidable.

If suffering signals the approach of redemption, then preventing suffering may seem less urgent than interpreting it correctly.

This is the moral distortion at the center of apocalyptic politics: catastrophe can become evidence that the theology is working.

The believer may grieve the deaths while retaining a hidden investment in the sequence that produces them. The worse the world becomes, the nearer fulfillment appears. Violence is condemned emotionally but required structurally.

Such theology does not need to desire dead Palestinians consciously. It needs only to desire a prophetic outcome for which Palestinian political existence has no stable place.

The theological disappearance precedes the physical one.

First, Palestinians disappear from the biblical story.

Then their political rights disappear from the policy discussion.

Then their suffering disappears from the sermon.

Finally, their removal can be described as an unfortunate but realistic solution.

The movement from sacred map to physical displacement is not automatic, but it is morally intelligible. Once people have been made narratively unnecessary, proposals to remove them encounter less resistance.

The Exvangelical Moment of Recognition

For some evangelicals, Gaza breaks the interpretive enclosure. Images, testimony, casualty reports, destroyed churches, displaced families, Palestinian Christian voices, and the rhetoric of political leaders accumulate until the inherited explanation can no longer contain them.

The believer experiences a reversal.

What had been called biblical fidelity begins to appear as avoidance.

What had been called standing with Israel begins to appear as standing with a government regardless of conduct.

What had been called prophecy begins to appear as political prediction protected from falsification.

What had been called opposition to antisemitism begins to appear, in some settings, as a mechanism for silencing Palestinian suffering.

What had been called Christian love begins to appear radically unequal in its distribution.

The believer may then look again at the Bible and discover that the text is not as politically obedient as the church suggested. Israel's prophets do not treat chosenness as exemption from judgment. Election increases responsibility. Kings are condemned. Land can be lost through injustice. Worship is rejected when separated from mercy. The cry of the oppressed reaches God without regard to the nationality of the oppressor.

This rereading does not require hostility toward Judaism or the Old Testament. On the contrary, it may require greater respect for the moral complexity of the Hebrew Bible and for Jewish traditions that refuse simplistic Christian appropriation.

The former evangelical begins to understand that Christian Zionism was not the Bible itself. It was a modern interpretive construction presented as though no interpretation had occurred.

Once that distinction becomes visible, the entire system can begin to unravel.

The modern State of Israel is no longer biblical Israel without remainder.

A government is no longer a covenant.

Territorial expansion is no longer prophecy.

A military victory is no longer divine approval.

Criticism is no longer antisemitism by definition.

The Palestinian is no longer an obstacle to someone else's sacred history.

The believer does not necessarily become anti-Israel. The believer becomes capable of seeing Israelis and Palestinians simultaneously as human beings rather than assigning one people sacred depth and the other political inconvenience.

That moral symmetry is intolerable to ideologies built upon exclusive chosenness, but it may be indispensable to Christianity.

Looking Up

The central failure of Christian Zionism is ultimately not that it reads the Bible. It is that it has learned to read the Bible without allowing the neighbor to interrupt.

The lawyer asks who possesses the land.

The strategist asks who controls the land.

The archaeologist asks who occupied it in antiquity.

The apocalyptic interpreter asks what must happen there next.

The Gospel asks who lies wounded beside the road.

That final question destabilizes every closed sacred map because it gives moral priority to the person encountered rather than to the identity the system assigned him. The neighbor is not recognized after the theological argument has been completed. The neighbor's existence changes the argument.

Gaza is producing exvangelicals because it has become increasingly difficult to maintain evangelical certainty without suppressing evangelical conscience. Believers are being asked to defend a political theology whose human consequences can be seen in ruins. Some will continue to treat the ruins as regrettable scenery surrounding a necessary biblical event. Others will conclude that any interpretation requiring such blindness cannot be the final authority on God.

They may leave evangelicalism without leaving Scripture.

They may leave Christian Zionism without abandoning concern for Jewish safety.

They may condemn Hamas without surrendering Palestinian civilians to collective judgment.

They may believe in God while rejecting a theology that makes God the author of ethnic domination.

Their departure begins with a simple act.

They look up from the Bible.

They see Gaza.

They see an Israeli mother who fears another attack.

They see a Palestinian father searching through rubble.

They see Jewish history without denying Palestinian history.

They see Palestinian suffering without becoming indifferent to antisemitism.

They see that no ancient name relieves a modern government of moral responsibility.

And in the faces that the theology had made invisible, they encounter the possibility that God was never confined to the sacred map at all.

Sola Scriptura and the Self-Sealing Evangelical Mind

The phrase *Sola Scriptura* possesses enormous emotional and theological power within evangelical Christianity. It evokes the Reformation, resistance to corrupt religious authority, the accessibility of divine truth, and the believer standing before God without dependence upon an infallible human institution. It promises that popes, councils, traditions, governments, charismatic leaders, and political parties can all be judged by a standard beyond themselves.

Properly understood, this principle should make evangelicalism resistant to authoritarian power.

Yet in contemporary American evangelicalism, *Sola Scriptura* can produce the opposite result. Rather than placing political and religious authorities beneath Scripture, it can conceal the authorities that determine what Scripture is permitted to say. The believer is told that the Bible alone governs belief, while an extensive interpretive system—pastors, study notes, seminaries, prophecy charts, denominational statements, favored translations, media personalities, political organizations, and inherited assumptions—quietly governs the Bible.

The hidden authority becomes most powerful when it denies that it exists.

A Catholic may acknowledge the authority of tradition and church teaching. An Orthodox Christian may openly locate Scripture within the interpretive life of the church. A historical-critical scholar states the methods and assumptions used to analyze the text. The closed biblicist, by contrast, may claim to possess no interpretive authority at all. He simply reads what the Bible plainly says.

This apparent absence of interpretation is itself the source of authority. A conclusion presented as interpretation remains open to criticism. A conclusion presented as the transparent speech of God is much harder to challenge.

The decisive evangelical claim is therefore often not merely:

The Bible is true.

It is:

My community's reading of the Bible is not a reading. It is what the Bible plainly says.

Once that equation has been established, criticism of the interpretation becomes criticism of Scripture, and criticism of Scripture becomes rebellion against God.

Sola Scriptura Is Not Solo Scriptura

A responsible critique must distinguish classical *Sola Scriptura* from the isolated biblicism that often operates under its name.

Evangelical defenders of the Reformation principle themselves emphasize that *Sola Scriptura* does not mean that Scripture is the only authority of any kind. It means that Scripture is the supreme, final, or uniquely infallible written authority beneath which other authorities serve. Creeds, teachers, historical scholarship, reason, church tradition, and communal interpretation may retain legitimate subordinate roles. Conservative Protestant writers frequently distinguish *Sola Scriptura* from *solo scriptura*, the idea that an individual needs only a Bible and private inspiration, without meaningful dependence upon the historic church or interpretive community.

This distinction is not a modern concession invented to answer Catholic criticism. The Reformers themselves interpreted Scripture through linguistic study, theological controversy, inherited creeds, previous commentators, and the life of worship. Martin Luther did not merely open a German Bible and encounter an interpretation-free text. He studied biblical languages, wrote extensive commentaries, debated earlier traditions, and repeatedly confronted the problem of interpretation.

Evangelical theology likewise recognizes that biblicism is only one feature of evangelical identity. David Bebbington's influential description of evangelicalism identifies four characteristic emphases: conversion, activism, the cross, and the Bible. Evangelicalism is therefore not theoretically reducible to possession of an infallible text. It is a historical community with characteristic practices, experiences, institutions, and ways of organizing authority.

The present argument does not claim that belief in scriptural authority necessarily produces Trumpism, Christian Zionism, or indifference to civilian suffering. Scripture has inspired abolitionists, civil-rights activists, pacifists, humanitarian reformers, antiwar Christians, and prophetic critics of empire. The Bible can function as a source of resistance because it preserves voices that refuse to equate political success with righteousness.

The problem arises when *Sola Scriptura* is converted into a claim of **interpretive immediacy**: the belief that the text delivers a single, obvious political meaning directly to the faithful reader, uncontaminated by history, culture, interest, or power.

At that point, Scripture ceases to stand above the institution. The institution's interpretation acquires the authority of Scripture.

The Bible Never Arrives Alone

No one encounters “the Bible alone.”

The reader encounters a canon whose boundaries were recognized through historical communities. The reader encounters a translation produced by committees and shaped by linguistic judgments. The text contains chapter divisions, verse numbers, headings, cross-references, maps, notes, introductions, and formatting decisions that affect how its parts appear to relate. The reader brings a language, education, family history, church tradition, political identity, moral formation, and set of prior questions.

Even the physical form called “the Bible” combines many writings composed in different periods, genres, historical settings, and theological circumstances. Poetry, law, prophecy, genealogy, parable, wisdom, apocalypse, correspondence, court history, lament, and theological argument do not become a single genre merely because they have been printed between the same covers.

Research on the history of the printed Bible demonstrates that paratextual features—headings, cross-references, summaries, notes, and organizational conventions—help readers experience a diverse collection as a single immediately accessible form of “Scripture.” The material presentation of the Bible therefore participates in interpretation before the reader consciously begins interpreting.

The canon also cannot be derived from an interpretation-free reading of the canon itself. As even conservative evangelical discussions acknowledge, the Bible does not contain its own table of contents. Recognition of which writings constitute Scripture necessarily involves history, communal reception, theological judgment, and inherited practice.

These observations do not disprove Christian claims about divine inspiration. They establish that inspiration does not remove mediation. Whatever Scripture is theologically, human beings receive it through language, history, institutions, and interpretation.

The claim “I follow the Bible rather than human tradition” therefore conceals an unavoidable truth:

The question is never whether tradition and interpretation will be present. The question is whether their presence will be acknowledged and made accountable.

An acknowledged tradition can be examined.

An invisible tradition speaks with the voice of God.

The Crisis of Interpretive Pluralism

The clearest empirical challenge to closed biblicism is the persistent disagreement among sincere Bible-believing Christians.

Evangelicals who affirm the inspiration, authority, clarity, and sufficiency of Scripture disagree about baptism, communion, church government, spiritual gifts, predestination, free will, women in ministry, divorce, remarriage, creation, evolution, sexuality, capital punishment, war, economics, immigration, Israel, the end times, and the proper relationship between church and state.

These disagreements cannot all be explained by claiming that one side respects Scripture while the other does not. Many conflicting positions are defended by highly educated, devout Christians using the same canon and affirming comparable doctrines of biblical authority.

Sociologist Christian Smith describes this condition as **pervasive interpretive pluralism**. His argument is not simply that people occasionally make mistakes. It is that the extent and persistence of disagreement challenge the biblicist expectation that a sufficiently sincere and competent reading will produce one plainly accessible body of biblical teaching.

The problem does not disappear when each group declares that the other groups have permitted culture, tradition, or self-interest to distort the text. Every group can make that accusation. The accusation itself provides no independent means of deciding which interpretation has escaped distortion.

Closed biblicism responds to this pluralism through selective visibility. The community notices interpretive diversity when criticizing other Christians but forgets it when proclaiming its own conclusions. Catholic, liberal, Orthodox, Black, feminist, Palestinian, or peace-church interpretations are described as culturally situated. The dominant white evangelical interpretation is described as biblical.

Culture is something other people have.

Interpretation is something other people do.

Ideology is something other people impose.

The community's own reading appears as the absence of all three.

This asymmetry enables political power to enter unnoticed. A partisan conclusion does not need to announce itself as Republican theology. It needs only to be presented as the plain meaning of Scripture.

Hidden Authorities Behind the Open Bible

American evangelicalism is sometimes portrayed as a radically decentralized religious world. It has no single pope, magisterium, or universally binding institutional center. This decentralization is real, but it does not produce an absence of authority. It produces competing networks of authority.

Historian Molly Worthen describes modern evangelicalism as marked by a persistent crisis of authority: evangelicals attempt to reconcile the authority of an inspired Bible, the claims of reason, personal spiritual experience, and the challenge of living in modern intellectual and political worlds.

In practice, authority circulates through relationships of trust. Pastors recommend teachers. Colleges certify pastors. Publishers determine which books reach churches. Radio and television personalities shape the questions believers ask. Donors support institutions. Political organizations provide voter materials. Prophecy ministries identify current events with biblical symbols. Social-media systems reward certainty, outrage, and repetition.

Research on evangelical identity has therefore emphasized that evangelicalism is not held together only by doctrine. It is also structured by communication networks and communities of trust. Who counts as evangelical, which controversies matter, and which interpretations appear legitimate are influenced by the institutions that circulate them.

The believer holding an open Bible may consequently stand at the end of a long interpretive supply chain.

A publisher selected the translation.

An editor supplied the headings.

A study-Bible author linked the verses.

A pastor framed the question.

A prophecy teacher identified the nation.

A political organization named the threat.

A broadcaster supplied the emotional tone.

An online network repeated the conclusion.

Then the believer reads the passage and experiences the conclusion as something discovered independently in Scripture.

This is not necessarily deliberate manipulation. Most participants may sincerely believe that they are helping others understand the Bible. The structural effect remains: institutional interpretation becomes invisible at the moment it is internalized.

The believer says, “The Bible tells me.”

Often the more accurate statement would be:

A trusted interpretive network taught me how to recognize one possible meaning as the only faithful meaning.

The Plain Meaning and the Political Present

The “plain meaning” of Scripture frequently changes when political alliances change.

This does not mean that every theological development is cynical. Believers reconsider texts for many legitimate reasons. New historical evidence, moral experience, scholarship, social change, and encounters with previously unheard communities can produce genuine learning.

The political pattern becomes visible when interpretation shifts in the direction required by a party while continuing to be described as timeless biblical truth.

Immigration offers an instructive example. Scholarly work on evangelicals and immigration notes that evangelical approaches once included strong refugee- and immigrant-friendly interpretations but became more restrictive as the issue grew increasingly polarized and the Republican Party moved toward hard-line policies. The biblical text did not change. The political environment changed, and the theology of hospitality was reorganized around it.

Trump’s character produced a similar transformation. Evangelical teachings about personal morality did not disappear because scholars discovered new manuscripts concerning presidential conduct. They changed because the application of the previous teaching would have obstructed evangelical access to political power.

Israel provides another example. Biblical passages concerning ancient land promises are treated as directly determinative for modern borders, while passages demanding justice for the stranger are generalized, spiritualized, or detached from concrete policy. Texts concerning national election remain politically literal. Texts concerning national judgment become devotional.

Iran provides yet another. Ancient Persia can be activated as a contemporary geopolitical category when doing so supports war, while Jesus’ teachings concerning enemies are assigned primarily to private relationships or an ideal future kingdom.

The interpretive rule is not consistent literalism. It is **strategic literalism**.

The text is literal where literalism authorizes power.

It is contextual where context restrains power.

It is eternal where eternity supports the coalition.

It is historically limited where history challenges the coalition.

The method may not be consciously formulated, but its outcomes display a recognizable direction.

Inerrancy and the Transfer of Perfection

Belief in biblical inerrancy asserts, in its classical evangelical formulation, that Scripture is without error in what it affirms when properly interpreted according to its language, genre, and intended meaning. Conservative defenders connect inerrancy closely with *Sola Scriptura*, arguing that Scripture alone can bind the conscience because it alone possesses uniquely divine written authority.

The phrase “when properly interpreted” is indispensable. It preserves the distinction between an inerrant text and a fallible reader.

Closed biblicism gradually loses that distinction. The certainty attributed to Scripture is transferred to the interpretation. The believer may verbally acknowledge human fallibility while treating disagreement with a favored conclusion as rejection of biblical authority.

The transfer occurs because the institution cannot act upon an uninterpreted text. It must teach doctrines, enforce boundaries, endorse policies, discipline members, and identify error. Each action requires an interpretation. If the interpretation remains visibly provisional, institutional authority weakens. The institution therefore has an incentive to present its reading with the certainty claimed for Scripture itself.

The sequence is subtle:

Scripture is without error.

This doctrine comes from Scripture.

This political conclusion follows from the doctrine.

Therefore, opposition to the political conclusion reflects biblical error.

At every step, human reasoning has occurred. Yet by the conclusion, the reasoning has disappeared.

The political judgment stands clothed in inerrancy.

This is how a claim about the perfection of Scripture can become a claim about the correctness of Donald Trump, the innocence of an Israeli government, the necessity of war with Iran, or the divine illegitimacy of political opposition.

The Bible does not need to mention Trump.

The interpretive institution completes the circuit.

Reality as a Threat to Faith

A closed interpretive system must control not only texts but evidence.

If visible reality repeatedly contradicts the moral expectations created by the theology, one of two things must change. The interpretation can be revised, or reality can be redescribed.

Revision is dangerous because the disputed interpretation has been fused with biblical authority. To acknowledge error may appear to weaken confidence not merely in a pastor or doctrine but in Scripture, salvation, God, and the entire religious world.

Reality is therefore easier to sacrifice.

News reports can be dismissed as propaganda.

Photographs can be declared staged or contextless.

Casualty estimates can be treated as enemy inventions.

International institutions can be described as antisemitic, globalist, Marxist, or hostile to Christianity.

Scholars can be accused of secular bias.

Dissenting Christians can be declared deceived.

Former evangelicals can be interpreted as people who wanted permission to sin.

Every external correction can be classified as evidence of the world's hostility toward biblical truth.

The system becomes self-sealing because resistance confirms the narrative. If outsiders agree, the truth is obvious. If outsiders disagree, persecution has been predicted. If evidence supports the interpretation, Scripture has been vindicated. If evidence challenges it, Satan is attacking Scripture.

The believer cannot lose the argument because every loss has already been translated into victory.

This is the epistemological form of spiritual warfare.

The Truth on the Ground

The sentence at the center of this paper can now be stated with greater precision:

The truth on the ground is too ugly to look up from the Bible because the Bible has been made to guarantee that the ground cannot overturn the interpretation.

The believer is not necessarily ignorant of what is happening. He may see the images, know the casualty reports, recognize Trump's conduct, and understand that civilians are suffering.

