

# The Endless Conversation

Dialogue between Different  
Voices in Scripture and in  
Contemporary Culture



# Purpose of This Forum

- Appreciate how listening to diverse voices helps us find greater truth and faithfulness
- Discover how the Bible includes diverse voices held in tension without any one voice “winning”
- Discuss issues we face today and how to approach them from this perspective
- Discern which voices do not have a place in the diverse conversation (hatred, extremism, violence, lies, etc.)
- Differentiate these issues from partisan politics: we are not discussing Republicans and Democrats, or any other political parties. Prior to our current extreme polarization, there were conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans.

# We Are All Liberals: Clarifying Terms

- **Liberalism is a political and moral philosophy based on liberty, consent of the governed and equality before the law.** Liberals espouse a wide array of views depending on their understanding of these principles, but they generally support individual rights (including civil rights and human rights), democracy, secularism, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and a market economy.
- **Liberalism became a distinct movement in the Age of Enlightenment, when it became popular among Western philosophers and economists. Liberalism sought to replace the norms of hereditary privilege, state religion, absolute monarchy, the divine right of kings and traditional conservatism with representative democracy and the rule of law.** Liberals also ended mercantilist policies, royal monopolies and other barriers to trade, instead promoting free trade and marketization. Philosopher John Locke is often credited with founding liberalism as a distinct tradition, based on the social contract, arguing that each man has a natural right to life, liberty and property and governments must not violate these rights.
- *Thank you Wikipedia!*

# Difference: Conservative and Liberal Ways of Thinking

Conservative	Liberal
Tend toward preserving traditions and institutions as they are	Tend toward changing traditions and institutions to address contemporary needs / address old injustices
Emphasize the autonomy of the individual	Emphasize the social dimensions of life
Have more positive views of those in authority and in power	Have more critical views of those in authority and in power
Value security and predictability	Comfortable with novelty and complexity
Stability	Adaptability

# Personality Traits of Conservatives and Liberals

Conservatives	Liberals
Persistent, tenacious Reliable, trustworthy, faithful, loyal Stable, consistent Rigid, intolerant Careful, practical, methodical Conventional, ordinary Obedient, conformist, concerned with rules / norms Fearful, threatened Closed-minded / less open to experience	Eccentric, sensitive, individualistic Open, tolerant, flexible Creative, imaginative, curious Unpredictable, impulsive Desire for novelty, diversity Complex, nuanced Open-minded / open to experience

## Liberalism

E, N, F, P

Openness

Change, novelty



## Conservatism

I, S, T, J

Conscientiousness

Stability, reliability

# Brain Science and Difference

Conservative	Liberal
Tend to have enlarged right amygdalas	Tend to have more active anterior cingulate cortex (ACC)
Amygdala functions: formation of emotional memories and learning, memory consolidation, emotional response, empathy	ACC functions: error detection, conflict monitoring, evaluating competing choices, emotion regulation
Tend to process information initially using emotion	Tend to process information initially evaluating various options
Tend to think in terms of what is meaningful personally, triggers empathy, and has emotional attachment	Tend to think in terms of data, research, judging with emotion set aside

<https://www.discovermagazine.com/mind/your-brain-on-politics-the-cognitive-neuroscience-of-liberals-and-conservatives>

# Old Testament and Different Voices

Conservative	Liberal
Structure legitimation	Structure critique
Theology of moral coherence	Theology of pain and suffering
Life works according to fixed principles, rationality	Life does not always work the way it should
Covenantal faithfulness leads to blessing	Honesty about all the exceptions
Supports the status quo of king and priest for the sake of God's blessings	Challenges the status quo when they contribute to injustice, pain, suffering
Celebrates order in creation, society, ritual life	Admits to chaos and disorder
Purity	Mercy

## Two Psalms in Tension: 21 and 79

**Psalm 21:1-13** <To the leader. A Psalm of David.> In your strength the king rejoices, O LORD, and in your help how greatly he exults! <sup>2</sup> You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah <sup>3</sup> For you meet him with rich blessings; you set a crown of fine gold on his head. <sup>4</sup> He asked you for life; you gave it to him-- length of days forever and ever. <sup>5</sup> His glory is great through your help; splendor and majesty you bestow on him. <sup>6</sup> You bestow on him blessings forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence. <sup>7</sup> For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved. <sup>8</sup> Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you. <sup>9</sup> You will make them like a fiery furnace when you appear. The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath, and fire will consume them. <sup>10</sup> You will destroy their offspring from the earth, and their children from among humankind. <sup>11</sup> If they plan evil against you, if they devise mischief, they will not succeed. <sup>12</sup> For you will put them to flight; you will aim at their faces with your bows. <sup>13</sup> Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.



## Two Psalms in Tension: 21 and 79

**Psalm 79:1-13** O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. <sup>2</sup> They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth. <sup>3</sup> They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them. <sup>4</sup> We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us. <sup>5</sup> How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath burn like fire? <sup>6</sup> Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name. <sup>7</sup> For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation. <sup>8</sup> Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low. <sup>9</sup> Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name's sake. <sup>10</sup> Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes. <sup>11</sup> Let the groans of the prisoners come before you; according to your great power preserve those doomed to die. <sup>12</sup> Return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbors the taunts with which they taunted you, O Lord! <sup>13</sup> Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

# Job: No Easy Answer to Problem of Suffering

- **Job 8:1-7** Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: <sup>2</sup> "How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? <sup>3</sup> Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? <sup>4</sup> If your children sinned against him, he delivered them into the power of their transgression. <sup>5</sup> If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, <sup>6</sup> if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place. <sup>7</sup> Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.
- **Job 10:1-8** Then Job answered: "I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. <sup>2</sup> I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me. <sup>3</sup> Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the schemes of the wicked? <sup>4</sup> Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as humans see? <sup>5</sup> Are your days like the days of mortals, or your years like human years, <sup>6</sup> that you seek out my iniquity and search for my sin, <sup>7</sup> although you know that I am not guilty, and there is no one to deliver out of your hand? <sup>8</sup> Your hands fashioned and made me; and now you turn and destroy me.

