

Understanding the Current Division Within Evangelicalism:

How We Got Here and Why It Is Important

Podcast #7

Overview: Understanding the Division Within Evangelicalism

What we'll cover in this presentation

- A) Review
 - The general context of the series and how we got here.
 - How this presentation relates to the previous podcast.
- B) What I won't be saying.
- C) What I will be saying.
 - Defining some terms
 - Re-illustrating the trajectory of the explanation (argument)
 - Zero in on Evangelicals
- D) Drawing Some Preliminary Conclusions

Understanding the Division Within Evangelicalism

- A) Review
 - 1) The general context of the series and how we got here.
 - We began by evaluating parts of two books written by Christians that discuss in some detail the relationship between Christ and Culture. (Podcasts #2, #3, #4 and #5)
 - We then looked at important ideas that influence academe (Podcast #6)
 - We are taking what we learned from that exploration to enter into a discussion about how these ideas have created a divisive issue within the larger evangelical Christian community & to a smaller degree those same people who are in academe.

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- Review (con't)
 - 2) How this presentation relates to the last presentation
 - In my research for this, I worked backwards from the current situation I saw in Evangelicalism to its underlying causes.
 - But with you, I started with those underlying causes in terms some of the “history of important ideas”—and pointed out the impact of the Enlightenment on different parts of Christianity.
 - The last presentation set us up to now look at its effect on Evangelicals in particular.
 - Transition: before we do that we need to cover a few things we mentioned in the introduction...

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- B) What I am not (or won't) be saying
 - What I will cover will not tell you is which political party to be a member of, is not intended in any way to endorse candidates for office, and is not intended to be lobbying for any political policies.
 - Is not meant as ammo for increasing the polarity within the Christian faith.
 - Not giving an account for the sociology of ideas...and that's important to consider, too.

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- C) What I'll be saying
 - Definitions
 - Enlightenment
 - Evangelicals
 - Theological/Politically Progressive Evangelicals
 - Theological/Politically Conservative Evangelicals

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- **Enlightenment (Period)**

- *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* — “The heart of the eighteenth century Enlightenment is the loosely organized activity of prominent French thinkers in the mid-decades of the eighteenth century, the so-called “philosophes” (e.g., Voltaire, D’Alembert, Diderot, Montesquieu). . . [T]here is the renowned Scottish Enlightenment (key figures, Frances Hutcheson, Adam Smith, David Hume, Thomas Reid), a German Enlightenment (die Aufklärung, key figures which include Christian Wolff, Moses Mendelssohn, G.E. Lessing and Immanuel Kant), and there are also hubs...scattered throughout Europe and America in the eighteenth century...”
- Guided by D’Alembert’s characterization of his century, the Enlightenment is conceived here as having its primary origin in the scientific revolution (and its objectivity) of the 16th and 17th centuries. Religion, values, ethics and aesthetics were to become understood as subjective.

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- **Enlightenment** (con't)
 - Produced “the first modern secularized theories of psychology and ethics.”
(*Brittanica*)
 - Previously (Middle Ages) the state had been viewed as “an earthly approximation of an eternal order, with the City of Man molded on the City of God,” now it came to be seen (through Hobbes, et al.) as a mutually beneficial arrangement among humans aimed at protecting what they called “natural human rights” and the “self-interest of each.” Social contract theory...
 - Produced the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution.

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- **Evangelicals**

- Movement within Protestant Christianity that emphasizes (gospel) salvation by faith in “the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the authority of Scripture, the importance of preaching rather than ritual”— they take Jesus and the Bible seriously.
- According to *CT* the term is “widely misunderstood and frequently misrepresented”...has become highly politicized, “invoke to describe a voting bloc as a blanket label for those with conservative or, perhaps, fundamentalist views. Meanwhile some from within the movement have dropped the label or left evangelicalism entirely, coining the monicker “exvangelical.”