The theological work occurs in determining which facts possess moral authority.

A dead Palestinian child is real, but the covenant is treated as more real.

An Iranian family beneath bombardment is real, but spiritual warfare is treated as more real.

Trump's dishonesty is real, but providential selection is treated as more real.

The suffering is acknowledged phenomenally and denied interpretively.

It happened, but it does not mean what an unprotected conscience might think it means.

This distinction explains how people who are not personally cruel can participate in a cruel political theology. They do not necessarily celebrate every death. They inhabit a system that has decided in advance which deaths can challenge the sacred narrative.

The truth becomes bearable only after it has been deprived of the power to judge.

The Bible as Shield and Mirror

Scripture can function as a shield against moral recognition, but it can also function as a mirror in which the religious community sees its own corruption.

The difference lies partly in where the reader places himself within the story.

Closed biblicism tends to identify the reader with the faithful remnant, the persecuted saints, biblical Israel, Esther, Cyrus, the apostles, or the forces of divine victory. Condemnatory passages are directed outward—to secular society, hostile nations, liberals, Muslims, sexual minorities, universities, journalists, or apostate churches.

The community rarely imagines itself as Pharaoh.

It does not imagine itself as the royal prophets reassuring Ahab.

It does not imagine itself as the priest passing the wounded traveler.

It does not imagine itself as the crowd choosing power over innocence.

It does not imagine itself as the religious authority collaborating with the state.

It does not imagine that its own temple might stand under judgment.

Yet Scripture repeatedly makes this reversal possible. Its most severe judgments are often directed toward communities already convinced of their election, orthodoxy, sacrifice, or national importance. The prophetic voice does not merely condemn foreign enemies. It exposes the violence concealed within the worshiping nation.

A Bible permitted to judge the reader can break the enclosure.

A Bible used only to identify the reader with righteousness completes it.

From Sola Scriptura to Solus Logos

There is another way to retain Protestant resistance to human authority without pretending that interpretation has disappeared.

The Christian can affirm Scripture as a privileged and indispensable witness while recognizing that Scripture points beyond itself to the Logos—to the divine Word Christians identify with Christ. In this framework, the highest authority is not a collection of propositions detached from interpretation. It is God revealed through the crucified and living Christ, to whom Scripture bears testimony.

This does not solve every hermeneutical disagreement. It does, however, introduce a criterion that court theology finds difficult to absorb.

Does the interpretation resemble the Logos it claims to reveal?

Does it disclose truth or require deception?

Does it protect the vulnerable or erase them?

Does it humble political power or sanctify it?

Does it produce repentance or merely accuse enemies?

Does it lead toward reconciliation, justice, mercy, and self-giving love, or toward domination wrapped in biblical language?

A Christ-centered reading does not permit the believer to discard difficult biblical texts. It requires those texts to be interpreted within a revelation whose center is not conquest but the crucified one.

The Gospel Coalition itself, while strongly defending *Sola Scriptura*, notes that the Reformation principle was not isolated from *Solus Christus* and that Christ forms the central content through which Scripture's authority is understood. The theological alternative to biblicism therefore need not be abandonment of Protestant faith. It can be a recovery of the Christological limit that political evangelicalism has ignored.

The Logos judges the Bible reader.

The Logos judges the church.

The Logos judges Israel and the nations.

The Logos judges Trump.

The Logos judges the exvangelical as well.

No identity becomes righteous merely by opposing another identity.

Conscience as an Enemy of the Closed System

Evangelical communities often warn that conscience is unreliable because it can be distorted by sin, culture, desire, and self-deception. This warning contains truth. Human beings routinely mistake preference for moral insight.

But the same criticism applies to institutions and interpretations.

Pastors can be distorted.

Traditions can be distorted.

Political movements can be distorted.

Claims of biblical certainty can be distorted.

The possibility that conscience may err does not authorize the church to extinguish it. Conscience is the place where the individual remains morally answerable, even when every surrounding authority demands agreement.

The emerging exvangelical frequently experiences conscience first as guilt. He has been taught that doubt is rebellion, criticism is bitterness, compassion for disapproved people is compromise, and rejection of the community's political conclusions reveals weak faith.

Eventually the moral direction reverses.

The individual begins to feel guilt not for questioning the institution but for having accepted its blindness.

He remembers the cruelty he defended.

The testimony he dismissed.

The people he treated as abstractions.

The wars he allowed prophecy to justify.

The character he excused because judges mattered more.

The children he did not permit himself to see.

At that point, conscience becomes intolerable to the closed system because it restores moral authority to reality.

The believer looks at what happened and refuses to allow a verse, analogy, prophecy chart, or pastor to make it unhappen.

Exvangelicalism as Hermeneutical Repentance

Leaving evangelicalism can therefore represent more than institutional disaffiliation. It can be an act of hermeneutical repentance.

The former evangelical acknowledges not merely that a doctrine was mistaken but that a way of reading protected the reader from responsibility. The error did not remain inside the mind. It distributed sympathy unequally, justified political alliances, and rendered certain lives expendable.

Hermeneutical repentance begins by restoring the distinction between Scripture and interpretation.

The Bible may be sacred.

My reading is not sacred.

The text may be authoritative.

My application is not infallible.

My community may have preserved truth.

It may also have preserved power.

My confidence may have felt like faith.

It may have been fear of uncertainty.

The world may oppose the Gospel.

But the world's opposition does not prove that every evangelical claim is the Gospel.

A person who makes these distinctions may remain deeply Christian. Indeed, the confession resembles a Protestant protest against a new magisterium—the unwritten evangelical authority that claims to possess no tradition while demanding obedience to its own.

The exvangelical does not necessarily reject *Sola Scriptura*. He may reject its counterfeit.

He rejects the Bible alone when "the Bible alone" means the pastor's interpretation alone.

He rejects biblical authority when "biblical authority" means partisan authority protected by verses.

He rejects inerrancy when the perfection of the text is transferred to fallible political conclusions.

He rejects clarity when "clarity" means that questions are forbidden.

He rejects faith when "faith" means refusing to look.

What remains may initially appear uncertain, exposed, and fragile. Yet it may also be more honest.

The Bible is read again as a collection of witnesses rather than a political code.

Tradition is acknowledged rather than smuggled into the text.

History is permitted to complicate certainty.

Suffering is allowed to interpret theology.

Palestinian Christians are permitted to speak.

Jewish disagreement is permitted to exist.

Iranian civilians are permitted to be more than Persia.

Trump is permitted to be merely a president.

God is released from the obligation to endorse the coalition.

The self-sealing mind opens not when it abandons every conviction but when it accepts that truth must be capable of correcting the believer.

A faith that cannot be corrected by anything cannot repent.

A theology that cannot repent cannot distinguish itself from ideology.

And an evangelicalism that cannot look up from its Bible may eventually discover that the people who do look up have not abandoned God.

They have abandoned the interpretation that required them not to see.

The Exvangelical Conscience as a Continuing Form of Faith

The exvangelical is often imagined from the perspective of the institution left behind. The church sees an absence: a former member, a rejected doctrine, an abandoned identity, an empty seat. Departure is consequently interpreted through categories such as apostasy, rebellion, bitterness, cultural conformity, sexual permissiveness, intellectual pride, or loss of faith.

From within the departing person's experience, however, the movement may appear almost exactly reversed.

The person does not leave because moral truth has ceased to matter. The person leaves because the institution has demanded that moral truth matter less than institutional loyalty. He does not necessarily stop believing in God. He stops believing that obedience to God requires the defense of Donald Trump, the sacralization of war, the suppression of Palestinian suffering, or submission to an interpretation that cannot acknowledge its own failures.

The exvangelical conscience may therefore represent not the exhaustion of faith but its persistence after the collapse of religious certainty.

This is why the language of deconversion is often insufficient. Some former evangelicals do become atheists or agnostics. Others enter different Christian traditions, adopt more liberal theologies, join historically rooted churches, construct independent forms of belief, or remain spiritually unsettled. Still others retain central evangelical convictions while rejecting the political and institutional identity now attached to the word *evangelical*.

There is no single exvangelical theology.

What unites many such departures is not a shared creed but a shared rupture in authority. The individual can no longer assume that the people who taught him to recognize God are reliable interpreters of God's demands. The former certainty breaks apart, but the question of God remains.

The Difference Between Losing God and Losing an Interpreter

Religious identity often fuses several distinct commitments into one apparently indivisible structure.

God is real.

Jesus reveals God.

The Bible communicates divine truth.

My church interprets the Bible correctly.

My pastor can be trusted.

My political community defends Christian values.

The United States serves a providential purpose.

The modern State of Israel occupies a fixed place in biblical prophecy.

Donald Trump protects the people of God.

Because these propositions are taught within one religious world, questioning one may feel like questioning all. A believer who doubts Christian Zionism may fear that he is rejecting Scripture. A person who condemns Trump may fear that he is betraying the church. Someone who recognizes Palestinian humanity may be accused of hostility toward Israel, Jews, prophecy, or God.

The structure survives by preventing differentiation.

Exvangelical deconstruction frequently begins when the propositions are separated.

One can believe in God without believing that one's pastor speaks reliably for God.

One can follow Jesus without accepting Christian nationalism.

One can read Scripture without believing that every inherited interpretation is infallible.

One can care about Jewish safety without defending every action of the Israeli government.

One can condemn Hamas without treating Palestinian civilians as collectively guilty.

One can oppose Iran's rulers without believing that war against Iran constitutes spiritual warfare.

One can reject Trump without rejecting Christianity.

These distinctions initially feel dangerous because evangelical identity may have presented them as impossible. Yet differentiation is not necessarily destruction. It may be the beginning of intellectual and spiritual honesty.

The believer discovers that losing an interpreter is not identical to losing God.

The Persistence of Evangelical Formation

The word *exvangelical* suggests a clean temporal division: one was evangelical and is evangelical no longer. In lived experience, the boundary is rarely so simple.

Evangelical formation persists in language, emotion, memory, reflex, imagination, and conscience. The former evangelical may continue to hear biblical phrases internally. He may still pray spontaneously, search for providential meaning, experience anxiety about salvation, feel the emotional force of hymns, or understand life through the categories of conversion and testimony.

Even rejection occurs through structures acquired within evangelicalism. The demand for personal honesty, the insistence upon repentance, the conviction that faith must transform conduct, the belief that religious hypocrisy is intolerable, and the expectation that truth should prevail over institutional convenience can all become reasons for leaving.

The exvangelical may therefore reject evangelicalism through the moral vocabulary evangelicalism itself supplied.

This creates a paradoxical identity:

I am no longer an evangelical, but evangelicalism remains within me.

The word *former* does not erase formation. The person carries both belief and injury, gratitude and anger, scripture and suspicion, longing and refusal. He may be unable either to return or to depart completely.

A title such as **I Am an Evangelical** could express this unresolved condition more effectively than the clearer declaration **I Was an Evangelical**.

"I was" establishes distance. It describes an identity conclusively placed in the past.

“I am” admits that the rejected self remains present.

I am the person who believed these things.

I am the person who defended these people.

I am the person who interpreted the suffering away.

I am the person who confused certainty with faith.

I am still shaped by the world I have left.

The title becomes confessional rather than affirmative. It does not necessarily reclaim evangelicalism. It acknowledges responsibility for what evangelical formation produced within the self.

Confession Without Institutional Return

Evangelicalism emphasizes personal confession and conversion, but it often understands confession within a framework controlled by the institution. The sinner confesses deviation from accepted teaching and returns to the community’s interpretation.

The exvangelical confession moves in another direction. The person confesses participation in the religious system itself.

I confess that I excused cruelty because the cruel person promised political victories.

I confess that I called domination strength.

I confess that I believed the suffering of some people mattered less because they appeared on the wrong side of prophecy.

I confess that I treated doubt as sin even when doubt was conscience refusing to die.

I confess that I allowed Scripture to become a means of avoiding what was visible.

I confess that I defended the reputation of Christianity more urgently than I defended people injured by Christians.

Such confession does not necessarily lead back to the institution because the institution may be among the objects of repentance. Returning without transformation would repeat the violation.

The former evangelical therefore confronts a problem for which evangelical theology did not prepare him: how does one repent of the community that taught repentance?

The institution may insist that repentance means coming home. The individual may conclude that repentance means refusing to return to the conditions under which conscience was surrendered.

Departure becomes a form of penance.

Addressing God Rather Than the Evangelical Audience

Most books about religious deconstruction are written primarily for human readers. They explain why the author changed, defend the legitimacy of doubt, expose institutional harm, or guide others through reconstruction. Even when intimate and spiritual, they remain public arguments.

A paper or book addressed directly to God would alter the structure.

God would not be placed on trial as a proposition to be proved or disproved. The evangelical self would be placed before God as the object of examination.

The central question would no longer be:

God, why did You fail to meet evangelical expectations?

It would become:

God, what did we do in Your name?

This reversal matters because it preserves belief while rejecting religious innocence. The author does not need to decide at the outset whether every traditional doctrine remains intact. The address itself constitutes a residual act of faith. One speaks to God because God remains, however uncertainly, the possible listener.

The form resembles prayer, lament, confession, testimony, accusation, and repentance at once.

The speaker may accuse religious leaders.

He may accuse the nation.

He may accuse Israel's government.

He may accuse Trump.

But he must also accuse himself.

Otherwise exvangelicalism risks constructing a new innocence in which all moral corruption belongs to the people left behind.

The honest confession would acknowledge that the former evangelical participated in the system, benefited from it, repeated its claims, or remained silent while others suffered. The writer cannot merely say, “They deceived me.” He must also ask why the deception was attractive.

Did it provide certainty?

Did it offer membership in a chosen people?

Did it transform political fear into spiritual courage?

Did it permit aggression while preserving the self-image of righteousness?

Did it turn complex history into a simple battle between good and evil?

Did it offer access to power without requiring admission that power was desired?

The address to God becomes more than an explanation of departure. It becomes an inquiry into the spiritual temptations of evangelical identity.

The Former Self as Defendant and Witness

The former evangelical self should not be caricatured as merely stupid, hateful, or insane. Such dismissal would prevent understanding of how the system acquired its power.

The former self may have been sincere.

He may have wanted to be faithful.

He may have feared deception.

He may have loved Scripture.

He may have believed that eternal consequences depended upon correct doctrine.

He may have trusted parents, pastors, teachers, and friends who also acted sincerely.

He may have defended Israel because he feared antisemitism and another catastrophe against Jews.

He may have supported Trump because he believed abortion, religious liberty, or social disorder presented overwhelming dangers.

He may have accepted military action because he believed Iran’s government posed a genuine threat.

These motives do not make every conclusion correct, but they belong within the moral record. A confession that merely despises the former self reproduces the evangelical habit of dividing people into the righteous and the condemned.

The former self must be treated as both defendant and witness.

As defendant, he is responsible for the consequences of what he believed and defended.

As witness, he can explain how fear became faith, how certainty became obedience, and how political identity acquired the emotional authority of religion.

The goal is not self-exoneration.

It is truthful judgment without dehumanization—even of the person one used to be.

Shame, Guilt, and Responsibility

The exvangelical awakening often produces shame. The person looks backward and sees statements, votes, silences, relationships, or moral judgments that are now difficult to bear. He may feel contaminated by participation in a community whose public identity has become repellent to him.

Shame says:

I was one of them; therefore something is wrong with what I am.

Guilt says:

I defended, ignored, or participated in something wrong; therefore I must tell the truth and change.

The distinction is important. Shame can trap the former evangelical in endless self-rejection. Guilt can become responsibility.

The goal is not to deny complicity but to make it morally productive. The person can acknowledge harm, apologize where possible, revise public claims, support those previously dismissed, and refuse future participation in the same mechanisms.

Religious reconstruction fails when it merely changes the population considered righteous. The exvangelical cannot reproduce the old system by declaring all remaining evangelicals morally worthless. Many remain because of family, community, sincere conviction, fear, limited alternatives, or the possibility of internal reform. Some oppose Trump, war, Christian nationalism, and Christian Zionism while retaining the evangelical label.

The proper object of criticism is therefore not an undifferentiated population but a structure of power, interpretation, and moral evasion.

The exvangelical conscience should remain capable of seeing people inside the system, just as it learned to see people erased by the system.

The Loss of Community

Leaving evangelicalism is not merely an intellectual decision. It can involve the loss of a social world.

Church may have provided friendship, music, ritual, family identity, moral purpose, childcare, education, shared language, mutual assistance, and a sense of participation in a story larger than the self. Departure can threaten marriages, family relationships, employment, professional networks, and belonging.

The person may retain faith but lose the place where faith was practiced.

This loss helps explain why many remain silent long after internal belief has changed. The cost of speaking is not merely doctrinal disapproval. It is exile.

Political theology intensifies this danger because partisan identity becomes embedded in ordinary relationships. A criticism of Trump may be heard as an attack upon parents who voted for him, pastors who defended him, friends who organized for him, and congregations that understand themselves as besieged by hostile culture.

Likewise, criticism of Israeli conduct may be heard not as concern for Palestinians but as rejection of biblical prophecy, betrayal of Jewish people, or alliance with enemies of Christianity.

The person who looks up from the Bible may find that everyone nearby is still looking down.

He sees suffering, but the community sees betrayal.

He names the war, but the community names spiritual warfare.

He asks for evidence, but the community hears unbelief.

He speaks of Palestinians, but the community hears hostility to Israel.

At that moment, departure becomes socially real.

Faith After Certainty

Evangelicalism often presents certainty as evidence of faith. The converted believer knows that he is saved, knows that Scripture is true, knows which doctrines are essential, and knows the moral structure of the world. Doubt may be tolerated as a temporary struggle, but it is rarely honored as a permanent condition of honest belief.

After the interpretive system collapses, certainty may no longer be available.

The former evangelical may still believe in God but be unable to define the mechanics of inspiration.

He may still follow Jesus but doubt inherited theories of atonement.

He may continue reading Scripture while recognizing internal diversity and historical development.