# Diverse Voices about King David: Structure Legitimation and Critique

- Samuel warns the people that if they have a king, the king will cause them great problems
- Nathan tells David his throne shall be established forever
- David is judged and punished for his affair with Bathsheba and having her husband killed in battle
- **2 Samuel 23:1-5** Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel: <sup>2</sup> The spirit of the LORD speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue. <sup>3</sup> The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, <sup>4</sup> is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. <sup>5</sup> Is not my house like this with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?

# Judaism as Endless Conversation

- <https://heterodoxacademy.org/blog/jewish-wisdom-about-viewpoint-diversity/>
- Havruta (friendship, companionship): Jewish practice of interpreting Talmudic texts with rabbi and small group of students analyzing, discussing, and debating a shared text.
- *Jews long ago put into practice the idea that we need a partner to question us, criticize us, and help us overcome our own confirmation bias. Hearing these stories from the rabbis at Central Synagogue, I experienced moments of connection, waves of awe. Talmud scholars and John Stuart Mill... offered advice, and it was largely the same advice: Be humble, recognize your limits, and seek out those who differ from you because they are best placed to help you become smarter.*
- *Let's remember what our tradition teaches: not what to believe, but how we get to beliefs worth holding. Questioning is sacred. Dissent is productive. If you start to debate, you may discover something that transcends the binary: You may discover a third opinion. And it will inevitably be wiser than either of the first two. On this day of Atonement, in this restless return to our best selves, consider committing to this core Jewish practice: Seek out a hevruta in your life.*  
– Rabbi Angela Buchdahl

# Foreigners among Us: Problem and Gift

- **Ezra 10:2-5** *Shecaniah son of Jehiel, of the descendants of Elam, addressed Ezra, saying, "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. 3 So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 Take action, for it is your duty, and we are with you; be strong, and do it." 5 Then Ezra stood up and made the leading priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear that they would do as had been said. So they swore.*
- **Ruth 2:8-12** *Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. 9 Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." 10 Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" 11 But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 12 May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"*
- What are legitimate arguments for and against immigration? Why does one side appeal to you more than the other?

# Viewpoints on Policing:

Defund police!  
Reform police!  
Support police!

- How would you describe these three common responses to our current debate about policing in terms of our Old Testament model of different voices?
- What does each viewpoint offer to the conversation that is valuable?
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/09/opinion/minneapolis-police-defund.html>

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# The Four Gospels

	Structure Legitimation	Structure Critique
Matthew	Affirming the Law	Rejecting the Temple
Mark		All allegiances to empire but be rejected; following Jesus is the way to life
Luke		A transformation of society, flipping the social order, mercy and justice
John	Affirming the community of Christ and rejecting those outside that lack faith	Letting go of old ways of knowing God and welcoming relationship with God in Christ

# The Bible and Eunuchs: It's Complicated

- **Deuteronomy 23:1** No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.
- **Esther 2:3** And let the king appoint commissioners in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in the citadel of Susa under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women;
- **Isaiah 56:3-5** Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and do not let the eunuch say, "I am just a dry tree." <sup>4</sup> For thus says the LORD: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, <sup>5</sup> I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.



# Jeremiah and the Ethiopian Eunuch

- **Jeremiah 38:7-13** Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. The king happened to be sitting at the Benjamin Gate, <sup>8</sup> So Ebed-melech left the king's house and spoke to the king, <sup>9</sup> "My lord king, these men have acted wickedly in all they did to the prophet Jeremiah by throwing him into the cistern to die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city." <sup>10</sup> Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, "Take three men with you from here, and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies." <sup>11</sup> So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, to a wardrobe of the storehouse, and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes. <sup>12</sup> Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, "Just put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes." Jeremiah did so. <sup>13</sup> Then they drew Jeremiah up by the ropes and pulled him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

# The Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts

- **Acts 8:27-39** So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship<sup>28</sup> and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.<sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."<sup>30</sup> So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"<sup>31</sup> He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.<sup>32</sup> Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth."<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."<sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"<sup>35</sup> Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.<sup>36</sup> As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"<sup>37</sup><sup>38</sup> He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.<sup>39</sup> When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

# Finding Value in Different Views

- Can you name what is valuable about the other sides' views from your own on each of these issues:
  - Abortion
  - Death penalty
  - Gun control
- How does the other side from your own speak to the truth even if you don't share their position?
- What is it like when someone with different views is willing to say what is right or true about your position?

# Are We All Fundamentally Structure Legitimizers in the West?

- Conservatives and Liberals (and others) who are invested in the Liberal philosophical worldview need other voices to see outside of this way of thinking
- In many ways we are all seeking to preserve this tradition, give legitimacy to it, and defend it against change
- Brueggemann: Counterscript
  - What if the Bible itself, with its multiple voices, is confronting us with an alternative worldview which both Liberals and Conservatives must wrestle with?
  - <https://www.religion-online.org/article/counterscript/>