

Adapt or Die: Why Social Conservatives Need

a *Moneyball* Revolution

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If social conservatives don't radically alter what we are doing—if we don't buck the current conventional wisdom and do something different—we will lose.

Social conservatives need to go back and watch *Moneyball*.

In the 2011 film, Oakland Athletics General Manager Billy Beane (played by Brad Pitt), who is saddled with a middling small market ball club operating on a shoestring budget, decides to buck conventional wisdom and risk his reputation by embracing advanced analytics long before the field became widely respected.

In a particularly memorable scene, a disgruntled scout comes up to Beane and demands that he abandon his obsession with analytics and instead trust his scouting department's instincts: "You're discounting what scouts have done for 150 years." Beane responds caustically: "Adapt or die."

Social conservatives find themselves in a similar circumstance in 2018: adapt or be defeated. Adapt or lose our religious liberty. Adapt or die.

Our fundamental problems are the same as those faced by Beane. We are underfunded. We are limited by a conventional wisdom among our donor class that says we are better off investing our limited resources in reforming our academic, cultural, and legal institutions instead of embracing the rough and tumble of politics. And we are up against a behemoth in the well-funded, institutionally dominant progressive Left, just as Beane was up against the overwhelming payrolls of large market teams like the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox.

Our Political Environment Is Rapidly Devolving

America's political reality is falling apart, and the social conservative movement is scrambling to cope. The absence of structures in the social conservative movement to fight back against the aggressive machinations of

the Sexual Left have left the country undefended, even in areas that have traditionally been strongly socially conservative. Even these areas may not be socially conservative for much longer.

That is, at least, the goal of pro-LGBT megadonor Tim Gill, who [last year told *Rolling Stone*](#) he wanted to use his considerable fortune to “punish the wicked”—meaning Christians who didn’t fully accept the Sexual Left’s new mandatory doctrine. And Gill is moving quickly, according to the [Chicago Tribune](#):

Megadonor Tim Gill has become one of the nation’s leading philanthropists for LGBT causes, spending tens of millions of dollars from his fortune accrued from a software company he started. One of his priorities now is to move beyond “the easy states” and build new alliances in Republican-controlled states that could pave the way for non-discrimination laws.

One of Gill’s first target states is Pennsylvania, an important battleground where his crusade against social conservatism—and Christianity itself—is well under way. This past month, Philadelphia’s Catholic Social Services and Bethany Christian Services were denied city contracts to provide foster care services due to their longstanding commitment to placing children in families with both a mother and a father. Christian hospitals and other social services could be next in the crosshairs. Meanwhile, in Harrisburg, Gill-aligned legislators have been pushing hard for changes to non-discrimination law that would enshrine SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) as a new, protected class, thus imperiling religious liberty statewide.

But progressives won’t stop here. *National Review*’s David French [recently described](#) a new proposed law in California that would “ban the sale of books expressing orthodox Christian beliefs about sexual morality.” (For another take on the bill, see [Adam MacLeod’s *Public Discourse* essay](#).) California, of course, is the true blue utopia—the model that the progressive movement wants to foist on the entire United States. As French notes, “Despite the obvious constitutional problems and despite its obvious intolerance for the Christian ethics of millions of its citizens, the bill is

presently sailing through — passing two committee votes by 8–2 and 8–1 margins.”

Needless to say, social conservatives are facing a dire situation. The march of radical progressivism is accelerating, and calls for compromise and tolerance are being shrugged aside as the Sexual Left becomes ever bolder in its attempts to root out perceived “bigotry.” Furthermore, social conservatives’ attempts to push back against this onslaught appear increasingly feeble when compared to the Left’s successes.

The bottom line is this: if social conservatives don’t radically alter what we are doing—if we don’t buck the current conventional wisdom and do something different—we will lose. Adapt or die.

The Case for Politics

As I have argued [previously](#), there is a notion in social conservative circles that culture and politics are separate spheres that, while they may overlap occasionally, are only indirectly related. Donors, many of whom are apolitical themselves, find it much more enthralling to attempt to change the culture by reforming or rebuilding our society’s broken institutions: academia, our legal system, Hollywood, the media, and so on. These institutions have, of course, been captured by the Left, and while changing them is a noble and important effort, it is a long-term strategy whose successes can often be very slow to appear.

The Sexual Left, meanwhile, has focused considerable resources on targeted political investments that have an immediate return—and, arguably, just as significant an impact on American culture.

Consider the SOGI issue. Just a few short years ago, the issue of gender identity was barely a blip on most Americans’ radar screens. But in 2016, sensing an opportunity to pounce against a weak Republican Party that had ceded the gay marriage issue, progressives decided to make an example out of North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory for signing HB2, a bill that overrode a Charlotte SOGI ordinance in order to protect privacy and religious freedom.

Progressive advocacy groups spent millions of dollars in North Carolina, as their corporate allies threatened boycotts and applied economic pressure to

the state. Meanwhile, the media dutifully played their role, inventing an economic crisis that had no basis in reality. The effort was rapid and considerable, and the conservative response was virtually non-existent. McCrory lost by just 10,000 votes, but the message was clear: Republicans who oppose SOGI laws will be destroyed.

With no advocates for religious freedom in the Democratic Party (and few public ones in the Republican Party), and no support in our nation's institutions, corporate America, academia, and the media, what hope is there? What chance do social conservatives have to protect our nation's most sacred freedoms?

