

Chapter 12

**Voices from the Global
Evangelical Community**

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THE DAY BEFORE THE INAUGURATION OF DONALD TRUMP, THE FORTY-FIFTH President of the United States, the International Fellowship for Mission as Transformation (INFEMIT) issued a call for biblical faithfulness to the radical implications of the gospel. Its message was for the church worldwide, but especially for the church in the United States. It called for biblical faithfulness amid what it identified as “the new fascism,” words which many at the time deemed too harsh. Tragically, the words, policies, and actions of the Trump administration over the last four years have lived up to the charge. The possibility of a second Trumpian term compels us to reprint the Call, along with follow-up voices from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

A Call for Biblical Faithfulness Amid the New Fascism¹

A new form of dangerous political leadership is emerging in different parts of the world. Although this is not the first, and likely not the last time, the threat today of what can be called the new

1. INFEMIT, <https://infemit.org/call-biblical-faithfulness/>.

fascism is real. As an ideology characterized by fundamentalist, militant, nationalistic, and racist policies, fascism threatens especially the “other,” be it the poor, the oppressed, or the disenfranchised people for whom God has a special concern.

As members of the global evangelical community, we, the undersigned, feel compelled by the Spirit to call the church worldwide, first and foremost ourselves, to hear the clarion call of the Gospel to radical biblical faithfulness amid the new fascism and to renew its commitment to live out the peace, justice, and hope of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.

Though we witness this form of dangerous political leadership emerging in other parts of the world, we are issuing this statement around the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the 45th President of the United States, because of that nation’s global influence. We are keenly aware of the anxiety and fear being caused around the world by the actions, stated positions, and inflammatory foreign policy remarks of the President-elect.

As followers of Jesus, we also feel compelled to issue this call because we find it disturbing that many self-identified evangelicals in their respective countries contributed in no small part to the new fascism by the way they voted in a number of recent referenda (e.g., Colombia, United Kingdom) and national elections (e.g., Philippines, United States). In the case of the U.S., we mourn the reduction of the gospel that resulted in single-issue voting, even as we acknowledge the complexity of the political process and the agony of many over the options available. It is true that for many evangelicals, their vote was more *against* the other candidates than it was *for* the one they elected. Nonetheless, we grieve the part that evangelicals played in electing a person whose character, values, and actions are antithetical to the Gospel. Furthermore, we find it inadmissible that some high-profile evangelical leaders have hailed the President-elect as a Christian and a prophet. It does not surprise us that many people, especially from the younger generation, are abandoning the evangelical world altogether.

As representative members of the global evangelical community, we stand with all who oppose violence, racism, misogyny, and religious, sexual and political discrimination by resisting the leadership of a person whose life, deeds and words have normalized and even glorified these postures. Our voices represent solidarity with them both in their grief over the results of the elections and in their resolve to speak to power in word and deed in these troubling times.

As a challenge to the new fascism, we call the whole church to biblical faithfulness in:

- the merciful and just treatment of immigrants, refugees, strangers, and racial and religious minorities.
- the rejection of all sorts of objectification of women and commercialization of sex.
- the responsible and just regard for the care of God's creation, including taking seriously the reality and dangers of climate change.
- the commitment to world peace in the face of the war industry, military rhetoric and action.
- the courageous and self-sacrificing pursuit of the welfare of the poor, marginalized, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, including children and youth.

Finally, we call to account the incoming U.S. President and his administration in the power of the Gospel, warning them that God holds each nation, each leader, and each individual responsible for how they act on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. And we encourage all God's people to pray for the United States and its leaders, for the sake of the welfare not only of U.S. citizens but of all people around the world.

J. Samuel Escobar (Lima, Peru)

I believe that in good conscience, both as a Latin American evangelical and as an American citizen, I cannot support President Trump. For me it would be supporting a pagan war-maker in clear contrast with a Christian peacemaker. Trump is a pagan, and this is demonstrated by a behavior in which wealth, sex, and power were the dominant values in his life. I see no evidence that his moving close to the conservative Protestant side of the American scene is the result of a conversion to Christ either in speech or in behavior.

Of course, this places me in an uncomfortable position as a citizen. Is there a possibility that a Christian peacemaker may enter in the political arena of the USA today and be elected as president? Or is that unthinkable? I am aware that even evangelicals who share theological convictions and political principles may not agree in answering these questions.