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- **Evangelicals** (con't.)
 - **CT** implies that Evangelicals find common ground across denominations in their “shared faith in Christ, commitment to orthodox theology, and passion for proclaiming the gospel.”
 - **Theologically conservative evangelical**—“...evangelical theologies is the set of doctrines held historically and traditionally by the church throughout its history. It is rooted in Scripture and cannot contradict anything Scripture teaches. Evangelical theologians typically distinguish cardinal doctrines from doctrines of secondary importance. It is the cardinal doctrines that are deemed essential to hold if one is to be evangelical in his/her understanding of God and his relation to our world.” (*TGC*)

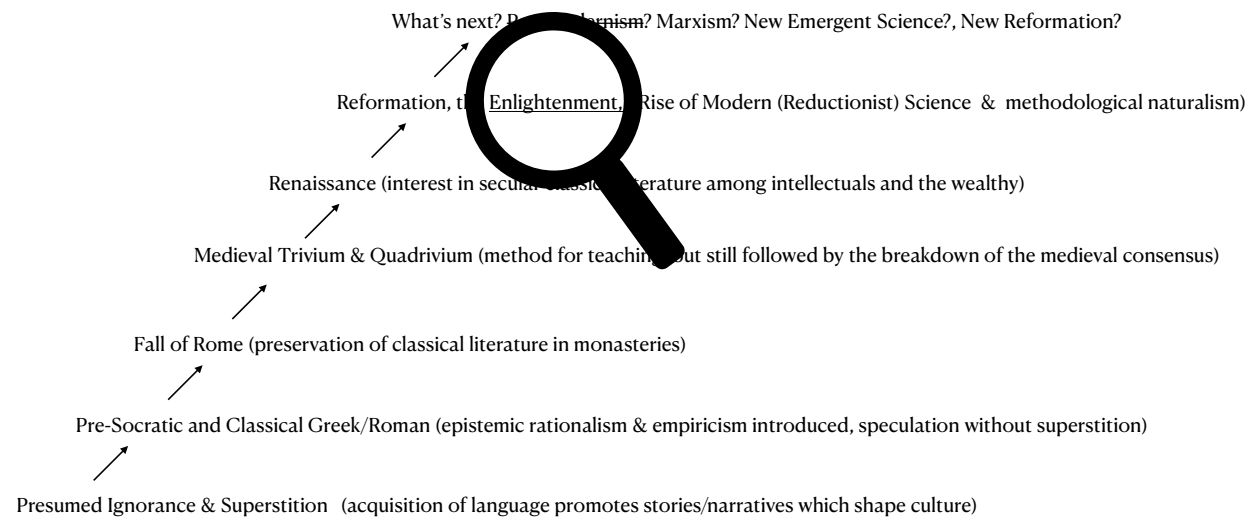
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- **Theologically conservative evangelical**—“high view of the Bible,” plenary inspiration, likely an inerrantist (range of understanding of this), generally thought to lean to the right politically.
 - **Most conservative:** “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” May read the whole Bible literally.
 - **Moderate conservative**” believes in inerrancy of Scripture: original autographs are inspired (not what we now have); a few textual issues (ending of Mark, John 8 passage—woman caught in adultery), but none that affect any important doctrines of Christianity, and NT understood on its terms are historically accurate. Believes in OT inerrancy because “Jesus quoted in a way that implies he believed its truth.” Believes miracles occurred of which the resurrection is the most important and paradigmatic for other miracles. Does not read whole Bible to be literal.
 - **Scholarly conservative:** e.g. Wallace, Blomberg; rejects Ehrman’s “modernist” reading of Bible, does not take (or read) the whole Bible literally but holds to a more nuanced inerrancy, believes in miracles, uses a modified historical critical method, understands the importance of genre in reading parts of the Bible. Very nuanced scholarly views.