He may pray without knowing whether prayer changes events.

He may hope for resurrection without claiming evidential certainty.

This faith can appear weak when judged by evangelical standards. Yet it may require greater courage than the closed system because it no longer protects the believer from the possibility of error.

Certainty says:

I possess the truth and know where God stands.

Faith after certainty says:

I remain answerable to truth even when I cannot possess it.

The first can become a form of control.

The second accepts dependence.

The exvangelical may discover that faith is not the elimination of uncertainty but the refusal to purchase certainty at the cost of honesty.

Christ Against Christian Power

For those who remain Christian, Jesus may become more important after evangelical certainty collapses.

This does not necessarily mean that the historical or theological problems surrounding Jesus disappear. It means that Jesus functions as a critical center against which Christian power can be judged.

The figure who refuses domination becomes a judgment upon Christian nationalism.

The teacher who identifies the neighbor beyond approved boundaries becomes a judgment upon ethnic hierarchy.

The one executed through cooperation between religious and imperial authority becomes a judgment upon court theology.

The crucified person becomes a judgment upon every attempt to compare the ruler with the victim while ignoring the victims of the ruler.

This reversal is especially important in relation to Trump. When Trump is portrayed as persecuted like Jesus, the comparison directs sympathy upward toward the most powerful office in the country. A cruciform reading directs attention downward toward those subjected to power.

The question is not whether Trump has ever been treated unfairly. Political opponents, courts, journalists, and institutions can act unjustly toward powerful people. The question is whether the central Christian symbol should be used primarily to intensify identification with the ruler or to disclose the human cost of political and religious power.

The exvangelical conscience may conclude that Jesus is found less securely in the presidential prayer circle than among those whose suffering the circle explains away.

God Beyond the Coalition

Political evangelicalism often acts as though God's reputation depends upon the success of the coalition.

If Trump loses, Christianity loses.

If conservative judges are not appointed, God's order recedes.

If Israel is criticized, biblical truth is threatened.

If the United States is restrained, evil advances.

If the church loses cultural privilege, persecution has begun.

This theology produces a perpetually endangered God who must be defended through political power.

The exvangelical departure releases God from this dependency.

God is not identical to the Republican Party.

God is not identical to the United States.

God is not identical to the modern State of Israel.

God is not identical to evangelical institutions.

God is not identical to the believer's former certainty.

The collapse of the coalition is not the collapse of God.

This distinction makes criticism possible without metaphysical panic. A president can be judged as a president. A government can be judged as a government. A war can be judged as a war. Scripture can be interpreted without making every disagreement a battle over the existence of truth.

The loss of religious certainty may therefore enlarge rather than diminish transcendence. God becomes more than the guarantor of one political arrangement.

The Confession "I Still Believe"

The phrase "I still believe in God" can carry several meanings.

It may mean that the person continues to affirm God's existence.

It may mean that the person continues to pray despite uncertainty.

It may mean that he cannot remove God from consciousness even after rejecting previous doctrines.

It may mean that hope, conscience, beauty, suffering, or the figure of Christ still points beyond the self.

It may mean that the person refuses to allow corrupt representatives to possess the final meaning of God.

The word *still* contains the whole history.

I believed before Trump.

I believed while defending Trump.

I believed while beginning to doubt those defenses.

I believed while watching Gaza.

I believed while hearing war called spiritual.

I believed while leaving the church.

I believe now, but not in the same way.

The persistence of belief does not prove that the reconstructed theology is correct. It establishes that exvangelical departure cannot be reduced to secular disbelief.

The person may reject the former evangelical self before God because belief has survived the institution that once defined it.

A Confession to the God Who Remains

The theological core of the exvangelical position might be expressed in the following confession:

God, I believed that defending Your truth required defending those who claimed to defend You.

I believed that the enemies of my church were Your enemies.

I believed that political victory confirmed faithfulness.

I believed that national power could become an instrument of righteousness without corrupting those who possessed it.

I believed that biblical promises allowed me to decide whose suffering mattered most.

I believed that prophecy relieved me of uncertainty.

I believed that refusing contrary evidence was faith.

I believed that doubt endangered my salvation more than cruelty endangered my soul.

I now confess that I often loved certainty more than truth.

I loved belonging more than repentance.

I loved a victorious God because I feared the crucified one.

I treated Scripture as protection from the neighbor You placed before me.

I saw Trump's enemies more clearly than I saw his victims.

I saw Israel's biblical meaning more clearly than I saw Palestinians.

I saw Iran as prophecy more clearly than I saw Iranians.

I saw my own persecution in every criticism and failed to recognize the suffering carried out with my consent.

I do not know how much of my former faith was faith and how much was fear.

I do not know which doctrines will survive.

I do not know where I belong.

But I still speak to You.

I still believe that truth matters because You are not served by lies.

I still believe that mercy matters because power cannot define the good.

I still believe that every human being exceeds the role assigned by politics or prophecy.

I still believe that repentance must begin with the people who invoke Your name.

I have left evangelicalism because I could no longer defend what evangelicalism asked me to defend.

I reject the person I became within it, but I cannot pretend that person was someone else.

I bring that former self before You.

I do not ask You to restore my certainty.

I ask You to teach me how to see.

The Exvangelical as a Theological Witness

The person who leaves may possess a form of witness unavailable to both committed insiders and secular critics.

The insider knows the language, emotional structure, scriptural reasoning, and communal bonds of evangelicalism but may be unable to examine them from sufficient distance.

The secular critic may see the political consequences clearly but misunderstand why the system remains spiritually compelling.

The exvangelical stands between worlds. He knows what it felt like to believe that the system was true, and he knows what it cost to recognize its failures.

This position can generate bitterness, but it can also generate insight. The exvangelical can explain that the problem is not simply lack of intelligence or information. It concerns belonging, salvation, fear, family, authority, and the possibility that questioning one political claim could dissolve the entire universe of meaning.

The exvangelical can also testify that departure need not end in nihilism. Moral meaning may survive institutional collapse. Faith may survive certainty. God may survive the failure of those who claimed to represent God.

Such testimony is threatening because it breaks the institution's final defense: the claim that outside evangelicalism there is only unbelief, moral chaos, and abandonment by God.

The believing exvangelical demonstrates another possibility.

One may leave and continue praying.

One may doubt and remain morally accountable.

One may reject biblical inerrancy without rejecting the Bible.

One may reject Christian Zionism without rejecting Jewish humanity.

One may reject Christian nationalism without rejecting one's country.

One may reject Trump without rejecting conservative neighbors.

One may condemn war without pretending that Iran's government is innocent.

One may oppose Israel's destruction of Gaza without excusing Hamas or antisemitism.

One may lose the evangelical self and still seek God.

The Meaning of Departure

The moral significance of exvangelical departure depends partly upon what follows it.

Leaving does not automatically make a person just. Former evangelicals can reproduce certainty, tribalism, contempt, and dehumanization in secular or progressive forms. A new political community can become another church, complete with orthodoxy, excommunication, sacred language, and enemies beyond sympathy.

The decisive achievement is therefore not departure alone.

It is the recovery of a conscience that remains open to correction.

The former evangelical must allow Israelis to complicate his account of Palestine.

He must allow Palestinians to complicate his account of Israel.

He must allow Iranian civilians to complicate his judgment of Iran's rulers.

He must allow genuine threats to complicate pacifist impulses.

He must allow history to complicate prophecy.

He must allow evidence to complicate ideology.

He must allow the possibility that he can become wrong again.

This openness distinguishes repentance from reversal. Reversal merely exchanges one certainty for another. Repentance changes the relationship to certainty itself.

The exvangelical conscience becomes a continuing form of faith when it refuses to make any institution, nation, leader, interpretation, or identity incapable of judgment.

That refusal is not the end of belief.

It may be belief's return to moral seriousness.

The exvangelical leaves because the truth on the ground has become impossible to ignore. Yet after looking up, he may discover that God has not disappeared.

What disappears is the enclosure.

The Bible remains, but it is no longer a blindfold.

Christ remains, but he is no longer the mascot of power.

Faith remains, but it is no longer certainty protected from evidence.

God remains, but God no longer belongs exclusively to the people who said that leaving them meant leaving Him.

Revelation or Acceleration? The Historical Transformation of Evangelical Identity

Donald Trump did not invent the contradictions now destabilizing American evangelicalism. Neither the Gaza catastrophe nor the war with Iran created Christian nationalism, Christian Zionism, racial hierarchy, apocalyptic politics, hostility toward modernity, or the evangelical desire for access to state power. Each of these tendencies possesses a longer history.

Yet it would be equally mistaken to describe Trump, Gaza, and Iran as merely revealing conditions that would otherwise have developed in the same way and at the same speed. Political events do not simply expose religious identities. They reorganize them. Repeated

choices alter institutions, reward particular leaders, discredit rival interpretations, and change what membership comes to require.

Trump is therefore both revelation and accelerator.

He reveals the political commitments already latent within white evangelical institutions. He also strengthens those commitments by rewarding the people who express them most aggressively. He does not merely expose court theology. He creates a court and invites theologians to inhabit it. He does not merely uncover Christian nationalism. He provides it with executive power, public ceremony, administrative access, and a human object of devotion. He does not merely reveal evangelical divisions over war. He forces congregations to decide whether opposition to his wars remains compatible with evangelical belonging.

Israel's destruction of Gaza functions similarly. It reveals the human consequences of Christian Zionism, but it also drives the theology toward greater clarity. Evangelicals must increasingly choose between an unconditional prophetic allegiance and a moral judgment responsive to the people living beneath the prophecy. The scale and duration of the suffering make indefinite ambiguity more difficult.

The war with Iran intensifies the same process. It transforms prophetic speculation into military commitment. A believer who once attended an end-times Bible study may now be asked to interpret an American bombing campaign as the realization of the biblical pattern previously studied. What had been imaginative theology becomes public authorization for violence.

These events are not external pressures acting upon a stable religious identity. They are participating in the production of a new identity.

The central historical question is therefore not simply whether evangelicalism will decline. It is whether the word *evangelical* will continue to name primarily a form of Christianity or whether it will increasingly name a political population possessing Christian symbols.

The Older Crisis Behind the Present Crisis

American evangelicalism has never been politically uniform. The tradition has contained abolitionists and defenders of slavery, pacifists and military nationalists, social reformers and defenders of economic hierarchy, racial integrationists and segregationists, populists and elites, isolationists and interventionists.

The contemporary Christian Right should not be projected backward as the inevitable political expression of evangelical theology. Historical scholarship has emphasized that evangelical political participation before the rise of the modern Christian Right was more varied than later

partisan narratives suggest. The alliance among conservative Protestantism, the Republican Party, free-market economics, opposition to abortion, resistance to LGBTQ equality, and aggressive nationalism was historically constructed rather than directly dictated by an unchanging biblical worldview.

This history matters because it reveals that evangelicalism can change again. The present alliance is powerful, but it is not metaphysically necessary.

At the same time, institutions acquire inertia. Once churches, colleges, publishers, broadcasting networks, legal organizations, donors, campaign strategists, and political leaders become mutually dependent, separating theology from party becomes increasingly costly. A pastor who challenges the alliance does not merely propose a different interpretation. He risks donors, members, friendships, invitations, reputation, and access to the larger evangelical network.

The political identity therefore becomes self-reproducing.

Seminaries train leaders expected to serve existing churches.

Churches select pastors who will not disturb established political assumptions.

Publishers promote voices that speak to a known market.

Media systems reward outrage and certainty.

Political organizations cultivate pastors as mobilizers.

Congregants hear the same interpretation from multiple apparently independent sources.

What appears to be spontaneous biblical agreement may reflect a mature institutional ecology.

Trump entered this ecology as both beneficiary and transformer. He recognized that evangelical voters did not require theological fluency if he could provide protection, recognition, enemies, and victory. Evangelical leaders recognized that Trump did not require moral formation if they could provide votes, prayer, legitimacy, and a language of providence.

The relationship succeeded because each party possessed what the other lacked.

Trump had power without religious legitimacy.

Evangelical leaders had religious legitimacy without sufficient political power.

The alliance exchanged one for the other.

Trump as a Selection Pressure

Trump does not affect every evangelical in the same way. He acts as a selection pressure upon the population.

Those who experience his aggression as courage, his nationalism as protection, and his enemies as their enemies become more strongly attached to evangelical identity. The label acquires emotional value because it marks membership in a community that resisted liberal institutions, secular culture, immigration, Islam, feminism, universities, mainstream journalism, and the administrative state.

Others experience the same alliance as a contradiction. They leave the label, the congregation, or Christianity itself.

The result may not be immediate numerical collapse. It may be **recomposition**.

Those most disturbed by Trump depart.

Those most attracted by Trump enter or intensify their identification.

Those who remain become, on average, more politically homogeneous.

The increasing homogeneity then pushes out another group of dissenters.

Their departure further increases the apparent consensus.

This process can make a community look stable or even energized while its meaning changes substantially.

A Pew panel study of Trump's first term illustrates why simple decline narratives are inadequate. Among white adults followed between 2016 and 2020, 2 percent stopped identifying as born-again or evangelical Protestants, but 6 percent began using that identity. Those who adopted the label were disproportionately favorable toward Trump. The evangelical category therefore did not merely lose people repelled by Trump; it attracted people for whom Trump-era politics made the label more appealing.

This finding complicates the claim that Trump simply "creates exvangelicals." He may produce exvangelicals and evangelicals simultaneously.

He drives some believers away because the religious identity has become too political.

He attracts some political conservatives because the religious identity has become political enough.

The same transformation operates in both directions.

The question is not merely how many people retain the label. It is what the label comes to mean among those who retain or adopt it.

The Political Convert

Traditional evangelicalism emphasizes conversion to Christ. Trump-era evangelicalism creates the possibility of conversion to the social identity without an equivalent theological conversion.

A person may begin to call himself evangelical because the term communicates opposition to cultural liberalism, support for Trump, nationalism, heterosexual family norms, hostility to progressive institutions, and solidarity with conservative Christians. He may attend church irregularly, possess little biblical knowledge, and affirm few distinctly evangelical doctrines. Nevertheless, the label functions successfully because it locates him within the political conflict.

This does not mean that most evangelicals are secretly irreligious. Pew's 2023–2024 Religious Landscape Study found that evangelical Protestants continue to constitute approximately 23 percent of American adults, and evangelicals report comparatively high levels of religious commitment. The broader Christian share of the population also appears to have stabilized somewhat since 2019 after a long period of decline.

Evangelicalism remains a major religious tradition, not merely a campaign database.

The transformation is subtler. Political identity can become one of the principal means by which religious authenticity is recognized. Prayer, conversion, Scripture, church attendance, and personal faith remain important, but they coexist with unofficial partisan tests.

Does the person support Trump?

Does the person oppose abortion?

Does the person reject "wokeness"?

Does the person defend Israel?

Does the person regard immigration as invasion?

Does the person distrust mainstream media?

Does the person believe Christianity is being persecuted?

A believer who answers incorrectly may be treated as less authentically evangelical than a politically aligned person whose theological life is minimal.

The political convert therefore does not replace the religious convert. He reveals that political agreement may now compensate for religious absence more readily than religious devotion can compensate for political dissent.

Christian Nationalism as a Parallel Creed

Christian nationalism helps explain this reorganization because it provides a creed broad enough to unite people whose theology differs or remains poorly formed.

Its essential claims concern the nation rather than the church:

America has a special relationship with God.

Christianity should possess privileged public authority.

The federal government should formally protect or promote Christian identity.

National decline results from the displacement of traditional Christian culture.

Political restoration therefore acquires religious meaning.

PRRI's 2025 American Values Atlas, published in February 2026, found that 56 percent of Republicans qualified as Christian-nationalist adherents or sympathizers under its measure. The report also found strong correlations among Christian-nationalist attitudes, favorable views of Trump, Republican affiliation, and white evangelical identity.

The precise measurement of Christian nationalism remains contested. Critics dispute how survey questions are worded, whether the category combines distinct theological and political beliefs, and whether respondents understand the term consistently. Such methodological concerns should prevent the label from being applied indiscriminately to every patriotic or politically conservative Christian.

The larger pattern is nevertheless difficult to dismiss. A substantial constituency interprets American identity, governmental authority, and Christianity as mutually dependent. Within this worldview, Trump's promise of national restoration is easily transformed into a religious project.

This parallel creed does not require agreement about baptism, communion, predestination, spiritual gifts, or biblical chronology. It requires agreement about who properly owns the nation.

The sacred object shifts.

Classical evangelicalism asks whether the person has been reconciled to God through Christ.

Christian nationalism asks whether America has been restored to the people believed to represent its Christian essence.

The first centers conversion.

The second centers possession.

The two can coexist, but under political pressure the second may dominate the public identity.

The Evangelical Brand and Its Moral Price

A religious label functions partly through reputation. It tells outsiders what kind of person or institution they are encountering. The evangelical brand once emphasized conversion, missionary activity, biblical authority, personal morality, family life, and proclamation of the Gospel.

By the Trump era, the public meaning of the term had become increasingly political. This transformation does not mean that theology vanished internally. It means that politics became the most visible external identifier.

The moral price appears when the brand repels precisely the people most sensitive to its contradictions.

A young Christian sees church leaders excuse conduct they once condemned.

A woman sees accusations of sexual misconduct treated as politically inconvenient.

A racial minority hears national restoration described through nostalgia for a social order that was not equally safe for everyone.

A Palestinian Christian discovers that American evangelicals regard an Israeli government as more biblically authoritative than the testimony of fellow Christians living under its power.

A veteran or military family watches war described in apocalyptic language by people who will not bear its physical cost.

A biblical scholar sees complex texts reduced to partisan slogans.

A pastor who objects discovers that moderation is treated as cowardice.

Each departure narrows the range of voices remaining inside the label.

Evangelicalism can then become more politically coherent while becoming morally and intellectually poorer.

The most committed critics leave.

The most loyal defenders gain influence.

Leadership interprets the resulting uniformity as proof that the dissenters were never genuine evangelicals.