In the year 2005 and as a result of his experience as President of the United States, Jimmy Carter wrote: "Americans cherish the greatness of our

homeland, but many do not realize how extensive and profound are the transformations that are now taking place in our nation's basic moral values, public discourse and political philosophy.²

For me, the way in which the policies as well as the discourse of President Trump have developed in these years that he has been in office, show the accuracy as well as the relevance of what Carter predicted in 2005. He said: "Narrowly defined theological beliefs have been adopted as the rigid agenda of a political party. Powerful lobbyists, both inside and outside government, have distorted an admirable belief in free enterprise into the right of extremely rich citizens to accumulate and retain more and more wealth and pass all of it on to descendants. Profits from stock trading and income from dividends are being given privileged tax status. To quote a Christian friend, the new economic philosophy in Washington is that a rising tide raises all yachts."³

I am not writing as a Democratic voter but as a Christian pondering the reflections of another Christian with great political experience. What do his reflections tell me about what I, as a missiologist, can learn from them as to the way God acts in history and expects Christians to act?

In 1985 Jimmy Carter published his book *The Blood of Abraham*. As he tells us in the initial pages of the book, it is an effort to which Carter dedicated several years.⁴

It has a historical chronology of the region which goes from 9,000 before Christ to 1985, and five excellent maps that include Abraham's trip to the birth of the State of Israel as well as the situation up to 1984. Carter wants his readers to understand a really complex situation. With his wife Rosalynn and with Kenneth Stain, he traveled through Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, and Morocco. A chapter is dedicated to each and in every one of them the Carters interviewed statesmen, scholars, and authorities.

I have come to the conclusion that by his way of life, his commitment to Christian truth and the quality of his testimony, President Jimmy Carter showed that it was possible for a Christian to hold such a position acting as a Christian peacemaker and not as a pagan war seeker.

2. Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2005), 3.

3. Carter, *Endangered*, 4.

4. Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), vii–viii.

David S. Lim (Manila, Philippines)

Why not reelect Trump? Eight reasons. I share my political views as a representative voice of the evangelical movement in Asia, having been in the leadership teams of the Lausanne Movement in the Philippines since 2007 and in Asia (especially Southeast Asia) since 2008.

As a vocal critic of the Trump-like Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, I would like to call all evangelical citizens of the USA to campaign as vehemently as possible to oppose the reelection of President Donald Trump. Trump's election with the strong backing of white Evangelicals has shown that US Evangelicalism has fallen into the worst-case scenario that I wrote about thirty-five years ago.⁵

Here in brief are the eight main reasons why I urge Americans, especially evangelicals, not to vote for Trump again.

Personal integrity matters

Above all, leadership, especially world leadership, must be by example. Over the past three years Trump has proven that his character and leadership have no moral fiber. His values and behavior have been antithetical to biblical standards and even plain simple ethics. His life, deeds, and words have enhanced racism (particularly white supremacy), misogyny, sexual and political discrimination, and gun violence. He has been devoid of empathy and compassion for the poor and marginalized (especially minorities and refugees) and even of decency in speech (most notably the vulgarity in his tweets). He has made false and misleading statements routinely and unapologetically.⁶ He has yet to apologize for any lie, mistake, or sin that he has said or done.

Leadership style matters

Secondly, Trump has practiced a Machiavellian (or dictatorial) style of leadership and has shown his high regard for contemporary dictators like Russia's Putin, China's Xi, and North Korea's Kim. Politics thus becomes amoral—any means however unscrupulous can justifiably be used to achieve and maintain power. His governance has been unprincipled and manipulative, often unethical and dishonest, showing no respect for human

5. David Fraser, ed., *The Evangelical Round Table, II: Evangelicalism: Surviving Its Success* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 210–36.

6. Cf. "Veracity of Statements by Donald Trump," *Wikipedia*.

rights and rule of law. No one can trust any tweet he posts or any word he says. This is far from the model of President “Honest Abe” Lincoln.

This is also seen in his “transactional politics” based on personal vendetta. If one treats him badly, Trump will hit back even more badly. If another treats him well, Trump will reward him doubly. He has been petty, making decisions based on personal hurt feelings. This narcissistic pattern is seen in his hostility to any criticism from any person (including his appointed staff and advisers, and even his party mates) in any media (including his favorite Fox News).

