

CS502.N Church as Social and Cultural Institution Inst. M. Mapuranga

Critique, Wallis Φ Phishermen.net Φ

Wallis, Jim, 2008. *The great awakening: Reviving faith & politics in a post-religious right America*. New York, NY. Harper Collins Publisher.

Jim Wallis is a self proclaimed progressive, evangelical, political activist. A clear product of the tumultuous American “60’s”, Wallis is the founder of Sojourner Magazine and of the “inside the beltway” political change oriented organization of the same name.

From Sojourner’s materials...

*Sojourners are Christians who follow Jesus, but who also sojourn with others in different faith traditions and all those who are on a spiritual journey. We are evangelicals, Catholics, Pentecostals and Protestants; progressives and conservatives; blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asians; women and men; young and old. We reach into traditional churches but also out to those who can't fit into them. Together we seek to discover the intersection of faith, politics, and culture.*¹

And... *Sojourners* is a progressive Christian commentary on faith, politics and culture.²

Wallis is also the author of the New York Times bestseller, “*God’s Politics: Why the Right gets it wrong and the Left doesn’t get it*”. It is apparent from Wallis’ writings and standpoint, that he feels he has the pulse of what God would do if He were incarnate once again - as indeed He is in His church – and that all true Christians, indeed all truly spiritual people, would embrace this set of beliefs and work toward a world of Wallis’ and ostensibly God’s design. From issues of world hunger and poverty, to racial equality, to world peace, to environmentalism, Wallis calls for religious communities of every stripe to come together to work for change in world conditions on all of these and several other fronts. Conspicuous in all of this is that - in Wallis’ opinion - the solution to each of these matters, with the exception of the abortion issue, is the politically left-leaning one.

Commensurate with this bent are Wallis’ own and the publisher’s statements. From the book’s publisher’s dust cover, we are treated to the summation of Wallis’ “*God’s Politics*”... “*God’s Politics*...

¹ Retrieved 02/25/09 from, http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=about_us.history

² Self description, <http://www.sojo.net>

Critique, Wallis Φ Phishermen.net Φ

*electrified Americans disenchanted with how the Right had co-opted all talk about integrating religious values into politics...*³. Yet at the same time, Wallis, holding only to politically left positions, states... *“Remember, the era of the Religious Right is now past, and it’s up to all of us to create a new day.”*⁴ Apparently, there is co-opting going on, on both sides, as the very idea of spirituality is implicitly redefined in Wallis’ work as that which is consistent with what was typically referred to as the “Social Gospel” and a left leaning populist political agenda.

Wallis calls overtly for Christian political involvement, though it is sometimes difficult to follow the train of thought for such involvement. At once, Wallis is calling for genuine spiritual and religious revival resulting in a necessary involvement of religious communities in things political and social, and the separation of religion and politics. The same Wallis who outlines Christian “Rules of Engagement”⁵ in socio-political matters and extensively quotes Yoder’s “*The Politics of Jesus*”, says in a section on religious pluralism...

*It is far better to regard faith communities as counter cultural, calling us all to a higher ground and challenging political and economic power when it becomes abusive of religious values of compassion and justice. Only through its independence and separation from any state can religion exercise its vital prophetic role in every society.*⁶

How this almost purely *reactive* stance is reconcilable with Christians (and the truly spiritual of all stripes) being called upon to participate *proactively* in lobbying governments to behave in certain ways, is a machination of Wallis’, and one not very well elucidated herein. The theme of the book is overtly proactive and calls overtly for the revival of faith *as a means* of influencing politics.

The overall theme of Wallis work is indeed proactive Christian Activism for social change. Wallis refers to himself as a Christian Activist and calls upon people of faith everywhere to be/do the same.

³ Wallis’ publisher notes, inside rear dust cover

⁴ Wallis, 9

⁵ Ibid, 59

⁶ Ibid, 181

Critique, Wallis Φ Phishermen.net Φ

Toward this end, Wallis uses numerous current event issues to make the point that the Christian's obligation is to be on the side of God in issues of justice, equality, poverty, peace, environmental awareness, racial equality, immigration, etc. Yet God must of a necessity be a progressive liberal. For Wallis, throughout pointing the finger at both sides, right and left, never (with the exception of the abortion issue) takes the position of the right; frequently pointing to its failures and shortcomings. Oddly, the issue on which Wallis agrees with the "dead" Religious Right, abortion, makes up 50% of their platform, of which he lauds the death.