The boundary is purified through expulsion.

This is how a religious movement can become simultaneously stronger as a faction and weaker as a church.

Gaza as a Generational Separation

Gaza may accelerate this transformation because attitudes toward Israel are changing unevenly across generations and political communities.

Pew reported in April 2026 that 65 percent of white evangelical Protestants continued to hold favorable views of Israel, making them one of the most supportive major American religious groups. Yet national opinion had become more negative, especially among younger adults, and confidence in Benjamin Netanyahu had continued to decline.

The political consequences extend beyond evangelicalism. Reuters reported on July 29, 2026, that longstanding bipartisan support for Israel was fracturing sharply among Democrats amid Gaza, the war with Iran, and Netanyahu's close alignment with Republicans. Republicans remained considerably more supportive, with evangelical backing continuing to reinforce the alliance.

Within evangelical churches, this divergence creates a generational problem. Younger Christians inhabit a media environment in which Palestinian testimony, images from Gaza, criticism by international organizations, Jewish dissent, and postcolonial analysis circulate more readily than they did during the formation of older Christian Zionist institutions.

Exposure does not guarantee wisdom. Social media also circulates misinformation, antisemitism, propaganda, decontextualized images, and romanticized depictions of armed groups. Yet the older evangelical monopoly over interpretation has been broken. Pastors and prophecy teachers can no longer assume that congregants will encounter Palestinians only through a sermon about ancient enemies.

The young believer may watch the sermon while simultaneously seeing the ruins.

This creates an unstable double vision.

The church says prophecy.

The screen shows a child.

The church says existential defense.

The screen shows an amputee.

The church says Amalek.

The screen shows a family whose names and history can be learned.

The church says antisemitism.

Jewish critics of the Israeli government speak from the screen.

The inherited categories do not disappear, but they no longer control all available perception.

The resulting exvangelical may not possess a complete geopolitical analysis. The initial break may be simpler:

I no longer trust a theology that tells me in advance which suffering must not change my mind.

Iran as the Conversion of Prophecy into Obligation

The Iran war adds a different pressure. Gaza exposes the cost of unconditional allegiance to Israel. Iran tests whether that allegiance obligates Americans to participate directly in expanding war.

The conflict makes evangelical prophecy politically consequential in a new way. A believer can hold speculative beliefs about Persia, Israel, and the end times without deciding how the United States should deploy military force. Once war begins, the prophetic framework becomes a source of public consent.

The June 2026 Reuters/Ipsos survey found that 54 percent of evangelicals regarded Trump's military use in Iran as inconsistent with their understanding of Christianity, while Trump's evangelical approval had fallen to 52 percent. Those figures reveal a substantial internal fracture rather than a unified religious bloc.

That fracture can lead in at least three directions.

Some evangelicals will revise their politics while retaining their churches and theological identity.

Some churches will intensify support for Trump and define dissenters as spiritually compromised.

Some believers will conclude that the evangelical label no longer provides enough room for moral independence.

The second response produces the third.

The more tightly leaders bind war to Christian fidelity, the more likely conscientious opposition will become exvangelical identity.

Israel Does Not Create Exvangelicals Alone

It is important to avoid assigning agency too broadly. “Israel” is not a single acting mind. Israeli citizens disagree. Jewish communities disagree. Military officials, hostage families, peace activists, settlers, religious nationalists, opposition parties, government ministers, and diaspora Jews hold conflicting positions.

The causal chain is more specific.

The Israeli government conducts and justifies military policy.

Some Israeli religious nationalists attach biblical entitlement to territorial and military aims.

American Christian Zionist institutions interpret those aims within evangelical prophecy.

Evangelical leaders present support for the government as biblical faithfulness.

Believers confronted with the human consequences either accept, modify, or reject that interpretation.

Exvangelical formation occurs chiefly at the final link. The person leaves not simply because Israel acted, but because his own religious community demanded a response he could no longer regard as Christian.

The same distinction applies to Trump.

Trump acts.

Advisers sacralize the action.

Institutions normalize the sacralization.

Congregations enforce it socially.

The believer experiences the collision between conscience and belonging.

The political event becomes religious departure through the interpretive work of the church.

Three Possible Evangelical Futures

The present crisis may produce three broad futures. They need not be mutually exclusive.

The first is **the partisan remnant**.

Under this future, the evangelical label becomes smaller or more selective but increasingly coherent as a marker of conservative nationalism. Theologically diverse people remain united by Trumpism, opposition to progressive culture, Christian privilege, support for Israel, and a politics of national strength. Those disturbed by the fusion leave, while the remaining population interprets departure as purification.

This evangelicalism may retain large institutions and considerable electoral power. It may even attract new adherents seeking political belonging. Its weakness would not necessarily be numerical. Its weakness would be the diminishing distinction between Gospel and coalition.

The second future is **internal reformation**.

Pastors, theologians, congregations, and believers retain the evangelical name while resisting Trump's sacralization, opposing Christian nationalism, reassessing Christian Zionism, recovering traditions of peacemaking, and separating biblical authority from partisan certainty.

This future would require more than issuing occasional criticisms of tone. It would require institutional repentance.

Leaders would need to acknowledge how evangelical structures rewarded political access.

Churches would need to protect dissenters from partisan discipline.

Christian Zionists would need to listen seriously to Palestinian Christians and Jewish critics.

Supporters of military force would need to submit war to moral scrutiny rather than prophetic analogy.

Biblical teachers would need to distinguish interpretation from revelation.

The evangelical name could survive, but only by accepting that some of its severest critics remained faithful precisely when the institution did not.

The third future is **the post-evangelical diaspora**.

Under this future, large numbers of people continue to believe, pray, read Scripture, and follow Jesus but no longer gather under a common evangelical identity. They enter mainline

Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, peace churches, independent congregations, house churches, or loosely organized spiritual communities. Others remain unaffiliated while sustaining private or relational forms of faith.

This diaspora may lack the institutional power of evangelicalism, but it could preserve theological and moral elements that the public brand has made difficult to inhabit.

Conversion without coercion.

Scripture without inerrant politics.

Christ without nationalism.

Concern for Jewish safety without Christian Zionism.

Concern for Palestinians without antisemitism.

Moral judgment without apocalyptic certainty.

Faith without the demand to defend Trump.

Numerical Survival and Spiritual Transformation

The future of evangelicalism cannot be inferred solely from population totals.

Pew's Religious Landscape Study found that evangelical Protestants declined from approximately 26 percent of American adults in 2007 to 23 percent in 2023–2024. At the same time, the Christian population's long decline had slowed or temporarily stabilized.

These figures do not indicate disappearance. Evangelicalism will remain influential for the foreseeable future.

But numerical persistence can conceal spiritual transformation.

A church can retain attendance while changing the object of its loyalty.

A label can retain population while changing its meaning.

A coalition can win elections while losing the confidence of its own children.

A movement can gain political converts while losing theological dissenters.

A faith can remain statistically alive while becoming morally unrecognizable to people raised within it.

The question is not whether evangelicals will still exist. They will.

The question is what future historians will mean when they use the word.

Will *evangelical* describe Christians centered upon the Gospel?

Will it describe a branch of conservative Protestantism?

Will it describe white Republican religious identity?

Will it describe support for Christian nationalism and Israel?

Will it function as a cultural ancestry rather than a current faith?

Will the word eventually divide into incompatible meanings, with theological evangelicals and political evangelicals each denying the authenticity of the other?

The transformation may already be underway.

The Label as a Contested Inheritance

The believing exvangelical stands at the center of this contest because his existence refutes two simplifying claims.

He refutes the evangelical claim that leaving the movement necessarily means leaving God.

He also refutes the secular claim that evangelical faith is reducible to reactionary politics.

The exvangelical can say:

I know what evangelicalism claimed to be.

I know what it became in my community.

I know that the two were never wholly separate.

I also know that they were never wholly identical.

This position preserves historical responsibility without surrendering complexity.

Trump did not corrupt an entirely innocent evangelicalism. The conditions of the alliance were already present.

But neither did Trump merely uncover an unchanging essence. He rewarded certain tendencies, marginalized others, elevated particular leaders, altered public expectations, and made partisan allegiance more central to the label.

Gaza did not invent Christian Zionism. It revealed what Christian Zionism could require when a favored government imposed catastrophic suffering upon a population excluded from the sacred narrative.

Iran did not invent evangelical militarism. It converted inherited apocalyptic categories into immediate pressure to bless an American war.

These events accelerate history because they force decisions.

Every sermon, silence, endorsement, resignation, departure, and refusal changes the movement that remains.

From Broad Church to Purified Faction

Religious movements often respond to crisis by narrowing their boundaries. Purification feels safer than ambiguity.

Those who question biblical inerrancy are removed.

Those who affirm LGBTQ Christians are removed.

Those who criticize Trump are distrusted.

Those who condemn Israeli policy are suspected.

Those who oppose war are called naïve.

Those who ask whether Christian nationalism has displaced Christianity are accused of helping Christianity's enemies.

Each exclusion creates greater internal clarity. It also makes the movement less capable of self-correction.

A broad church contains contradiction but preserves conversation.

A purified faction possesses unity because the people who could challenge it have gone.

The final form of political evangelicalism may therefore appear exceptionally confident. Its members will share media, enemies, national mythology, policy preferences, and prophetic expectations. Leaders will point to this agreement as evidence of biblical clarity.

But unanimity achieved through departure proves very little.

The empty chairs may contain the argument the institution refused to hear.

The Exvangelical as an Unintended Product

Evangelical institutions often describe exvangelicals as products of secular culture. Universities, entertainment, progressive politics, sexual liberation, social media, or intellectual pride supposedly lure believers away.

External culture certainly influences religious change. No identity develops in isolation.

Yet contemporary evangelicalism must consider a more disturbing possibility:

The exvangelical may be one of evangelicalism's own products.

The movement taught the believer that truth matters.

It taught that rulers stand beneath God.

It taught that every person possesses value.

It taught that hypocrisy discredits witness.

It taught that repentance requires naming sin.

It taught that faith without moral fruit is empty.

Then the movement asked the believer to suspend these teachings for political necessity.

The believer applied the teachings to the movement itself.

The institution called the result apostasy.

From another perspective, the institution educated its own critic.

Trump, Gaza, and Iran intensify this process because they make the contradiction concrete. The believer is not debating an abstraction. He sees the leader, the adviser, the missile, the ruined city, the displaced family, and the sermon explaining why these realities must not alter the approved conclusion.

The movement creates the exvangelical when it leaves no place for the conscience it formed.

A Name That May No Longer Hold

The word *evangelical* derives from the Gospel—the good news.

Its contemporary political associations create an increasingly severe semantic contradiction. A term rooted in good news has become associated, for many observers and former members, with aggression, exclusion, domination, war, nationalism, and unconditional defense of power.

A religious movement can survive such contradiction for a long time. Institutions preserve names after meanings change. Members also continue to use inherited words because no replacement carries the same history.

But the title cannot remain infinitely elastic.

At some point, the believing dissenter must decide whether retaining the word communicates fidelity or falsehood.

Some will fight to recover it.

Some will qualify it: progressive evangelical, post-evangelical, evangelical left, red-letter Christian.

Some will abandon it reluctantly.

Some will reject it with relief.

Some will speak the paradoxical confession:

I am an evangelical before God because the evangelical self remains responsible for what was done in that name.
I am an exvangelical before the institution because I no longer consent to what the name requires.

This is not verbal confusion. It is a truthful description of historical transition.

The person belongs to the formation but not to the faction.

He inherits the Gospel but rejects the political brand.

He carries the language but refuses the enclosure.

He remains the person evangelicalism made, while becoming someone evangelicalism can no longer contain.

Acceleration Toward Judgment

Trump, Gaza, and Iran should therefore be understood as accelerants of evangelical judgment.

They judge the movement by forcing its hidden priorities into action.

When character conflicts with power, which does evangelicalism choose?

When prophecy conflicts with visible suffering, which does it choose?

When Israel's government conflicts with justice, which does it choose?

When an American war conflicts with Christian restraint, which does it choose?

When conscience conflicts with belonging, which does it require the believer to surrender?

The answers are not uniform. Evangelicalism remains internally contested. Many evangelicals oppose Christian nationalism, reject the sacralization of Trump, criticize Israeli policy, mourn Palestinian suffering, and resist war.

Their presence prevents a complete equation between evangelicalism and Trumpism.

But their future inside the movement depends upon whether disagreement is permitted to remain Christian.

If political loyalty becomes the practical test of faith, the word *evangelical* may retain millions of adherents while losing many of the people most determined to place the Gospel above the coalition.

Trump will then have created exvangelicals not by disproving God but by making the institutional substitute for God unmistakable.

Christian Zionism will have created exvangelicals not by proving Scripture false but by demonstrating what happens when Scripture is used to keep a suffering neighbor outside the field of vision.

The Iran war will have created exvangelicals not by resolving Christian arguments about force but by showing how quickly spiritual advisers can turn presidential aggression into sacred necessity.

The movement may interpret every departure as defeat.

History may judge some departures as evidence that the evangelical conscience had not entirely died.

The transformation is therefore not merely a decline in religious affiliation. It is a redistribution of faith, conscience, identity, and authority.

Some will remain within evangelicalism and struggle for its soul.

Some will remain only because evangelicalism has become the political identity they desire.

Some will depart Christianity altogether.

Some will leave the institution while continuing to address God.

And some will discover that the moment they ceased calling themselves evangelical was the moment they became able to hear the Gospel again.

From Sola Scriptura to Solus Logos

The critique developed in this paper cannot end with the exposure of evangelical failure. If every inherited authority is dismantled without a constructive alternative, exvangelical departure may become little more than permanent negation. Trump is rejected, Christian Zionism is rejected, biblical inerrancy is rejected, war theology is rejected, and evangelical identity is rejected—but the question remains: by what standard are these judgments made?

One possible answer is conscience. Another is historical evidence, human rights, reason, compassion, democratic principle, or the testimony of suffering people. Each is indispensable. Yet none is immune to distortion. Conscience can be malformed. Reason can rationalize domination. compassion can be selective. Human-rights language can be applied inconsistently. Historical narratives can be manipulated. Political communities can construct new orthodoxies as rigid as the ones they replaced.

The believing exvangelical therefore needs more than the rejection of authority. He needs an account of authority capable of remaining open to correction.

This paper proposes **Solus Logos** as such an account.

The phrase is not presented as an established Reformation slogan or a simple replacement for *Sola Scriptura*. It is a constructive theological proposal arising from the crisis described here. *Solus Logos* means that God's living truth—not an institution, nation, ruler, political coalition, isolated text, or private interpreter—possesses final authority. Scripture remains essential, but Scripture is understood as testimony to the Logos rather than as an instrument by which human interpreters acquire divine infallibility.

The proposal begins with the opening of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word." The Greek term *Logos* carries meanings that exceed the English word *word*. It can suggest speech, reason, intelligibility, ordering principle, account, meaning, and revelation. Within John's Gospel, the Logos is not merely information delivered by God. The Logos is with God and is God. The Logos becomes flesh and enters human history.

This claim places an important limit upon every theology of textual authority.

The Word of God is not finally a book.

The Word of God is not a doctrinal system.

The Word of God is not a prophetic chart.

The Word of God is not the political destiny of the United States.

The Word of God is not the military program of Israel.

The Word of God is not Donald Trump.

The Word becomes flesh.

This does not diminish Scripture. It distinguishes Scripture from the reality to which Scripture bears witness. The Bible possesses authority because it communicates, preserves, and participates in testimony to God—not because printed sentences can be detached from history and made to authorize whatever a trusted interpretive institution desires.

Under *Solus Logos*, the Bible is neither discarded nor made self-interpreting. It is read in continuous relation to the divine truth it claims to reveal. Interpretations remain accountable to the character of the Logos, the reality of the neighbor, the consequences of political action, the testimony of communities, historical knowledge, and the possibility that the reader is wrong.

The movement is therefore not from Scripture to autonomous subjectivity. It is from a closed textualism to a living accountability.

The Logos Before the Interpreter

Closed biblicism quietly places the interpreter in possession of divine truth. The believer may say that God possesses the truth, but in practice the believer or institution determines what God has said, which texts control, how they apply, and which contemporary actors occupy the approved biblical roles.

Solus Logos reverses the relationship.

The interpreter does not possess the Logos.

The interpreter stands beneath the Logos.

This distinction changes the moral posture of reading. The purpose of Scripture is no longer merely to confirm that the reader belongs to the righteous side. Reading becomes an encounter in which the reader may be exposed, contradicted, and judged.

The evangelical habit of self-identification with biblical heroes becomes unstable. The reader can no longer assume that he is Esther and his enemy is Haman, that his nation is Israel and another nation is Amalek, or that his president is Cyrus and political opponents are agents of Babylon.

The Logos may disclose that the reader is Pharaoh.

The church may be the royal priesthood flattering the king.

The nation may be the empire.

The favored ruler may be the persecutor.

The supposed enemy may be the neighbor.

The person beneath the bomb may stand closer to the crucified Logos than the people blessing the bombing.

A theology centered upon the Logos does not eliminate biblical analogy. It subjects analogy to judgment. The question is no longer merely whether a contemporary event resembles a biblical pattern. The question is what the analogy does.

Does it illuminate responsibility?

Does it deepen compassion?

Does it expose power?

Does it encourage repentance?

Or does it transfer sacred innocence to one side and sacred guilt to another?

An analogy that makes the powerful less accountable and the suffering less visible has failed, regardless of how many verses can be assembled in its defense.

The Logos as Truth

The Logos is inseparable from truth. This places deception, propaganda, and self-sealing interpretation under theological judgment.

A political theology cannot serve the Logos while requiring believers to deny evident facts. It cannot become more faithful by dismissing every inconvenient report as persecution. It cannot claim divine authority while remaining structurally incapable of admitting error.

Truth is not whatever protects the religious coalition.

Truth is not whatever benefits the chosen nation.

Truth is not whatever preserves the believer's confidence.