Last Line of Defense: The American People

Our hope is the American people, who by and large support religious freedom and are still bound by an intuitive understanding of natural law and common sense. Yet this asset—our “silent majority,” the only asset social conservatives actually possess—remains relatively unused.

Although the previously mentioned institutions of course hold a great deal of influence in American society, there is only one place where the average person has a direct say: politics. Elections are the single most effective avenue for citizens to make their voices heard, and for a movement whose greatest strength is the citizenry, one might expect the political realm would be high priority.

However, objectively speaking, this has not been the case for social conservatives. According to [data](#) compiled by my organization, the American Principles Project Foundation, over the last seven years, spending by social conservative organizations has skewed heavily toward nonpolitical efforts to change policy and culture, to the detriment of electoral opportunities. In fact, for every dollar invested in electoral politics, social conservatives spent over thirty-five dollars on nonpolitical activities. This has led to a massive disadvantage when compared to the Left, which regularly outspends our side by significant margins. In 2016, for example, three of the Sexual Left's largest groups—EMILY's List, Planned Parenthood, and Human Rights Campaign—combined to spend more

electorally than the entire social conservative movement over the previous four election cycles.

Simply put, if this status quo continues, social conservatives will continue to lose. We cannot afford to constantly surrender on the only battlefield that favors us.

Pennsylvania: A Unique Opportunity

Chad Griffin, president of Human Rights Campaign, [recently bragged in *The Hill*](#) about his track record of winning important races to promote the transgender agenda. Griffin fully understands the importance of politics. He closed his piece with a warning: “And as we continue to prove — from North Carolina, to Virginia, to Alaska — if you come for us, we will come for you on Election Day.”

Griffin is living rent-free in the heads of establishment Republicans across the country. That threat—and the success the Sexual Left has had in taking down politicians who challenge them—has a chilling effect on legislative efforts to protect our religious liberty. The First Amendment Defense Act, important religious liberty legislation that was supported by President Trump on the campaign trail and ostensibly supported by the Republican Party as a whole, has never even come close to getting a vote in Congress. And Republican consultants are telling state legislators across the country to avoid introducing RFRA (Religious Freedom Restoration Acts) in order to avoid the wrath of the Sexual Left.

It’s pretty clear that we need a victory... which brings us back to Pennsylvania. Governor Tom Wolf is one of the most aggressive anti-religious liberty extremists in the country. Wolf supports the Fairness Act, a SOGI “non-discrimination” law that would discriminate against Christians, violate the privacy of women and children, and violate religious freedom in Pennsylvania. Defeating Wolf—and using the religious liberty issue to do it—would be an incredible victory for social conservatives. The Human Rights Campaign’s narrative of the LGBT lobby’s newfound invincibility would be seriously weakened.

In order to wage an all-out battle against Wolf, we would need a strong conservative who believes in religious liberty to be the Republican nominee.

Unfortunately, the frontrunner, Scott Wagner, is just as bad as Wolf on the issue. Wagner was a cosponsor of the Fairness Act and even voted down an amendment that would have provided religious liberty exceptions to the bill. Wagner has repeatedly lied about the effect the Fairness Act would have. He promises voters that it is not a bathroom bill and is just about “housing, employment, and public accommodations.” He fails to mention that the state’s Human Relations Commission has already explained that this applies to the bathrooms, locker rooms, and showers in housing, employment, and public accommodations.

The good news is there is a strong conservative candidate in the race: Paul Mango. Mango has attacked Wagner repeatedly for his support of the “bathroom bill” and has promised to protect religious liberty in the state of Pennsylvania. He is the perfect candidate to take on Governor Wolf in the fall. Pennsylvania provides a twofold opportunity to reject the Sexual Left’s agenda and to demonstrate that religious liberty is a political winner. If we defeat Wagner, we show that Republican voters won’t stand for an anti-religious liberty candidate. And if we defeat Wolf, we show that the same is true among all voters in a high-profile general election, too.

Yet in this race there’s a glaring absence of real political muscle coming in to support the religious liberty and traditional values candidate. This is where we need a “Moneyball” revolution. As the Sexual Left understands, winning key races like the one in Pennsylvania (or losing key races like the ones in North Carolina or Virginia) sends a message and affects the way issues are debated across the country. A small investment in an important race like the Pennsylvania governor’s race can create a narrative and change the way politics is done, which represents an incredible return on investment that nonpolitical spending simply can’t match.

Currently, as we argued in our [Case for Politics](#) report, there isn’t a major group that focuses on leveraging religious liberty as a political issue. While groups like ours (American Principles Project) episodically participate in this, as we did in North Carolina and Virginia, there is no consistent funding for this effort. This represents a huge hole in the center of our

movement. If we fail to mobilize our biggest asset, the genuine common sense of the American people, we will never defeat the Sexual Left.

In *Moneyball*, Billy Beane was ultimately viewed as successful. In the 2002 season, the first year he employed his advanced analytics strategy, the Oakland Athletics finished 103-59 and made the playoffs, where they lost 3-2 to the Minnesota Twins and failed to advance to the World Series. But despite failing to win the “battle”—the World Series—Beane won the war. His advanced analytics strategy, born out of necessity due to a shoestring budget and a daunting lineup of well-funded opponents, changed the way the game of baseball was played.

We, too, are operating on a shoestring budget. We, too, have the odds stacked against us. And we, too, can be successful if we embrace politics and embrace the American people, where we have a distinct advantage over our radical opponents.

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