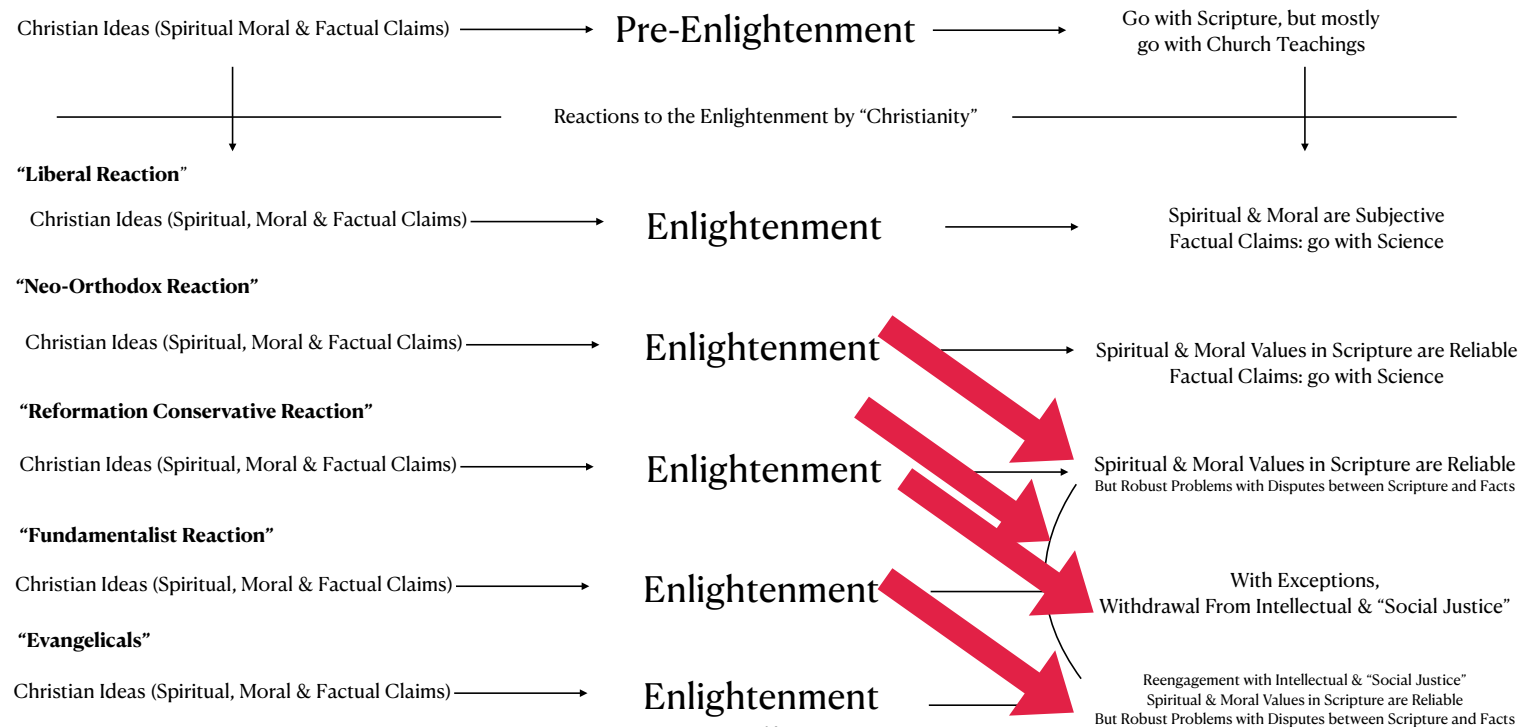
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- **Progressive evangelical**—“evolving view of the character of the Bible”, tends to lean toward progressive political views
 - **Least progressive evangelical:** very close to moderate conservative evangelical beliefs in Scripture & social change, believes in miracles, typically does not believe in inerrancy, but the Bible has authority, views “positive” social change is supported in the Scriptures.
 - **Moderate progressive evangelical:** believes in Scriptural authority (in spiritual matters, less so in matters of fact and history), more strongly involved in social change movements.
 - **Most progressive evangelical:** very close to leaving Evangelicalism or in the process of leaving Evangelicalism; does not take Scriptural authority seriously in spiritual matters and/or has problems with traditional understandings of important doctrines; very committed to social change AND by any means necessary including Marxist modes of operation.