National unity matters

Thirdly, rather than working for national unity, Trump has encouraged worse public divisions. Perhaps he is just riding on the global trend towards populist politics, like China’s Xi, India’s Modi, the UK’s Johnson, Philippines’ Duterte, etc. But this has not been the case in many other countries, like Germany, France, Sweden, Finland, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, etc. Populisms claim to represent the common people and use narrow nationalistic sentiments (like building walls and discriminating against minorities) to gain loyalty and votes. This is shown in Trump’s persistent use of personalization of issues, thereby building a personality cult around himself. This has resulted in the heated polarization of the citizenry, seen in the voters’ choice based on loyalty (or disloyalty) to his person rather than his party platform and/or national policies.

Just policies matter

Fourthly, since the 1963 March on Washington, the USA has made great strides in fulfilling the ideals on which the country was founded. But the fight for true equality continues today.⁷

Trump rolled back previous regimes’ regulations and pushed through a corporate tax cut while boosting military spending, thereby putting unemployment to a record low, yet driving inequality worse.

Due to these and other “anti-poor” policies, more than 1.5 million US public school students were homeless at some point over the past three years, according to data from the 2017–2018 academic year published in

7. Cf. “Equality now,” *Time*, March 2–9, 2020, 28–83.

January 29, 2020 by the National Center for Homeless Education. That is more than double the number from 2004–2005.⁸

Foreign policies matter

Fifthly, cancelling or changing trade deals and military pacts has made the USA appear like a rogue superpower that wants to bully weaker nations, while China has been making friends with its Belt and Road Initiative and generous loans. Trump even reversed Obama's "pivot to Asia" policy! Today, no one (not even Trump himself) knows what his overall foreign master plan is!

In the Middle East, Trump unilaterally recognized the divided Jerusalem as the capital and disputed Golan Heights as a sovereign part of Israel, thereby raising the "rumors of war." And in Syria, the USA should be using her diplomatic power to "insist on a cease-fire and a negotiated peace based on some measure of political participation, accountability and the conditions for the safe return of refugees."⁹

Instead his sudden personal decision to pull strategic troops out of Syria has left a leadership vacuum that Russia and Turkey have gladly filled.

Climate crisis matters

Sixthly, confronting the challenge of climate change needs resolute leadership based on "the Science." At the mid-February Davos 2020 event, teenage activist Greta Thunberg rightly said, "Pretty much nothing has been done since the global emissions" of carbon dioxide have not been reduced. In fact global temperatures will rise far beyond the desired level even if governments follow through on their current commitments in the Paris Agreement.¹⁰

G20 reports that it is Trump's USA that is the only member that opposes the issuance of a clear statement to take serious steps to address the climate emergency. We need global leaders who are not "climate deniers," but "creation care" advocates to minimize if not eradicate this catastrophe for generations to come.

8. "News Ticker: Students face record homelessness," *Time*, February 10, 2020, 10.

9. Angelina Jolie, "The price of inaction in Syria," *Time*, March 2–9, 2020, 18.

10. Justin Worland, "The world of finance groggily awakens to climate change," *Time*, February 10, 2020, 16 and 18.

US leadership matters

Seventhly, in a world where Communist China has risen rapidly to become “the superpower” by 2030 if not earlier, the USA has to have a clear blueprint on what to do, particularly on trade deals and military pacts, and a strategic chart toward attaining world peace. But so far Trump has shown that he has no such master plan and no intention of following the wisdom of the Pentagon or the multilateral decisions of the United Nations and other global bodies.

As the commander-in-chief of still the world’s superpower (and its allies, especially the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan in Asia), Trump has made USA into an unpredictable bully nation, behaving like the tough “Ugly American” depicted in the 1958 book of Eugene Burdick and William Lederer.¹¹

He has made the world more vulnerable, uncertain, unsafe, and insecure. Trump’s slogan to “make America great again” sounds so hollow and laughable!

Evangelical brand matters

Eighth and lastly, with white evangelicals being the key supporters of Trump and his regime, the identity and reputation of American (and global) evangelicalism is at stake. And with the above seven reasons, it has been an embarrassing and shameful downward slide. As a key leaders of the Philippine and Asian partner-members of the Lausanne Movement, my colleagues and I have started to label ourselves as “post-evangelical” and white evangelicalism as “fundamentalist”! We long to return to being called simply “evangelicals” (with white American “fundamentalists” on board, too) as soon as possible.

In short, you need to redeem the damage of bringing embarrassment (if not dishonor) to your country’s status (and to Christ’s name) in Trump’s first term. Trumpism has been a great disaster. Trump made American degraded, debased, and decadent! For the above eight reasons, therefore, I plead with American voters by the mercies of God, please vote for the next presidential candidate who is “anti-Trump”! Let history not show that you are ignorant accomplices to your past shameful deed of enabling and supporting the worst president of the USA who made your country ugly (and uglier) again! “In God (alone) we trust.”