Unfortunately for Wallis, many of his facts are as "populist" as his message itself. Shortly after his movie "Fahrenheit 911" was released, Michael Moore was interviewed on "Late Night with David Letterman". Letterman asked Moore, "Where did you get most of your information?" Moore was quite shocked when much of the audience laughed at his response, "The New York Times"⁷. It appears that Wallis has taken much the same tack as did Moore. For those who are informed on many of the issues cited in Wallis' work here, the factual inaccuracies are quite glaring. From Global Warming to Hurricane Katrina to the war in Iraq, Wallis has taken the mainstream media approach to research and regurgitate "facts" found in the Times, the nightly news and CNN. Had we space here, factual rebuttals to much of what Wallis asserts would abound. To the reader, we advocate some alternative resource research, or contact this writer for source material on above stated and other issues.

Wallis calls upon the reader to recognize his solutions as those coming from an Evangelical. It is quite noticeable however, that the Christian interpretations of scripture given by Wallis in this work, are not Evangelical positions. In each case that Scripture is quoted, the means of interpretation is the reader response method of textual criticism, devoid of any exegetical understanding. This is quite consistent with most liberation theologies' understanding of scripture, being culturally informed and understood, with little influence from Western Historical Critical methodologies. In this same regard, on the two

⁷ YouTube has made "no longer available" the 8min40sec clip in favor of the 5min55sec clip, such that the noted exchange, heard in the longer clip, is no longer available.

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Critique, Wallis Φ Phishermen.net Φ

occasions that Wallis appealed to the ancient languages for his understanding, as if doing the exegetical work, his understanding contained translation errors and misunderstandings.

The Evangelical understanding of the realities and work of evil are lost in this work, while at several points throughout, the author claims to be Evangelical. There is little mention of evil and/or sin, their effect in the world, or how the church or governments- the two blending and melding their efforts being the stated and primary goal of Wallis' treatise- are to address them. One can only wonder what sort of Evangelical understanding does not pay sufficient attention to the recognition of evil or sin, and offer some address thereto, for there are no solutions offered; merely ideology. What is offered instead is a largely Catholic and/or Liberal Protestant, left-leaning understanding that all humans are concerned almost solely with basic needs, and will peacefully co-exist with other humans if these are provided. Governments are in place presumably to enforce these basic needs policies while "negotiating" with violators in order to find out which basic needs they themselves are lacking, which need is ostensibly making them behave as violators. Additionally, no attention is paid to the non-material aspects of human nature (where one would find sin, by the way). There is no address, evangelical, political or otherwise, of striving, achievement, ambition or any other such thing. One can only wonder at policies for meeting human needs with no attention given to these "soulish" ones. In fact, at once with the "basic needs" idea is that which sees strivers and achievers as oppressors and lesser achievers as the oppressed.

As Wallis develops his theme of Christian Activism for social change with redefinition of such terms as Evangelical, spiritual, and even Great Awakening an apparent naiveté exists in Wallis that is quite understandable at the youthful beginnings of his sojourner movement, but is largely inconsistent with his place in life and his professed (Evangelical) belief system. While openly denying being a Utopian, Wallis openly supports the co-optation of youth in envisioning a Utopian Global Society; beginning with support of the Global Warming Environmental agenda all the way through consistently exposing them to progressive political causes as part of their upbringing.

Critique, Wallis Φ Phishermen.net Φ

With his (and others') new definitions, we have in Wallis's work, the foundations of an "American Liberation Theology"; a Christianity that is (if Christianity can indeed be) anything but Christo-centric. It comes complete with oppressors and oppressed, a bourgeoisie and a proletariat. We have a new Marxism, couched in spirituality; true spirituality redefined to match Marxist Collectivism. *From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.*⁸

⁸ Marx, 1875, the fuller quote found in 'Critique of the Gotha Program' but gleaned from Utopian Socialist, Louis Blanc in 1840. *In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!*