Some Shifts in (Intellectual/Cultural) Thinking in the West

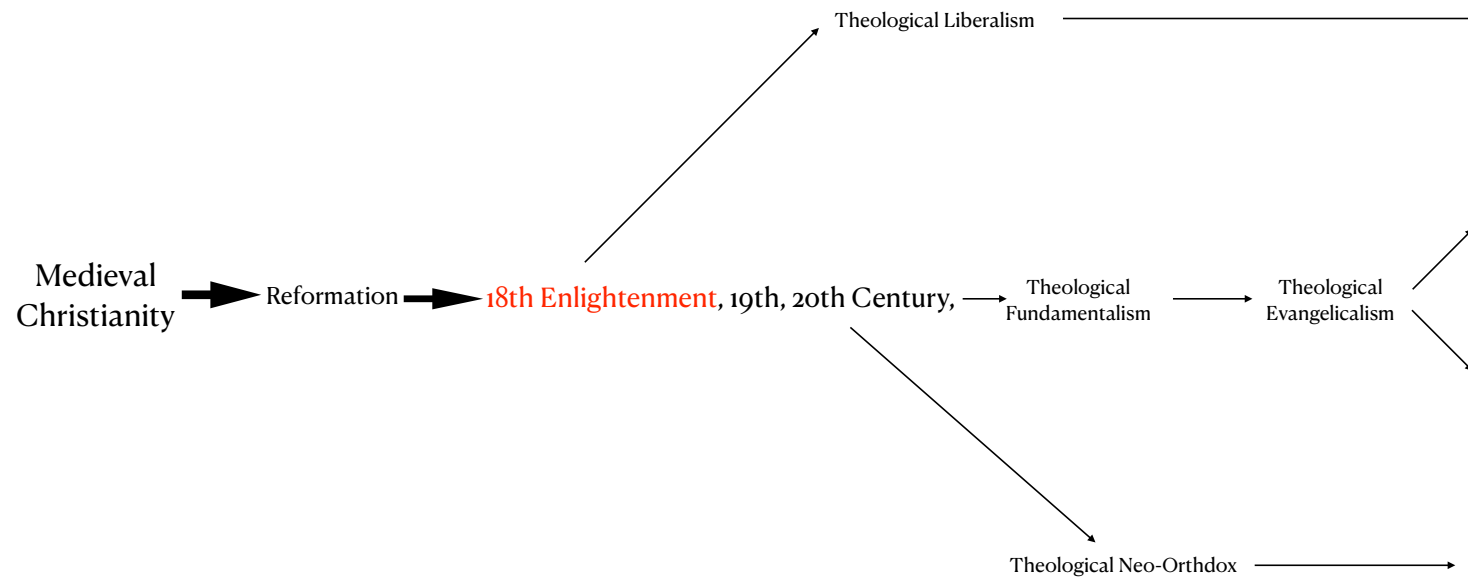


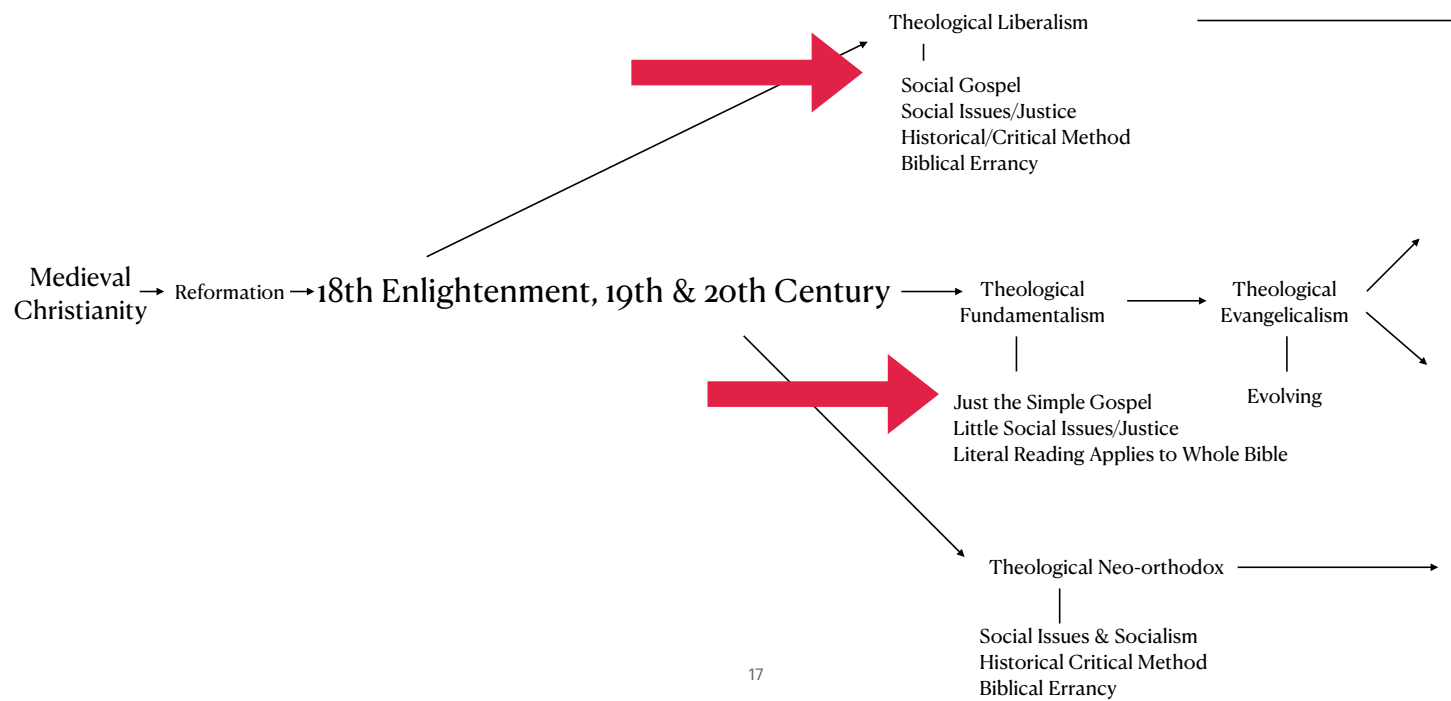
The Enlightenment: How Have Christians Responded?