Truth is not whatever confirms prophecy after every possible outcome.

The Logos cannot be reduced to the survival mechanism of an ideology.

This has immediate consequences for evangelical political reasoning. Claims about election fraud, immigration, Iran, Gaza, civilian casualties, military necessity, religious persecution, or prophetic fulfillment must remain accountable to evidence. Religious conviction does not abolish the obligation to distinguish what is known, what is alleged, what is inferred, and what remains uncertain.

A theology that treats factual correction as spiritual attack has ceased to worship truth. It worships immunity from correction.

Solus Logos therefore requires epistemic repentance. The believer must become capable of saying:

I was wrong.

My source was unreliable.

My church repeated propaganda.

My interpretation protected my political preference.

The evidence does not support what I claimed.

The biblical analogy failed.

The prophecy did not occur.

The person I distrusted was telling the truth.

These confessions are not threats to faith. They are evidence that faith remains answerable to truth.

The Logos Made Flesh

The doctrine of incarnation is especially important because it resists the transformation of theology into abstraction.

The Logos becomes flesh, not territory.

The Logos becomes flesh, not military supremacy.

The Logos becomes flesh, not national destiny.

The Logos becomes flesh, not interpretive certainty.

Human embodiment therefore possesses theological significance. Bodies cannot be treated merely as obstacles within a prophetic scheme. Hunger, injury, displacement, imprisonment, fear, and death are not secondary phenomena beneath a supposedly deeper spiritual story.

The body beneath the rubble interrupts the interpretation.

The wounded soldier interrupts the triumphal speech.

The hostage interrupts ideological romanticization of Hamas.

The starving Palestinian child interrupts Christian Zionist prophecy.

The Iranian civilian interrupts the conversion of Persia into a military target.

The migrant family interrupts nationalist abstraction.

The incarnate Logos makes it impossible to honor God while consistently looking away from embodied suffering.

This does not mean that the most visible suffering automatically settles every political question. Images can mislead. Governments and armed groups can manipulate sympathy. Victimhood does not make every action of a victimized community righteous. A serious ethic must examine causes, responsibilities, threats, and competing claims.

Yet embodiment establishes a limit. No interpretation is morally complete if it can explain the suffering while remaining unchanged by it.

The Logos made flesh means that theological truth must survive contact with bodies.

The Logos and the Crucified

Christian theology identifies the Logos not only with incarnation but with crucifixion. This provides a decisive criterion for judging political power.

The cross reveals what religious and imperial authority can do when each legitimizes the other. Jesus is not executed by abstract evil. He is killed through an interaction among political calculation, religious accusation, crowd pressure, imperial violence, and the preservation of institutional order.

Court theology attempts to reverse this revelation. It places the ruler in the position of the crucified and treats criticism of the ruler as participation in persecution. Trump becomes the suffering innocent, while the victims of policies enacted under his authority disappear from view.

A theology of the crucified Logos must resist this upward transfer of victimhood.

Powerful people can be treated unjustly. A president does not cease to possess rights because he is powerful. But the Christian symbol of crucifixion cannot be monopolized by rulers seeking moral exemption. It directs attention toward those whom political and religious systems can injure without hearing.

The cross asks whose body bears the cost of the policy.

Who is imprisoned?

Who is displaced?

Who is bombed?

Who is silenced?

Who is treated as expendable?

Who has been reduced to a category—terrorist, illegal, Amalek, Persian, collateral damage, enemy of the people—before violence is applied?

The crucified Logos does not provide an automatic policy program, but it destroys the illusion that victory proves righteousness.

Rome was victorious at Golgotha.

The priests preserved order.

The crowd obtained its demand.

The state completed the execution.

If political success were evidence of divine favor, the cross would vindicate the empire rather than expose it.

The Logos and the Neighbor

The political theology criticized in this paper is sustained through moral distance. Trump's opponents become abstractions. Iranians become Persia. Palestinians become Hamas, Amalek, or demographic impediments. Israelis become either sacred embodiments of prophecy or colonial symbols. Jewish people become instruments in Christian eschatology. Evangelicals become caricatures of stupidity or malice.

Solus Logos requires the recovery of the neighbor from every abstraction.

The neighbor is not simply the person who confirms one's moral worldview. The neighbor is the person whose existence prevents that worldview from becoming complete too easily.

The Israeli mother whose child was killed or abducted complicates any account that romanticizes armed resistance.

The Palestinian father whose family was buried beneath rubble complicates any account that treats military destruction as uncomplicated self-defense.

The Iranian dissident complicates romantic accounts of the Iranian state.

The Iranian civilian beneath American bombing complicates sacred accounts of regime confrontation.

The evangelical grandmother who sincerely fears social collapse complicates the portrayal of all Trump supporters as consciously cruel.

The former evangelical rejected by his family complicates the claim that evangelical community is uniformly loving.

The neighbor does not eliminate moral judgment. Recognition is not moral equivalence. Hamas, the Israeli government, Iran's rulers, the United States, religious leaders, and individual citizens do not possess equal power or responsibility in every situation.

Seeing the neighbor means refusing to let judgment erase personhood.

The Logos does not command blindness to wrongdoing. It prevents wrongdoing from becoming the total definition of a human being or population.

The Logos Against Chosenness Without Judgment

Religious and national identities often seek divine chosenness without divine judgment.

The United States is chosen to defend freedom.

Israel is chosen through covenant.

Evangelicals are chosen to preserve biblical truth.

Trump is chosen as an instrument.

The chosen identity then treats criticism as hostility toward the divine purpose it represents.

The biblical tradition itself repeatedly refuses this arrangement. Election does not eliminate accountability. It intensifies it. The nation that invokes God remains subject to judgment. The

religious institution that possesses Scripture remains capable of corruption. The ruler used by providence remains morally responsible.

Solus Logos universalizes this accountability.

No covenant interpretation makes a government infallible.

No national history makes a people disposable.

No election result proves divine endorsement.

No military victory establishes justice.

No religious office guarantees prophetic courage.

No spiritual experience makes criticism unnecessary.

No claim of persecution makes the claimant innocent.

The Logos is not the private possession of the chosen. The chosen remain answerable to the Logos.

This is especially important in relation to modern Israel. A Christian theology centered upon the Logos should reject both antisemitic supersession and Christian Zionist political absolutism.

It should reject the idea that Jewish history has been erased or that the church has simply replaced the Jewish people as though Israel's continuing existence were theologically meaningless.

It should also reject the idea that a modern state inherits unconditional moral authorization from biblical covenant.

Jewish life cannot be reduced to a Christian prophetic function.

Palestinian life cannot be erased by a Christian interpretation of Jewish covenant.

The Logos does not force Christians to choose which people God is permitted to love.

The Logos and Scripture

The constructive proposal must now confront the central objection. If the Logos stands above Scripture, how does the believer know the Logos except through interpretations that are themselves fallible?

There is no escape from mediation.

The Logos is encountered through Scripture, tradition, worship, reason, history, conscience, community, experience, nature, and the testimony of others. None arrives without interpretation. *Solus Logos* does not create an unmediated route to God. It refuses to identify any one mediation with God without remainder.

Scripture remains uniquely important because it preserves the foundational testimony through which Christians know the story, teaching, death, and proclaimed resurrection of Jesus. It also preserves Israel's history, law, wisdom, prophecy, lament, and theological argument. Without Scripture, "the Logos" could become an empty name for whatever the interpreter already prefers.

Yet Scripture cannot be isolated from the reality to which it testifies. The text must be read through serious attention to language, history, genre, canonical diversity, Jewish interpretation, Christian tradition, scholarly criticism, lived consequence, and the communities affected by its application.

A land-promise interpretation should not be developed without hearing Jewish and Palestinian histories.

A war theology should not be developed without hearing soldiers and civilians.

A theology of immigration should not be developed without hearing migrants.

A doctrine of sexuality should not be developed without hearing the people whose lives it governs.

A theory of male authority should not be developed without hearing women who lived beneath it.

A doctrine of church authority should not be developed without hearing people abused by churches.

Experience does not automatically overrule Scripture. Experience exposes dimensions of interpretation that privileged readers may not perceive.

The Logos is not found by abandoning the text for experience or abandoning experience for the text. The Logos is sought through their morally serious encounter.

The Logos and Conscience

The exvangelical often turns toward conscience after institutional authority collapses. This movement is necessary but dangerous.

Private conscience can become another infallible authority. A person may assume that strong moral feeling proves correctness. He may repeat the very structure he rejected, replacing “the Bible plainly says” with “my conscience plainly says.”

Solus Logos does not enthrone conscience. It makes conscience answerable while refusing to extinguish it.

Conscience must be informed by evidence.

It must hear affected people.

It must examine its own interests.

It must distinguish discomfort from injustice.

It must remain aware of trauma, prejudice, tribal loyalty, and self-deception.

It must accept correction from communities and traditions.

Yet conscience also remains the place where institutional commands are finally encountered as moral demands. No church can relieve an individual of responsibility by saying that obedience was required. No president can make a war righteous merely by declaring national necessity. No government can erase civilian humanity through official classification.

The believer cannot outsource moral agency.

The conscience may be fallible, but surrendering it does not remove responsibility. It merely makes responsibility easier to deny.

The Logos and the Community of Interpretation

Closed biblicism can be answered neither by authoritarian church tradition nor by isolated private interpretation. A constructive alternative requires communities capable of disagreement without excommunication.

Such communities would not possess a single political test of Christian authenticity. A believer could oppose Trump without being treated as apostate. A believer could support some conservative policies without being assumed to endorse Christian nationalism. A person could condemn Hamas and Israeli military conduct simultaneously. Disagreement about war would be treated as a serious moral dispute rather than a division between God and Satan.

The community would also protect testimony.

Palestinian Christians would not appear only as objects of charity or obstacles to prophecy.

Jewish voices would not be reduced to those supporting the policies favored by American Christians.

Former evangelicals would not be interpreted exclusively by the leaders they left.

Survivors of religious abuse would not be required to preserve the reputation of the institution.

Scholars would not be dismissed merely because research complicates certainty.

Community under the Logos would be organized around mutual accountability rather than compulsory unanimity.

Its members would be permitted to say, “I do not know.”

They would distinguish confession from accusation.

They would practice correction without humiliation.

They would understand repentance as an institutional possibility, not merely an individual requirement.

The church would not claim to stand where God stands. It would gather as a community attempting, fallibly, to discern where it has failed to stand with truth.

The Logos Against Apocalyptic Capture

Apocalyptic expectation becomes politically dangerous when current events are assigned fixed roles within a predetermined sacred sequence. The interpretation reduces uncertainty by converting nations into symbols and conflict into fulfillment.

Iran becomes Persia.

Russia becomes Gog.

Israel becomes prophecy.

War becomes inevitability.

Suffering becomes a sign that history is approaching its intended conclusion.

Solus Logos resists apocalyptic capture by distinguishing hope from prediction.

Christian hope may affirm that history possesses meaning beyond domination and death. It may trust that injustice is not ultimate. It may anticipate divine reconciliation, judgment, and renewal.

But hope does not require the believer to know which present government occupies which ancient symbol. It does not authorize the production of catastrophe in order to accelerate redemption. It does not make war desirable because war appears in apocalyptic literature.

The Logos is not a schedule that political leaders can fulfill through violence.

No president can bomb the world into the kingdom of God.

No territorial annexation can force divine completion.

No body count confirms that prophecy is on track.

Any eschatology that requires indifference to preventable suffering has allowed the imagined future to devour the neighbor in the present.

The Logos and Political Restraint

Solus Logos does not produce a single party platform. Christians centered upon the Logos may continue to disagree about taxation, regulation, immigration limits, military force, abortion, criminal justice, social welfare, and the proper powers of government.

The proposal supplies moral restraints rather than a complete policy code.

Political power must remain accountable to truth.

The person affected by policy must not disappear into abstraction.

Violence carries an exceptional burden of justification.

National interest cannot be equated with divine purpose.

The enemy retains humanity.

The ruler remains morally fallible.

Religious authority must not function as propaganda for the state.

No policy becomes righteous merely because it is supported by Christians.

No political coalition may claim exclusive possession of God.

These restraints do not eliminate difficult judgment. They prevent difficult judgment from being replaced by sacred certainty.

A government may sometimes use force. But force must be defended in public, moral, legal, and evidential terms—not through comparisons between the president and biblical deliverers.

A state may possess legitimate security concerns. But security cannot remove every limit on what may be done to civilians.

A nation may preserve borders. But migrants cannot be converted into an invading spiritual enemy.

A society may debate abortion. But concern for life cannot end at birth, nationality, or the edge of a favored political constituency.

The Logos requires continuity in moral concern.

Solus Logos as Protestant Protest

Solus Logos can be understood as a renewal of the Protestant impulse against unaccountable authority.

The original Reformation protest insisted that ecclesiastical institutions could not place themselves beyond correction. Yet evangelical biblicism has sometimes generated a new magisterium—one that denies being a magisterium.

Pastors, publishers, media networks, political organizations, and charismatic advisers collectively establish authorized interpretations. Because authority is distributed rather than centralized, it becomes harder to name. Because it speaks in the language of the Bible, it appears to possess no institutional interest.

The believing exvangelical can therefore issue a new protest:

The church is not the Logos.

The pastor is not the Logos.

The Bible teacher is not the Logos.

The study notes are not the Logos.

The denominational statement is not the Logos.

The evangelical voting guide is not the Logos.

The president's spiritual adviser is not the Logos.

My interpretation is not the Logos.

Even the phrase *Solus Logos* is not the Logos.

The proposal defeats itself if it becomes another verbal instrument of immunity. It must remain a confession of limitation, not a slogan of possession.

The Risk of Subjective Christology

A Logos-centered theology faces a serious danger. The interpreter may construct a Jesus who simply reflects contemporary moral preferences. The "Christlike" interpretation becomes whatever feels compassionate, inclusive, peaceful, or politically progressive to the reader.

This danger cannot be dismissed. Liberal Christianity, progressive Christianity, conservative evangelicalism, and Christian nationalism are all capable of selecting the aspects of Jesus that support their prior commitments.

The answer is not a return to interpretive denial. It is disciplined plurality.

The Logos must be sought through the whole scriptural witness, including passages that disturb modern readers.

The historical Jesus must not be reduced to a symbol.

Jewish context must be taken seriously.

Christian tradition must be heard without being made infallible.

The voices of suffering people must be included without making victimhood equivalent to moral perfection.

Reason and evidence must test claims.

Communities must examine interpretations over time.

The believer must remain open to the possibility that compassion itself has been manipulated or selectively distributed.

Solus Logos is not easier than closed biblicism. It offers less certainty and greater responsibility.

The closed system says, "The Bible has settled the question."

The Logos-centered approach asks, "Have we understood the testimony truthfully, and what has our interpretation done to human beings?"

The question remains open because the reader remains fallible.

A Theology Capable of Repentance

The ultimate advantage of *Solus Logos* is not that it guarantees correct conclusions. It does not. Its advantage is that it makes correction theologically possible.

A church can confess that it misused Scripture.

A nation can confess that it sacralized war.

A Christian movement can confess that it confused partisan power with divine favor.

A supporter of Israel can confess that Palestinian suffering was ignored.

A critic of Israel can confess that antisemitic assumptions entered the critique.

An opponent of Iran's government can confess that Iranians were reduced to their rulers.

An exvangelical can confess that contempt for evangelicals has become a new form of dehumanization.

The Logos remains beyond every faction, making repentance possible for all.

This universality is not moral equivalence. Responsibilities differ according to power, action, knowledge, and consequence. The person dropping a bomb and the person beneath it are not equally situated. The government imposing policy and the civilian enduring it do not possess equal agency.

Universal accountability means that no identity is incapable of sin and no identity is incapable of truth.

Looking Up as a Logos Event

The central metaphor of this paper—looking up from the Bible—can now be interpreted constructively.

Looking up does not mean abandoning Scripture for reality.

It means recognizing that the reality before the reader also belongs to God.

The book and the world are not enemies.

The human face is not an interruption of theology.

The neighbor is not external evidence threatening revelation.

The Logos through whom Christians believe all things came into being cannot be confined to the page while the created person before the reader is ignored.

Looking up becomes a Logos event because the interpreter discovers meaning outside the enclosure of inherited certainty.

The Palestinian is no longer merely part of a prophecy discussion.

The Israeli is no longer merely a representative of a state.

The Iranian is no longer merely an inhabitant of enemy territory.

The evangelical is no longer merely a Trump voter.

The exvangelical is no longer merely an apostate.

Each person exceeds the ideological category.

The Logos restores depth to the human being whom the system had flattened.

The Confession of Solus Logos

The constructive confession emerging from this paper might be expressed as follows:

I believe that Scripture matters, but my interpretation is not God.

I believe that tradition matters, but tradition is not incapable of corruption.

I believe that conscience matters, but conscience must remain open to correction.

I believe that reason matters, but reason can serve power.

I believe that evidence matters, and faith does not make falsehood true.

I believe that nations may pursue legitimate security, but no nation embodies divine innocence.

I believe that Jewish life must be protected and antisemitism opposed.

I believe that Palestinian life possesses equal human depth and cannot be erased by prophecy.

I believe that Iran's government may act unjustly, but Iranian civilians are not biblical symbols.

I believe that political leaders must be judged by the moral consequences of their actions, not by claims that God chose them.

I believe that the Gospel cannot be identified with a party, war, border, government, or president.

I believe that the Logos is truth and therefore cannot require lies.

I believe that the Logos became flesh and therefore cannot make bodies irrelevant.

I believe that the Logos was crucified and therefore stands in judgment upon religious power allied with the state.

I believe that the Logos cannot be possessed by my former evangelical self or by the exvangelical self that condemns it.

I believe that God remains greater than every name invoked to control God.

Beyond the Evangelical Enclosure

The exvangelical need not know immediately where this proposal leads institutionally. *Solus Logos* is not a denomination. It does not specify a liturgy, creed, sacramental order, or ecclesiastical structure. It cannot substitute indefinitely for religious community.

Its initial purpose is more modest. It creates theological space in which the believer can reject the evangelical enclosure without concluding that every form of Christian faith has collapsed.

Scripture can remain without biblicism.

Christ can remain without Christian nationalism.

Jewish history can remain without Christian Zionist absolutism.

Concern for Israel can remain without indifference to Gaza.

Moral opposition to Iran's rulers can remain without sacred war.

Faith can remain without certainty.

God can remain without the evangelical institution claiming possession of God.

The movement from *Sola Scriptura* to *Solus Logos* is therefore not a movement away from revelation. It is a refusal to confuse revelation with the mechanisms through which human beings domesticate it.

The Logos remains free to judge the reader.

Free to judge the church.

Free to judge the nation.

Free to judge Israel and its enemies.

Free to judge Trump and his advisers.

Free to judge the exvangelical critic.

Free to appear in the person whom every political and theological system had rendered invisible.

The final authority is not the Bible held downward as a shield against the world.

It is the living truth before which the Bible, the reader, and the world remain answerable.

The evangelical enclosure breaks when the believer finally accepts that looking up from the page is not necessarily looking away from God.

The Logos may already be standing in the ruins, waiting to be seen.

What Evangelical Repentance Would Require

The argument of this paper would be incomplete if it treated evangelical collapse as inevitable. Religious institutions are historical constructions, and what has been constructed can be altered. Churches can confess error. Seminaries can revise formation. Publishers can elevate previously excluded voices. Pastors can surrender political access. Congregations can protect dissent. The evangelical label can be separated from Trumpism, Christian nationalism, Christian Zionism, and sacred war.

The possibility of reform remains real because evangelicalism is not politically or theologically uniform. Significant numbers of evangelicals oppose Trump's policies. Christian leaders have publicly condemned the use of religion to justify the Iran war. Evangelical publications have criticized Christian nationalism and political idolatry. Nearly 400 Christian leaders signed an Ash Wednesday statement in February 2026 accusing the Trump administration of cruelty and warning that an aberrant form of Christianity was being used to justify oppression. Religious leaders also condemned Trump's threats against Iran and rejected efforts to portray military violence as divinely authorized.

These acts demonstrate that resistance is possible. They do not establish that institutional repentance has occurred.

Opposition by individual leaders can coexist with the continued operation of the structures that created the crisis. A denomination may issue a statement while its congregations continue to function as partisan communities. A magazine may publish a criticism of Christian nationalism while evangelical political organizations mobilize millions of voters through apocalyptic rhetoric.

A seminary may teach responsible interpretation while graduates discover that questioning Trump or Christian Zionism threatens their employment.

Repentance requires more than dissent within the existing system.

It requires alteration of the system.

Repentance Is Not Rebranding

Evangelical institutions may be tempted to respond to moral crisis through public relations. Leaders can condemn the most embarrassing language, distinguish themselves from extremists, emphasize charitable work, and insist that the media has unfairly generalized from a few unusual personalities.

Some criticism of evangelicalism is indeed careless. Not every conservative Christian is a Christian nationalist. Not every Trump voter believes that Trump is divinely anointed. Not every supporter of Israel accepts dispensational prophecy. Not every evangelical church resembles the presidential prayer circles visible on television.

These distinctions matter, but they can also become methods of avoidance.

An institution does not repent merely by proving that its worst representative does not represent everyone. It must ask why the worst representative acquired influence, access, money, audiences, and legitimacy within the movement.

Why were pastors who flattered Trump invited into powerful networks?

Why were critics treated as disloyal?

Why did character cease to matter when its application became politically costly?

Why did prophetic speculation about Israel become more authoritative than Palestinian Christian testimony?

Why did religious opposition to abortion produce absolute moral language while opposition to war remained optional?

Why could a president's spiritual advisers compare his persecution with that of Jesus without losing their standing?

Why did evangelical institutions repeatedly describe political access as religious victory?

Rebranding changes the appearance of a movement.

Repentance changes the conditions that produced the offense.

The difference is visible in what happens to power. Rebranding leaves the same leaders, donors, interpretive authorities, and incentives in place while supplying them with more careful language. Repentance asks whether those who built the alliance should continue controlling its aftermath.

The First Requirement: Name What Happened

Institutional repentance begins with accurate speech.

The movement would need to say publicly that the evangelical alliance with Trump was not merely an understandable voting decision among imperfect alternatives. It became a system of moral exemption and religious sacralization.

Evangelical leaders would need to acknowledge that Trump's political usefulness caused them to reverse standards they had applied aggressively to others. They would need to admit that claims about character, truth, sexual conduct, humility, and public witness were made conditional upon partisan interest.

They would need to acknowledge that the Cyrus analogy did more than explain why Christians might vote for a flawed man. It allowed a political leader to acquire providential immunity.

They would need to acknowledge that spiritual advisers frequently acted as courtiers rather than prophets.

They would need to acknowledge that Christian nationalism was not only an accusation invented by secular critics. It became a recognizable fusion of Christian identity, national possession, governmental power, and partisan restoration. PRRI's 2025 American Values Atlas found Christian-nationalist attitudes especially concentrated among white evangelical Protestants and strongly associated with Republican and pro-Trump identification. The exact boundaries and measurement of Christian nationalism remain contested, but the relationship between white evangelical identity, Trump support, and nationalist religious belief cannot responsibly be denied.

The institution would also need to name what happened in relation to Israel.

It would need to acknowledge that Christian Zionism often collapsed the distinction between biblical Israel and a modern government.

It would need to acknowledge that biblical land promises were used to diminish the claims and visibility of Palestinians.

It would need to acknowledge that Palestinian Christians were frequently treated as less authoritative interpreters of their own situation than American prophecy teachers.

It would need to acknowledge that concern about antisemitism was sometimes used to suppress legitimate moral scrutiny of state action.

It would need to acknowledge that support for Jewish safety does not require unconditional support for the Netanyahu government.

The decline in white evangelical approval of Israel's government suggests that this recognition is already occurring among some believers. White evangelicals remain more supportive of the Israeli government than other major religious groups, but that support has fallen substantially during the Gaza war.

Repentance would finally require naming what happened in Iran.

The church would need to say that disagreement over war is not disagreement between God and Satan.

It would need to reject the use of biblical analogy as a substitute for evidence.

It would need to acknowledge the civilians killed, displaced, injured, impoverished, or placed at risk through American military decisions.

It would need to confess that some evangelical leaders imposed sacred certainty upon a conflict about which ordinary Christians had serious moral doubts.

The June 2026 Reuters/Ipsos poll showed that 54 percent of evangelicals regarded Trump's use of military force in Iran as inconsistent with their understanding of Christianity. The institutional presentation of evangelical support therefore concealed substantial evangelical resistance.

The movement cannot repent while describing these contradictions as misunderstandings created by hostile media. It must become capable of saying:

We did this.

We rewarded it.

We gave it theological language.

We disciplined people who objected.

We made political loyalty appear to be faithfulness.

The Second Requirement: End Court Theology

Evangelical access to political leaders is not inherently corrupt. Presidents should hear from religious communities, including evangelical Christians. Faith-based organizations possess knowledge about poverty, migration, addiction, imprisonment, disaster relief, family life, foreign persecution, and community needs.

The corruption begins when access becomes evidence of divine favor and proximity replaces moral independence.

A repentant evangelical movement would establish distance between pastoral authority and presidential power. Spiritual advisers would not function as unofficial campaign surrogates. Prayer meetings would not become public ceremonies of political authentication. Pastors would not use physical proximity to the president as proof of spiritual influence.

The essential question would no longer be whether evangelical leaders have a seat at the table.

It would be whether they retain the freedom to overturn the table.

A genuine spiritual adviser must be capable of telling the ruler that he has lied, acted cruelly, abused authority, endangered civilians, or confused national power with divine purpose. The adviser must be capable of losing access.

If access is never risked, it has probably already been purchased.

Institutional reform would therefore require public rules governing political advisory relationships. Churches and ministries should disclose official roles, financial connections, campaign work, government appointments, and policy-consulting arrangements. Leaders should state whether their access depends upon public support for the politician. Prayer events involving officeholders should not be edited into campaign propaganda without objection.

Most importantly, religious advisers should publish the substance of their moral counsel when political leaders use the advisers' presence as evidence of Christian approval. Confidential pastoral care deserves protection, but public political legitimation cannot hide indefinitely behind pastoral confidentiality.

The ruler should not be able to display the pastor while concealing the prophecy.

The Third Requirement: Separate the Pulpit from the Candidate

Separating the pulpit from the candidate does not mean that churches must become morally silent. A church that refuses to address war, racism, immigration, poverty, abortion,

antisemitism, state violence, or threats to democracy has not escaped politics. It has selected silence as its political practice.

The proper distinction is between moral teaching and partisan possession.

A pastor may criticize a policy without announcing that every faithful Christian must vote for one party. A church may condemn cruelty without becoming a campaign office. Religious leaders may evaluate candidates without presenting election outcomes as divine verdicts.

The American public broadly supports this distinction. In Pew's April 2026 survey, 79 percent of adults said churches should not endorse political candidates, and 66 percent said houses of worship should generally stay out of day-to-day political matters. At the same time, 55 percent expressed a positive view of religion's influence in American life. Americans are therefore not simply demanding the disappearance of religion. They are expressing suspicion toward direct institutional political control.

Evangelical repentance would respect that suspicion rather than dismissing it as secular hostility.

Churches should stop distributing voting materials that translate contested policy judgments into a single supposedly biblical ballot. Pastors should disclose when sermon themes have been coordinated with political organizations. Candidates should not be given privileged access to worship services unavailable to their opponents. Church directories should not become campaign lists.

The deeper reform would be cultural. A congregant should be able to vote against the pastor's preferred candidate without being regarded as spiritually suspect.

The test of a nonpartisan church is not whether politics is never mentioned.

It is whether people can disagree politically and remain recognizable to one another as Christians.

The Fourth Requirement: Protect the Dissenter

Institutions reveal their actual theology by the people they punish.

A church may claim that Christ is central, Scripture is authoritative, and conscience is sacred. Yet if members who criticize Trump, oppose war, question Christian Zionism, or defend migrants are treated as disruptive, the practical creed has become something else.

Repentance would require explicit protection for political and theological dissent.

Pastors should not lose employment merely for refusing to endorse a candidate.

Professors should not lose institutional standing merely for criticizing Christian nationalism.

Students should not be disciplined for questioning prophetic interpretations of Israel.

Congregants should not be accused of apostasy because they describe the destruction of Gaza as morally intolerable.

Missionaries and aid workers should be free to report realities that contradict donor expectations.

Palestinian Christians should be allowed to describe their experience without first proving that their testimony will not disturb Christian Zionist commitments.

Iranian Christians should not be required to support American military action in order to demonstrate opposition to Iran's government.

Protection for dissent does not mean that every claim must be accepted. Churches and schools will continue to possess doctrinal boundaries. The requirement is procedural and moral: contested conclusions must not be elevated to divine certainty merely because they serve a political coalition.

An institution serious about reform would create independent channels for raising concerns. These could include elected ethics committees, outside review, ombuds offices, confidential reporting, published procedures for doctrinal disputes, and protection against donor retaliation.

The person who warns that the church is becoming politically idolatrous should not be dependent for survival upon the people accused of the idolatry.

The Fifth Requirement: Reform the Financial Theology

Political theology is sustained not only through ideas but through money.

Donors support seminaries, media ministries, advocacy organizations, churches, conferences, mission agencies, and prophetic platforms. Large donors can influence which issues receive attention, which speakers are invited, and which forms of criticism are considered institutionally dangerous.

The influence may be explicit. A donor threatens to withdraw support unless an institution adopts a favored position.

More often it is anticipatory. Leaders learn which subjects threaten revenue and avoid them without receiving a direct command.

Christian Zionism possesses a significant organizational and fundraising infrastructure. Trump-oriented ministries likewise draw audiences through crisis, prophecy, persecution, and access. Fear generates engagement. Apocalyptic urgency produces donations. Political proximity produces prestige.

Repentance must therefore reach financial governance.

Churches and ministries should disclose major political and organizational relationships. Institutions should identify restricted gifts tied to Israel advocacy, national political activity, legal campaigns, or government policy. Boards should contain members who are independent of dominant donors and leaders.

No donor should possess the power to make Palestinian testimony unspeakable.

No political organization should be able to purchase the church's moral silence.

No prophecy ministry should be able to profit from escalating conflict without accountability for failed claims.

No spiritual adviser should convert presidential access into a fundraising asset while claiming only to serve God.

This reform would be costly. Institutions may lose money.

That cost is precisely why financial sacrifice would constitute evidence of repentance.

A confession that preserves every revenue stream is likely a communications strategy.

The Sixth Requirement: End Prophecy Without Accountability

Evangelical prophecy culture often operates without ordinary standards of correction. Predictions fail, dates pass, political outcomes change, and prophetic personalities continue speaking with minimal institutional consequence.

The problem becomes more severe when prophecy influences attitudes toward war.

A teacher who identifies Iran with an ancient enemy, declares that conflict is biblically inevitable, or implies that a president fulfills a divine role is not merely offering private speculation. The teaching may shape political consent, diminish concern for diplomacy, and make escalation appear sacred.

Repentance would require an archive of prophetic claims.

Churches and ministries should preserve what was said, when it was said, and what occurred. Predictions should not disappear from websites after failure. Leaders who repeatedly make false claims should lose platforms rather than merely revise their interpretation.

Biblical analogies should carry disclaimers distinguishing theological speculation from established fact. Claims that a contemporary nation fulfills a prophecy should be identified as disputed interpretations, not as the plain teaching of Scripture.

Pastors should teach congregations how prophecy has been repeatedly misapplied across history. Christians have identified many rulers as antichrists, many conflicts as Armageddon, and many dates as the end. Historical memory would produce humility.

A prophetic system that never preserves its errors cannot repent because it cannot remember.

The Seventh Requirement: Restore the Moral Burden of War

Evangelical churches have often discussed abortion and sexuality with specificity while treating war as a matter for national-security experts. This asymmetry must end.

A church that claims to form conscience cannot outsource the morality of bombing.

Repentance would require sustained teaching on Christian traditions concerning violence, pacifism, just war, civilian immunity, proportionality, last resort, lawful authority, torture, occupation, nuclear weapons, arms sales, military obedience, and care for veterans.

The church should hear not only generals and national-security officials but also chaplains, soldiers, veterans, refugees, civilian survivors, humanitarian workers, diplomats, international lawyers, and Christians committed to nonviolence.

War should not become a partisan sermon topic only after a president from the opposing party initiates it.

The same criteria should be applied regardless of administration.

Religious leaders were not uniformly silent about the Iran war. Faith leaders organized opposition before and after hostilities began, and prominent Christian voices condemned Trump's religious rhetoric and threats against civilians.

But isolated resistance must become institutional formation.

A congregation should possess moral resources before the bombs fall.

Otherwise the state will supply the theology after the decision has already been made.

The church's purpose is not automatically to oppose every use of force. It is to ensure that no use of force becomes sacred merely because national leaders call it necessary.

The Eighth Requirement: End the Israel Exception

Evangelical political ethics often contain an exception for Israel. Governments are ordinarily judged according to conduct, law, leadership, and consequences. Israel may instead be judged according to covenant, prophecy, blessing, and sacred history.

Repentance would require bringing the modern State of Israel back inside ordinary moral evaluation.

This does not mean treating Israel as an ordinary state in the sense of ignoring Jewish history, antisemitism, the Holocaust, regional threats, or the importance of Jewish refuge and self-determination. Historical context is indispensable.

It means that context does not eliminate accountability.

Evangelical institutions should stop teaching that biblical land promises settle modern borders without further moral, historical, and legal reasoning. Churches should distinguish Jewish people, Judaism, biblical Israel, Israeli citizens, the Israeli government, the Israeli military, settlers, and Christian interpretations of Israel.

The word *Israel* should no longer perform all of these functions at once.

Congregations should hear Israeli critics of their government as well as government defenders. They should hear Jewish theologians who reject Christian appropriation of Jewish eschatology. They should hear hostage families, peace advocates, security experts, and people who survived the October 7 attacks.

They must also hear Palestinians.

Not as a brief gesture of balance.

Not as humanitarian scenery.

Not only after their statements have been screened for compatibility with Christian Zionism.

Palestinian Christians should be treated as fellow interpreters of Scripture and political reality. Palestinian Muslims should be treated as human beings whose rights do not depend upon Christian agreement with Islam.

Evangelical repentance would not require a single position on every border, settlement, security arrangement, or final-status question. It would require abandoning the claim that one government's political desires possess advance biblical authorization.

The Ninth Requirement: Distinguish Antisemitism from Moral Criticism

The Gaza crisis has generated genuine antisemitism. Jewish individuals and institutions have been threatened, stereotyped, collectively blamed, and treated as responsible for actions they did not choose. Some criticism of Israel has used ancient anti-Jewish tropes, denied Jewish historical vulnerability, celebrated violence against Israeli civilians, or treated Zionism as a singular explanation for global evil.

Evangelical reform must oppose these developments without making the accusation of antisemitism an instrument of silence.

The distinction requires intellectual discipline.

Criticism becomes antisemitic when it targets Jews as Jews, applies collective guilt, invokes conspiracy, denies equal human rights to Jewish people, celebrates violence against Jewish civilians, or subjects Jewish political existence to standards not applied consistently elsewhere.

Criticism of an Israeli government, military policy, settlement project, political leader, or ideology is not automatically antisemitic.

The distinction also applies in reverse. Condemnation of Hamas does not justify hostility toward Palestinians or Muslims. Opposition to the Iranian government does not justify hatred of Iranians.

A repentant church would teach members how prejudice works in more than one direction. It would refuse the moral laziness of assigning innocence and guilt by ethnicity, nationality, or religion.

It would recognize that opposing antisemitism and opposing Palestinian dehumanization are not competing obligations.

They are the same obligation applied consistently.