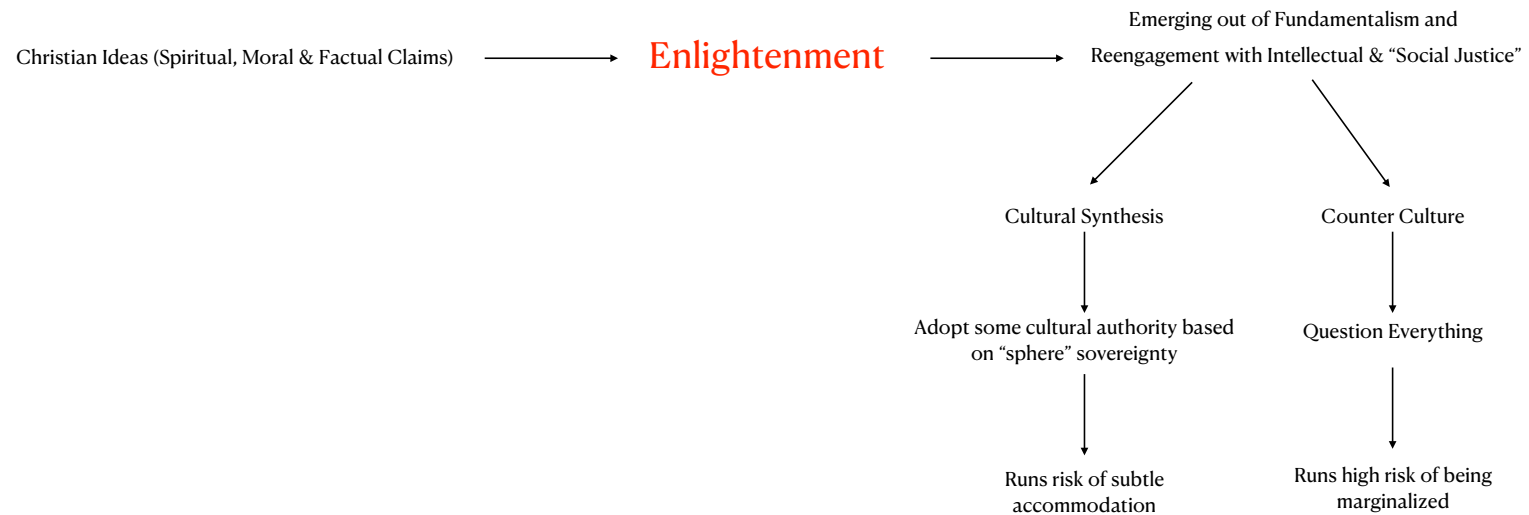
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- Review
 - How this presentation relates to the last
 - The Podcast before this explained some of the roots of this present day division
 - Rooted in ideas and the cultural ambiance coming from the Enlightenment
 - Has affected how Protestant Christians think about the Bible and the authority of the Bible.
 - Transition: let's look at another *descriptive* diagram...