The Tenth Requirement: Reform Seminary Formation

The political crisis of evangelicalism is also a crisis of ministerial education.

Pastors may graduate with training in biblical languages, theology, preaching, counseling, and church administration but little serious preparation in political theology, propaganda, nationalism, international law, religious trauma, media literacy, interfaith relations, or the history of evangelical political realignment.

They are then expected to interpret wars, elections, migration, racial conflict, and social upheaval for congregations exposed to constant partisan media.

The vacuum is filled by whoever speaks most confidently.

Seminaries committed to reform should teach the history of evangelical entanglement with slavery, segregation, colonialism, militarism, anticommunism, the Christian Right, and contemporary nationalism. This history should not be taught as an accusation against every present believer. It should be taught because institutions incapable of remembering their temptations are likely to repeat them.

Students should examine how biblical texts have been used both to authorize and resist oppression. They should learn that the phrase “the Bible plainly says” has supported incompatible political arrangements.

Ministerial training should include direct engagement with Jewish scholars, Palestinian Christians, Muslims, migrants, veterans, survivors of religious abuse, and Christians from outside the United States.

The purpose is not to replace evangelical doctrine with fashionable opinion. It is to break the illusion that an American partisan interpretation is simply Christianity without context.

Fuller Seminary’s 2026 reaffirmation of its evangelical identity emphasized rigorous scholarship, human dignity, justice, global mission, multiethnic community, and hospitable engagement among differing perspectives. Such language demonstrates that evangelical institutions can articulate identity without reducing it to partisan uniformity.

The test, however, lies in governance and practice. Hospitality to differing perspectives matters only when the differing perspective threatens donors, political allies, or inherited certainty.

The Eleventh Requirement: Repair, Not Merely Apology

Institutional repentance must address people harmed by evangelical political theology.

Former members who were ostracized for dissent should receive acknowledgment.

Pastors removed for criticizing Trump should have their cases reconsidered.

Survivors of political and religious intimidation should be invited to testify without being required to reconcile immediately.

Palestinian Christian organizations should receive material support not conditioned upon endorsement of Christian Zionism.

Refugee and immigrant ministries harmed by anti-immigrant rhetoric should be funded.

Veterans and military families affected by war should receive care that does not romanticize their suffering.

Jewish communities facing antisemitism should receive solidarity without being used as instruments for evangelical prophecy.

Repair may require returning money, changing boards, correcting published claims, withdrawing endorsements, and restoring reputations.

An apology says that something regrettable occurred.

Repair accepts that the institution incurred an obligation.

This distinction matters because churches often seek forgiveness before they have made truth possible. Christian language about grace can pressure injured people to absolve leaders rapidly. Forgiveness becomes another method of institutional protection.

Repentance should not dictate the timetable of those harmed.

The Twelfth Requirement: Relinquish Power

The most convincing evidence of repentance would be voluntary surrender.

Leaders who constructed personality cults should step down.

Advisers who repeatedly sanctified political power should lose official religious platforms.

Organizations that function primarily as partisan mobilization networks should stop presenting themselves as neutral ministries.

Boards that failed to restrain leaders should be reconstituted.

Institutions should accept reduced governmental access if access requires public loyalty.

The evangelical movement has frequently asked individuals to demonstrate repentance through consequences. Clergy caught in sexual or financial misconduct are told that forgiveness does not necessarily restore office. The same principle should apply to political misconduct.

A leader may be forgiven without retaining authority.

A ministry may survive without its founder.

A movement may lose power and recover integrity.

Indeed, the willingness to lose power may be the only persuasive evidence that power was not the true object of worship.

The Difference Between Withdrawal and Prophetic Presence

Some evangelicals may respond that the proposed reforms amount to withdrawal from politics. They may argue that political abstention would abandon law, education, family policy, religious liberty, abortion, and national security to secular ideologies.

This objection rests upon a false choice.

The alternatives are not domination or silence.

A church can be politically present without becoming politically possessed.

Prophetic presence addresses rulers without becoming their religious department. It speaks consistently across parties. It defends people who cannot reward it. It measures success by truthfulness rather than access.

Withdrawal refuses responsibility.

Court theology surrenders independence.

Prophetic presence accepts both public responsibility and institutional distance.

The prophet may speak to the king.

The prophet does not need a permanent office inside the palace.

Can Evangelicalism Repent?

The answer depends partly upon whether evangelicalism exists as a coherent institution capable of collective action. American evangelicalism is decentralized. It contains denominations, independent churches, parachurch ministries, colleges, publishers, broadcasters, networks, and informal communities. There is no single authority capable of issuing a binding confession.

This decentralization complicates reform but does not make it impossible.

Repentance can occur at multiple levels.

A pastor can name the church's partisan history.

A congregation can protect political disagreement.

A seminary can reform formation.

A publisher can correct false claims.

A donor can stop rewarding access.

A denomination can discipline court theology.

A Christian media organization can preserve an archive of failed prophecies.

A ministry can invite Palestinian Christians without controlling their testimony.

A prominent adviser can resign and confess that proximity to power corrupted judgment.

A political organization can stop claiming that its platform is the only biblical one.

No single act would reform the whole movement. Together, such acts could change the incentives through which evangelical identity is reproduced.

The greater obstacle is not decentralization.

It is unwillingness.

Repentance threatens status, income, belonging, certainty, and power. It may require leaders to admit that the exvangelicals they condemned saw something they refused to see.

The Return of the Exvangelical Witness

A repentant movement would need to listen to those who left.

This does not mean assuming that every exvangelical accusation is correct. Former members can exaggerate, misremember, generalize, or carry unresolved anger. Their departure does not grant infallibility.

But institutions possess strong incentives to interpret every departure as a defect in the departing person. Listening corrects that imbalance.

The exvangelical can describe which questions became forbidden.

Which political positions functioned as tests of faith.

Which facts could not be mentioned.

Which people were invisible.

Which leaders could not be criticized.

Which biblical interpretations were presented as nonnegotiable.

Which moral teachings were abandoned when they threatened power.

The former member may know the institution's practical creed more clearly than its official statement does.

An institution seeking reform should therefore conduct departure interviews, preserve testimony, publish aggregate findings, and invite outside review. It should not allow the leader most implicated in a departure to define why the person left.

The empty chair should become evidence.

The Cost of Refusing Repentance

Evangelicalism may refuse this work and continue to possess substantial power.

It may retain churches, universities, media networks, wealthy donors, political offices, and millions of adherents. It may help determine elections and public policy. It may describe every criticism as persecution and every departure as purification.

Institutional success will not answer the moral charge.

The cost will appear elsewhere.

Children raised in the movement will conclude that its moral language is conditional.

Young adults will associate Christianity with domination.

Palestinian Christians will regard American evangelical solidarity as structurally unavailable.

Jewish people will discover that some of their loudest Christian supporters love a prophetic role more than Jewish autonomy.

Veterans will watch war blessed by leaders who do not bear it.

Pastors will learn that political caution is safer than prophetic truth.

Believers will continue leaving not because God has been disproved but because the institution has made God morally unbelievable.

The movement may win the nation it sought and lose the Gospel from which it took its name.

Repentance as Looking Up Together

The metaphor of looking up must finally become communal.

The individual exvangelical looks up from the Bible and sees the suffering that the inherited interpretation concealed. Institutional repentance begins when the church looks up with him.

It looks up from the prophecy chart and sees Gaza.

It looks up from the presidential prayer photograph and sees the civilians affected by presidential decisions.

It looks up from the land promise and sees the family living on the land.

It looks up from the language of spiritual warfare and sees the people beneath the weapons.

It looks up from the claim of persecution and sees the power it already possesses.

It looks up from the doctrine of individual sin and sees institutional sin.

It looks up from the demand that former members repent and asks what repentance the institution owes them.

This shared act would not require abandoning Scripture.

It would require allowing Scripture's moral claims to reach the church itself.

The evangelical movement has long preached that repentance begins when excuses end. The same principle now stands before the movement.

No hostile media can repent for it.

No election victory can vindicate it.

No judicial appointment can absolve it.

No biblical analogy can substitute for it.

No declaration of religious liberty can conceal its absence.

No spiritual adviser can pray it into existence while refusing to name the wrong.

Repentance begins when evangelicalism stops asking how to recover its reputation and begins asking what its pursuit of power did to its ability to recognize God.

The movement may discover that the exvangelical was not its enemy.

He was the person who looked up first.

Conclusion: A Faith Capable of Looking Up

The crisis examined in this paper is not ultimately a dispute between believers and unbelievers. It is a conflict within belief over what faith requires when inherited interpretation collides with visible suffering.

Donald Trump has become an unusually powerful agent of this conflict because evangelical institutions did more than support him as a politically useful but morally compromised candidate. Many granted him a providential role. His survival became evidence of divine protection. His victories became evidence of divine selection. His prosecutions were compared with religious persecution. His aggression became courage. His enemies became enemies of the faithful. Spiritual advisers who might have confronted power instead supplied power with biblical identities.

The war with Iran intensified the contradiction. Evangelicals were no longer asked merely to tolerate Trump's character in exchange for preferred policies. They were asked to interpret his violence as part of a spiritual struggle. Military decisions entered biblical history. Iran became Persia. Trump became a deliverer. American force became an instrument whose sacred meaning could be declared before its necessity, proportionality, legality, or consequences had been adequately examined.

Gaza produced an even more severe rupture. Christian Zionism had long encouraged evangelicals to identify the modern State of Israel with biblical Israel and to interpret territory, war, and political sovereignty through sacred history. The destruction of Gaza forced this theology into contact with its human consequences. The question was no longer only whether ancient promises possessed continuing meaning. It was whether those promises could be used to make a living population politically and morally secondary.

The crisis became visible in the contrast between the sacred map and the human face.

On the sacred map, Israel occupied a prophetic role.

On the ground, Palestinians buried children.

On the sacred map, modern conflict continued an ancient biblical story.

On the ground, families lost homes, water, hospitals, schools, churches, mosques, and the ordinary structures through which human life is sustained.

On the sacred map, criticism threatened covenant and prophecy.

On the ground, a government exercised military power and remained responsible for how that power was used.

The moral failure did not require every evangelical to celebrate Palestinian suffering. It required only an interpretive system capable of acknowledging the suffering without permitting it to alter the conclusion.

This is the meaning of the central sentence of the paper:

The truth on the ground is too ugly to look up from the Bible.

The sentence is not an argument against Scripture. It is an accusation against a way of reading Scripture that protects the reader from reality.

The Bible becomes a shield when its authority is transferred to an inherited political interpretation. The reader no longer encounters a text capable of judgment. He encounters a system that has already assigned innocence, guilt, land, destiny, enemies, and divine favor. Facts may enter the system, but they cannot overturn it. Civilian suffering is regrettable, but prophecy remains. Political corruption is unfortunate, but providence remains. Failed predictions are disappointing, but spiritual warfare remains. Evidence can modify details while leaving the sacred structure untouched.

Such a system may be highly stable. It is not necessarily truthful.

A belief that cannot be corrected by any possible observation has ceased to function as a judgment about reality. It has become an enclosure.

The Evangelical Crisis Is an Epistemological Crisis

The public controversies surrounding Trump, Iran, and Gaza appear political, but beneath them lies a crisis of knowledge.

How does the believer know what God requires?

Who interprets Scripture?

What can prove an interpretation wrong?

Does suffering possess theological authority?

Can historical evidence alter a prophetic claim?

Can the testimony of people on the ground correct an interpretation produced far away?

Can a church admit that its reading of the Bible served its political interests?

These questions expose the weakness of the claim that the Bible alone speaks plainly. The Bible never arrives alone. It arrives through a canon, language, translation, community, tradition, pastor, publisher, school, media system, and political culture. The reader brings assumptions before reading the first line.

The problem is not interpretation. Interpretation is unavoidable.

The problem is the disappearance of interpretation.

When an institution's reading is presented as though it were simply the voice of Scripture, the institution acquires an authority it does not need to name. Human judgment becomes divine speech without acknowledging the transformation.

The believer says, "The Bible tells me that modern Israel possesses this land."

The missing sentence is, "My community has taught me to connect these ancient texts to this modern government and territory in this way."

The believer says, "God is using Trump."

The missing sentence is, "My political and religious authorities have selected biblical analogies that make Trump's power appear providential."

The believer says, "Iran is part of prophecy."

The missing sentence is, "An interpretive tradition has converted an ancient name into a contemporary military category."

The missing sentences contain the human work. They restore the possibility of error.

Closed biblicism suppresses them because once interpretation becomes visible, interpretation becomes accountable.

Sola Scriptura and the Concealed Magisterium

Sola Scriptura was intended to place ecclesiastical authority beneath Scripture. In its closed evangelical form, it can create an authority more difficult to challenge than the one it opposed.

The new magisterium has no single office. It is distributed across pastors, broadcasters, publishing houses, study Bibles, political organizations, seminaries, prophecy ministries, donors, social-media networks, and presidential advisers. Because it has no pope, it can deny being centralized. Because it quotes Scripture, it can deny being ideological. Because its political conclusions are repeated across many institutions, they appear to have arisen independently from the text.

The result is authority without visible authorship.

No individual claims to have invented the interpretation.

Everyone merely reports what the Bible says.

Responsibility disappears into repetition.

This concealed magisterium can be more resistant to reform than a formal hierarchy. A formal institution can issue a decision, reverse a teaching, discipline a leader, or acknowledge error. A decentralized system can preserve a failed interpretation because no one possesses sufficient responsibility to confess having created it.

The prophecy teacher says he was only reading Scripture.

The pastor says he relied upon trusted teachers.

The congregant says he followed the pastor.

The political organization says it represents evangelical voters.

The presidential adviser says she merely prayed.

The politician says religious leaders affirmed him.

Each participant transfers responsibility to another point in the network.

The interpretation survives because its authorship cannot be located.

Trump as Revelation

Trump's importance lies not merely in his policies or personality. He has functioned as a revelation of what American evangelicalism was prepared to surrender for power.

The movement did not simply discover that all political candidates are imperfect. It discovered that standards proclaimed as eternal could be modified when their application threatened partisan advantage.

Character mattered until character disqualified the preferred candidate.

Truth mattered until false claims mobilized the preferred constituency.

Sexual morality mattered until accusations became politically costly.

Humility mattered until aggression became electorally useful.

Respect for law mattered until legal accountability threatened the chosen leader.

Religious persecution mattered until religious language could be used to justify coercion against others.

The sanctity of life mattered intensely in selected domestic contexts while the lives of foreigners remained available for strategic abstraction.

These contradictions do not prove that every evangelical principle was fraudulent from the beginning. They demonstrate that principles without institutional willingness to sacrifice power remain vulnerable to reversal.

Trump did not force evangelical leaders to abandon their standards.

He offered enough power to reveal which standards they were willing to abandon voluntarily.

The deeper scandal was not that evangelicals voted for an imperfect man. Democratic politics routinely requires choices among flawed candidates. The scandal was the conversion of political accommodation into spiritual affirmation.

The movement could have said:

We support some of his policies while condemning his conduct.

We will vote for him but never portray him as a Christian model.

We will cooperate with the administration while maintaining prophetic distance.

We will praise what is just and condemn what is cruel.

We will not compare his legal troubles with the suffering of Christ.

We will not treat opposition to him as opposition to God.

We will not bless his wars merely because he initiated them.

Instead, influential leaders gradually eliminated the distance that would have made moral independence possible.

The bargain became allegiance.

Allegiance became providence.

Providence became sacralization.

Israel as Theological Test

Israel presents a different but related test. The central question is whether biblical identity can be transferred to a modern government in a way that places its conduct beyond ordinary moral judgment.

A government is not a covenant.

A military is not a biblical people.

A modern border is not established automatically by an ancient text.

A political leader does not become a prophet by citing Scripture.

A state can possess historical legitimacy, security needs, democratic institutions, and the right to protect its citizens while remaining capable of grave injustice.

These propositions should be obvious. Christian Zionism makes them difficult because criticism of a government appears to threaten a sacred narrative.

The distinction between Jewish people and an Israeli government must therefore remain explicit.

Jewish people are not collectively responsible for decisions made by Israeli leaders.

Jewish safety is not negotiable.

Antisemitism is not transformed into justice by adopting anti-colonial vocabulary.

The October 7 atrocities cannot be erased by the suffering that followed.

Israeli civilians do not become legitimate targets because Palestinians have suffered.

At the same time:

Palestinians are not collectively responsible for Hamas.

Palestinian civilians do not lose their humanity because Israel possesses legitimate security concerns.

The history of antisemitism does not provide unlimited political authorization.

Biblical connection to land does not eliminate the rights of people presently living there.

Condemning destructive government policies is not inherently hostility toward Jews.

These truths do not compete. They prevent moral reasoning from collapsing into ethnic allegiance.

The theological crisis appears when one people is granted sacred depth while another is treated primarily as a problem.

The Israeli possesses history, fear, covenant, memory, and personhood.

The Palestinian becomes population, threat, collateral damage, or obstacle.

A Logos-centered ethic refuses that asymmetry. It does not demand identical political judgments about every actor. It demands equal recognition that every human being exceeds the role assigned by ideology.

Iran as Sacred Abstraction

Iran demonstrates how quickly a nation can be transformed from a complex society into a biblical symbol.

Iran contains a government, military, religious establishment, dissidents, minorities, families, workers, children, scholars, believers, unbelievers, and people whose views cannot be inferred from their nationality. It possesses a long history that cannot be reduced to a prophetic name.

Yet sacred-war rhetoric compresses this reality.

Iran becomes Persia.

The state becomes the population.

The adversary becomes evil.

Military action becomes fulfillment.

Once the abstraction is complete, violence becomes easier to authorize because the people affected by violence are no longer encountered individually.

The same mechanism operates in reverse when critics romanticize Iran simply because it opposes the United States or Israel. Opposition to American war does not require innocence for Iran's rulers. Resistance to one empire must not become blindness toward another form of repression.

A moral theology must remain capable of holding several truths simultaneously:

Iran's government can act unjustly.

The United States can act unjustly toward Iran.

Israel can face real threats.

Israel can use those threats to justify excessive force.

Hamas can commit atrocities.

Palestinians can suffer collective punishment.

Trump can make a legitimate argument in one context and a deceptive argument in another.

Political complexity is not moral weakness.

It is the refusal to purchase clarity by erasing people.

Exvangelicals as Products of Evangelical Conscience

The exvangelical movement should not be understood solely as an invasion of secular ideas into Christian communities. In many cases, evangelicalism creates the moral expectations that eventually make continued evangelical identification impossible.

The child is taught that truth matters because God is truth.

The adult sees leaders repeat claims they know are false.

The child is taught that every life has value.

The adult sees foreign civilians treated as abstractions.

The child is taught that rulers must submit to God.

The adult sees religious advisers submit God to the ruler.

The child is taught to resist the world.

The adult discovers that the church desires worldly power.

The child is taught that repentance is necessary.

The adult watches institutions demand repentance from everyone except themselves.

The person leaves because the teachings remain active after the institution has suspended them.

This is why some exvangelicals continue to believe. Their departure is not necessarily a rejection of the Gospel. It may be the consequence of applying the Gospel's moral claims to the community that proclaimed it.

The institution calls the person unfaithful.

The person believes he has finally refused unfaithfulness.

The difference cannot be settled by the label alone.

The Exvangelical Temptation

The exvangelical is not automatically righteous.

Departure from a closed system does not guarantee freedom from closed thinking. The former evangelical can reproduce the same habits in a new political home.

Biblical certainty can become ideological certainty.

The saved and lost can become enlightened and ignorant.

Heretics can become fascists, Zionists, colonizers, liberals, conservatives, or any category used to eliminate the need for moral differentiation.

Evangelical contempt for outsiders can become exvangelical contempt for evangelicals.

Prophecy can become historical inevitability.

Divine election can become moral purity.

Excommunication can become cancellation.

The structure survives while the vocabulary changes.

This danger makes repentance more important than reversal.

Reversal changes sides.

Repentance changes the relationship to being on a side.

The repentant exvangelical must remain capable of seeing the evangelical as a person shaped by fear, community, conviction, family, history, and sincere moral concern. Understanding does not erase responsibility. It prevents responsibility from becoming dehumanization.

The same standard applied to Palestinians, Israelis, Iranians, Americans, Jews, Muslims, Christians, soldiers, civilians, and political opponents must also be applied to the people one has left behind.

No group should be reduced to the worst thing done in its name.

No individual should be excused merely because the group's general suffering is real.

This double refusal is difficult. It is also necessary.

Solus Logos as an Open Confession

The proposal of *Solus Logos* does not solve every theological problem raised by evangelical collapse. It does not provide an infallible interpretive method. It cannot guarantee that compassion will be applied consistently or that evidence will always be understood correctly.

Its purpose is more fundamental.

It prevents any human mediation from becoming final.

Scripture testifies to the Logos but is interpreted by fallible people.

The church seeks the Logos but can betray what it seeks.

Conscience answers to the Logos but can deceive itself.

Reason reflects the Logos but can rationalize power.

Tradition preserves wisdom but can preserve injustice.

Experience reveals consequences but can be partial.

Political movements pursue goods but can transform those goods into idols.

The Logos remains beyond possession.

This transcendence makes correction possible.

A theology that identifies itself completely with God cannot repent because repentance would appear to accuse God. A theology that distinguishes itself from God can confess error without losing God.

The church can say:

We were wrong about Trump.

We were wrong about war.

We were wrong about Israel.

We were wrong about Palestinians.

We were wrong about the people who left us.

These statements would not prove Christianity false.

They would prove that Christians remain fallible.

The refusal to admit fallibility protects the institution at the cost of making God responsible for the institution's errors.

Solus Logos releases God from that captivity.

Can Evangelicalism Survive?

Evangelicalism can survive numerically without reform. It possesses institutions, money, media, political influence, family continuity, and a large population. It may remain one of the most powerful religious identities in the United States for decades.

The more important question is whether it can survive morally and theologically.

Can a movement centered linguistically upon the Gospel remain recognizable as good news when its public identity is associated with aggression, exclusion, nationalism, sacred war, and unconditional defense of power?

Can it retain young believers who see the contradiction?

Can it hear Palestinian Christians without making their testimony conditional?

Can it oppose antisemitism without turning Jewish suffering into a political instrument?

Can it acknowledge real threats from Hamas or Iran without sacralizing destruction?

Can it judge Trump without fearing the loss of political protection?

Can it preserve Scripture without pretending that interpretation is absent?

Can it welcome dissenters as Christians rather than treating disagreement as apostasy?

Can it repent institutionally rather than demanding that individuals return submissively?

The answer remains open because evangelicalism is not a single actor. Some churches will reform. Some will deepen their political identity. Some will divide. Some will retain the label while changing its meaning. Some believers will continue leaving.

The future may contain several evangelicalisms sharing a name but little else.

One will remain centered upon conversion, Scripture, the cross, mission, and personal faith while resisting partisan possession.

Another will function primarily as the religious identity of conservative nationalism.

A third may become a cultural ancestry maintained by people whose theological commitments are weak but whose political belonging is strong.

The conflict among these forms will determine what the word means.

The Paper's Central Claim

The central claim can now be stated directly.

Trump is creating exvangelicals because his evangelical alliance forces believers to choose between conscience and belonging. His spiritual advisers intensify the crisis when they transform presidential power into divine purpose and criticism into persecution.

The war with Iran is creating exvangelicals because it requires some believers to choose between Christian restraint and sacred violence. When military policy is described as spiritual warfare, dissent becomes a theological offense.

The Israeli government's conduct in Gaza, combined with Christian Zionist interpretations of that conduct, is creating exvangelicals because believers are confronted with a choice between prophetic certainty and Palestinian humanity. Biblical possession claims become morally unbearable when their practical function is to prevent suffering from altering allegiance.

Sola Scriptura, in its closed biblicist form, helps preserve the system because it conceals interpretation beneath the authority of Scripture. The reader believes he is obeying God when he may be obeying a political-theological network that has taught him which meanings to see.

The exvangelical departure occurs when the distinction becomes visible.

The Bible is not the interpretation.

God is not the church.

Christ is not the coalition.

Israel is not its government.

Iran is not Persia without remainder.

Trump is not Cyrus, Esther, Jesus, or the indispensable vessel of divine history.

The suffering person is not an obstacle to theology.

The person is where theology is tested.

The Final Choice

The ultimate choice is not between the Bible and the world.

The Bible is already part of the world: written, transmitted, translated, interpreted, printed, preached, and lived through human history. The world is already part of theological judgment: creation, incarnation, neighbor, suffering, action, consequence, and responsibility.

The choice is between two forms of faith.

One form survives by enclosure.

It possesses answers before encountering people.

It assigns sacred roles before examining conduct.

It protects certainty from evidence.

It identifies criticism with persecution.

It reads suffering through prophecy until suffering loses the power to judge.

It cannot repent because every failure can be incorporated into the plan.

The other form remains open.

It reads Scripture while acknowledging interpretation.

It values tradition while permitting correction.

It honors conscience while examining conscience.

It listens to people on the ground.

It distinguishes populations from governments and governments from God.

It refuses to transform political success into divine favor.

It recognizes that truth may arrive through the person its theology had excluded.

The first faith appears strong because nothing can overturn it.

The second appears fragile because it can be wounded by reality.

Yet the capacity to be wounded may be the condition of moral life.

A conscience that cannot be disturbed is not faithful. It is anesthetized.

A theology that cannot be contradicted is not secure. It is sealed.

A church that cannot repent is not defending God. It is defending itself from God.

I Am an Evangelical

The title imagined at the beginning of this inquiry can now be heard in its full ambiguity:

I Am an Evangelical.

It can be spoken as an affirmation of continuing identity.

It can be spoken as an accusation.

It can be spoken as confession.

It can mean:

I remain shaped by evangelicalism.

I remain responsible for what I believed and defended.

I cannot place my former self entirely in the past.

The person who ignored suffering was not a stranger.

The person who confused certainty with faith was me.

The person who treated political power as evidence of God was me.

The person who believed the Bible required blindness was me.

The title can then be followed by another statement:

I am also an exvangelical.

I no longer accept the institution's authority over God.

I no longer accept its political tests of faith.

I no longer believe that national violence becomes holy through prayer.

I no longer believe that ancient texts make present people disposable.

I no longer believe that questioning Trump means rejecting Christianity.

I no longer believe that criticism of an Israeli government means hatred of Jews.

I no longer believe that Iran's population can be reduced to its rulers or to biblical prophecy.

I no longer believe that uncertainty is a greater sin than cruelty.

The two identities coexist because departure does not erase formation.

The evangelical self stands before God as the person to be confessed.

The exvangelical self stands before the institution as the person it can no longer command.

A Final Address to God

God, I did not leave because I proved that You do not exist.

I left because those who spoke most confidently in Your name made You increasingly difficult to recognize.

They told me that character mattered and then excused character for power.

They told me that truth mattered and then defended falsehood for victory.

They told me that every life mattered and then taught me which lives could be treated as abstractions.

They told me that rulers stood beneath Your judgment and then surrounded a ruler with advisers who called his ambitions providence.

They told me that Scripture made the world clear and then used Scripture to make suffering invisible.

I looked at Trump and was told to see Cyrus.

I looked at war and was told to see spiritual warfare.

I looked at Iran and was told to see Persia.

I looked at Israel's government and was told to see biblical Israel.

I looked at Gaza and was told not to let what I saw alter what I believed.

But what I saw did alter what I believed.

I saw that a sacred map can hide a human being.

I saw that prophecy can become permission.

I saw that prayer can become court ceremony.

I saw that biblical certainty can become fear of truth.

I saw that the church can demand the betrayal of the conscience it helped form.

I do not know how much of my former faith was faith.

I do not know how much was belonging, fear, habit, politics, or the desire to stand among the chosen.

I do not know which doctrines will remain after the enclosure is gone.

But I still speak to You.

I still believe that truth cannot require lies.

I still believe that mercy cannot require blindness.

I still believe that no nation contains all righteousness and no people contains all guilt.

I still believe that the person beneath the bomb matters more than the analogy used to explain the bombing.

I still believe that the neighbor can interrupt my theology.

I still believe that repentance is possible, though I no longer believe it belongs only to individuals.

I ask forgiveness for the suffering I made abstract.

I ask forgiveness for the certainty I called faith.

I ask forgiveness for every time I defended Your reputation by refusing to see what was done in Your name.

I do not ask to recover the person I was.

I ask to become capable of truth without cruelty, conviction without blindness, Scripture without idolatry, and faith without possession.

I have looked up from the Bible.

I have not found the world empty of You.

I have found You harder to control.

I have found You outside the coalition.

I have found You beyond the sacred map.

I have found You among people whom my theology had made invisible.

Perhaps I did not leave You.

Perhaps I left the place where I had been taught never to look for You.

Final Reflection

The exvangelical crisis is often described as a loss of faith. Sometimes it is. But the more consequential possibility is that it represents a redistribution of faith away from institutions that can no longer contain the consciences they formed.

Trump, Gaza, and Iran do not settle the question of God.

They settle something more immediate.

They reveal what religious institutions will defend when their doctrines collide with political power.

Some believers will respond by closing the Bible more tightly around the world.

Others will look up.

They may lose certainty.

They may lose churches, friendships, language, identity, and home.

They may carry the former evangelical self for the rest of their lives.

Yet what they recover may be more fundamental than certainty.

They recover the right to see.

And a faith that permits the neighbor to be seen may stand closer to the Logos than an ideology capable of quoting Scripture while looking awa

Methodological and Evidentiary Note

The central thesis of this paper is interpretive rather than experimentally demonstrated. Available evidence shows that evangelical support for Donald Trump, disagreement over the war with Iran, Christian nationalism, changing attitudes toward Israel, and dissatisfaction with religious institutions are all real phenomena. It also shows that political and moral conflicts contribute to religious disaffiliation. The evidence does not yet establish, through longitudinal polling, how many individuals have adopted the identity *exvangelical* specifically because of Trump's Iran war or Israel's conduct in Gaza.

The claim that these events are "creating exvangelicals" should therefore be understood as a proposed causal mechanism supported by converging evidence:

Evangelical institutions identify political allegiance with religious fidelity.

A believer encounters conduct that conflicts with the moral teachings through which the believer was formed.

Religious authorities sanctify, excuse, or conceal that conduct.

The believer loses confidence not necessarily in God but in the authorities claiming to interpret God.

Religious or institutional departure follows.

Research concerning religious switching supports the broader pathway. Former evangelicals commonly report leaving because of institutional scandals, social and political teachings, treatment of LGBTQ people, and loss of confidence in religious leadership. These findings demonstrate that religious departure is frequently moral and institutional rather than purely metaphysical. They do not prove that every political controversy produces formal disaffiliation.

Sarah McCammon's account of the exvangelical movement supplies qualitative evidence that evangelical support for Trump has functioned as a catalyst for deconstruction. Her work also shows why exvangelicalism cannot be reduced to atheism: some people leave white evangelical institutions while retaining prayer, biblical interest, Christian moral formation, or an uncertain continuing belief in God.

The language of moral injury should also be used carefully. The paper does not diagnose evangelicals with a psychiatric condition. It borrows a recognized concept to describe the spiritual and moral consequences of being pressured by trusted authorities to approve actions that violate deeply held convictions. Clinical literature defines moral injury as psychological, social, behavioral, and sometimes spiritual distress following perceived moral violation or betrayal by legitimate authority. The application to evangelical political disillusionment is an interpretive extension of that concept.

Factual Corrections and Clarifications

Several factual distinctions must be preserved throughout the final manuscript.

First, white evangelical support for Trump remains very high, but the correct source for the 2024 result is Pew Research Center's validated-voter analysis. Pew found that 81 percent of white evangelical Protestant voters supported Trump in 2024. This should replace any passage attributing that result to Reuters or treating it as an exit-poll estimate.

Second, polling conducted during the Iran war shows a serious evangelical fracture, but not a mass exodus from evangelical identity. In the June 3–8, 2026, Reuters/Ipsos poll, 54 percent of evangelical respondents said Trump's use of military force in Iran was inconsistent with their

understanding of Christianity, while 41 percent said it was consistent. Fifty-one percent said the administration's immigration approach was inconsistent with Christian values. Trump's approval among evangelicals stood at 52 percent, down from 61 percent the previous August. These findings demonstrate moral disagreement inside evangelicalism; they do not by themselves demonstrate religious disaffiliation.

Third, the characterization of Israel's conduct as genocide must be reported with legal precision. The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry concluded in September 2025 that Israel had committed genocide in Gaza. Israel rejects that conclusion. The case brought by South Africa under the Genocide Convention remains before the International Court of Justice, which has issued orders and provisional measures but, as of July 31, 2026, has not rendered a final judgment on the merits. The paper may discuss genocide as a substantiated allegation, a conclusion reached by the UN commission, and a contested moral and legal characterization. It should not state that the ICJ has finally adjudicated Israel guilty of genocide.

Fourth, Netanyahu's invocation of Amalek is documented in an official October 28, 2023, statement. Israel has argued that the reference concerned Hamas rather than the Palestinian population generally. The paper should retain both facts while explaining why the use of a category associated with total biblical enmity remains morally hazardous in a densely populated war.

Fifth, the humanitarian description of Gaza is not dependent upon the strongest disputed legal term. In July 2026, the United Nations reported that more than 60 million tonnes of conflict-generated debris remained across Gaza, while only a fraction had been cleared. It also documented continuing insecurity, displacement, damaged services, health risks, and severe restrictions upon humanitarian recovery. These material conditions can be established independently of the eventual genocide ruling.

Sixth, changing evangelical attitudes toward Israel should not be overstated. White evangelical Protestants remained exceptionally supportive in 2026. Pew found that 65 percent held a favorable view of Israel in early 2026 and that white evangelicals were the only large religious group in which a majority, 57 percent, viewed the Israeli government favorably in May. The relevant argument is not that evangelical support has disappeared. It is that unquestioned support is becoming harder to maintain, especially as government approval has declined and younger Americans have become more critical.

Seventh, the White House Faith Office and Paula White-Cain's appointment are matters of public record. Their existence does not itself prove court theology. "Court theology" is the paper's analytical term for a religious relationship in which advisers legitimate the ruler more

consistently than they judge him. The factual basis is the office's formal establishment, White-Cain's appointment, and documented religious rhetoric surrounding Trump and the Iran war.

Finally, evangelicalism is not presently disappearing. Pew's 2023–2024 Religious Landscape Study classified 23 percent of American adults as evangelical Protestants, down from 26 percent in 2007. The Christian share of the population has shown relative short-term stability after decades of decline. The paper should therefore describe transformation, recomposition, and contested identity rather than imminent institutional extinction.

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Editorial Positioning

The paper should be presented as a work of theological and political interpretation grounded in documented events, polling, institutional records, humanitarian reporting, and scholarship on evangelical identity. It should not claim to have measured a new wave of exvangelical conversion caused specifically by the 2026 Iran war or Gaza.

Its defensible conclusion is stronger when carefully limited:

Trump, the religious legitimation of war, and Christian Zionist responses to Gaza are creating conditions under which departure from evangelicalism becomes morally intelligible and, for some believers, spiritually necessary.

The paper identifies the mechanism, assembles evidence that the relevant fractures exist, and gives language to a confession likely shared by people whose continuing faith no longer fits within evangelical political identity.

The thesis is therefore neither:

Trump has made evangelicals stop believing in God.

Nor:

Israel has disproved the Bible.

It is:

Evangelical political theology is producing believers who separate God from those claiming exclusive authority to represent God.

Some will remain Christian.

Some will become atheist or agnostic.

Some will join other churches.

Some will retain the evangelical formation while rejecting the evangelical name.

Their common discovery is that departure from an institution need not be departure from truth.

For some, it begins when truth finally becomes visible.