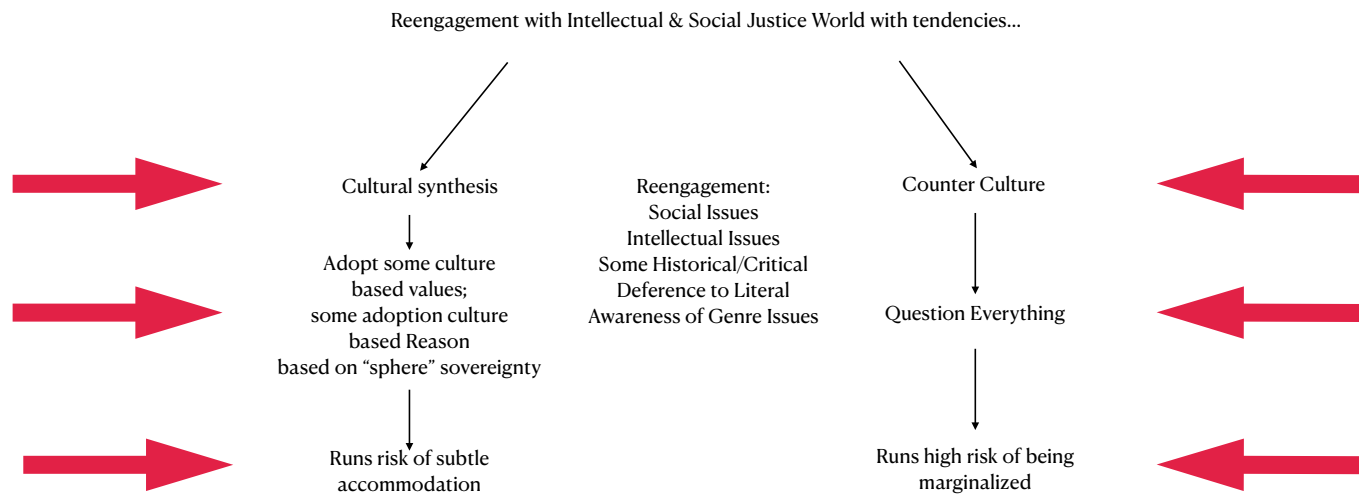


Getting to the Current Situation Among Evangelicals



Re-Engagement

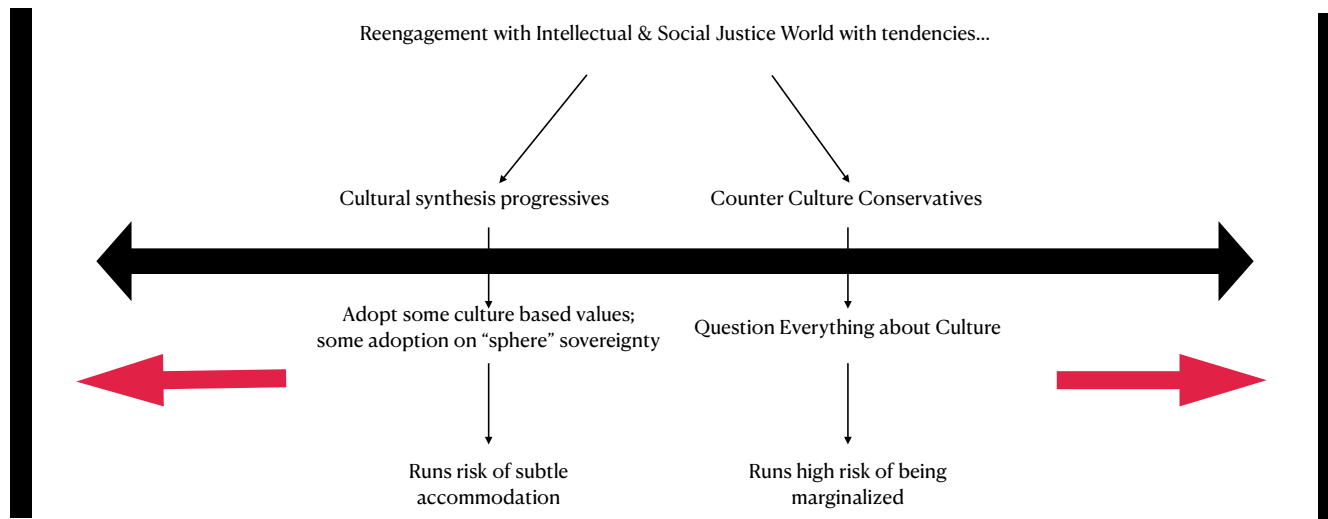
What Does it Look Like?



Roughly you are seeing the theological & philosophical commitments in this diagram, what would you guess would be the sociological/political commitments distribution?
(See Yancey, sociologist at Baylor University)

Re-Engagement

What Does it Look Like?



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(See Yancey, sociologist at Baylor University)

Preliminary Conclusions

- **My motivation for teaching this?**
 - Unless you take the view that Christians ought to live cloistered in a monastery or atop telephone pole or pillar (Simon Stylites) you are going to interact with culture for most of your life—how do you live in integrity & coherence?
- **My concerns (so far)**
 - Better than typologies is simply doing good exegesis—but it's complicated
 - A lot of the current division seems to be over politics, influenced by the “big” ideas in culture and potentially fueled by Marxist & (radical postmodern) ideology.

Other Conclusions

- Related concerns
 - The correlation between political views and theological views within evangelicalism.
 - It looks like **both** politically liberal and politically conservative Christians tend **prioritize their politics above** good exegesis.
 - Present day Christians in academe seem to be losing their nerve when thinking of the kind of integration their faith may require...advanced theological education and knowing well philosophical issues like: epistemic issues, metaphysical issues and Biblical moral theory.
 - Christians in the academic world may be accommodating to their culture in ways they don't realize.
 - Not enough philosophical sophistication—philosophy of science issues.
 - Not enough critical thinking about the history of science.
 - logical positivism
 - scientism
 - essentialism/nominalism
 - advanced theological learning—theological acuity
 - Christians on the theological left *in academe* may be naively accommodating to Marxist ideas for social change because of who they are listening to...and the further to the left they are the more likely they will become sophisticated heretics. They may also practice “cancel culture,” they may be blind to will to power issues, they may create a mean spirited division in the larger evangelical world. Both sides are doubling down.

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