11. That American ambassador’s “loud and ostentatious” behavior was offensive to the local people.

Bishop D Zac Niringiye (Kampala, Uganda)

Two reasons compel me to share my thoughts about the political situation in the United States. First, I was a signatory to INFEMIT's Call to Biblical Faithfulness. I consider this a further opportunity to share my angst and sense of a *kairos* moment that the Trump Presidency and candidature presents. Second and more importantly, I belong to the body of Christ and therefore, as a fellow pilgrim with brothers and sisters in the USA and indeed all over the world (past, present, and future), it behooves me to share in their struggles, hopes and fears. It is a shared journey, in Christ, in the world.

There will be some who question the second motivation. They ask: What business does a citizen of another country (in this case Uganda) have with the business of citizens in another country (USA), who exercised and will be exercising their responsibility in making a choice on by whom and how they are governed? Indeed, there is a lot that could be said in favor of this objection. But, as the gospel of Christ teaches us, although we belong and dwell in *different countries*, we dwell on the *one earth*; and although we belong to *different nations*, we also belong together as the *one human family*, created in the image of God. We are all "God's offspring" (Acts 17:28). Therefore, whether we like it or not, we are unavoidably interdependent: one human family, in a single habitat (the earth).

Moreover, those of us who invoke the name of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, the Lord and Savior of all creation, as the ground for our identity and location in the world, know that irrespective of where we are and what citizenship we hold, we share together in the citizenship of the kingdom of God. That is why *The Call* was addressed primarily to "the church worldwide, first and foremost ourselves, to hear the clarion call of the Gospel to radical biblical faithfulness . . ." Each location, in time and geography, and the perspective from that location, adds to the developing wisdom of the worldwide church.

There are some who have questioned *The Call's* reference to a "new fascism" and its timing "around the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the 45th President of the United States, because of that nation's global influence." Certainly, there is need to continue to evaluate the correlation of the "new fascism" with the current president of the USA, because *The Call* itself stands or falls on this. The question should therefore be what it is about the "Trump phenomenon" that justifies *The Call's* placing Trump in the category of "the new fascism." And why should it matter to all of us (American and non-American, Christian or non-Christian, evangelical or whatever shade of Christianity) whether that critique is grounded in the gospel?

I was having a conversation over lunch one afternoon with my friend Valerie from Burkina Faso, who was visiting Uganda for a conference. We talked with each other about the hopes and fears of Africa and her people, as we surveyed the dismal performance (to say the least) of contemporary political leadership across the continent. We agreed that the exception proves the rule. We also spoke about the external influences and pressures, particularly from the USA, Europe, and China. I then shared with her my assignment to write this reflection. She was very quick to interject: “Let me tell you why I like President Trump.” I was startled. I prepared myself to hear from her what I had heard from many Christians in different parts of Africa, why they (like the majority of American evangelicals) like Trump: that he is chosen by God, according to Romans 13; the “King Cyrus” of our times; a man who is committed to defend and protect Christianity from Islam, secular humanists, and other “enemies”; and one who has shown commitment to fight for the promotion of family values, against abortionists and the LGBTIQ agenda. But Valerie likes Trump for a different reason: because he presents to the world, and in particular to the USA an opportunity for critical self-examination. “President Trump is like a mirror. He is a reflection of the society that voted him into power,” Valerie clarified. She explained to me that in her view the presidency of Donald J. Trump provided the opportunity for America generally and evangelical America in particular to see itself for what it really is; and that, looking toward the next election, the question should not be about the terrifying prospect of his reelection, but rather whether America and in particular evangelical America has yet come to terms with the America and world that affirms the Trump narrative. I couldn’t agree with her more.

The critical issue therefore is to come to grips with the story that the Trump phenomenon tells: the story that “the Trump base” (that includes American evangelicals) tells to itself and to America and the world; its roots and shoots in American history and society; and its resonance with narratives in different countries and contexts elsewhere in the world. Who we are and how we self-identify and make sense of our location in the world, are the stories we have imbibed and tell ourselves and the world. Stories have a way of not only making the past present, but also creating individual and societal imaginations of the future.

I suggest that the story that Trump lives and is indeed the central feature of the Trump phenomenon, is fear. Fear is the story he embodies, projects, and presents. Fear is what he hopes will shape the present and the future of America and the world. As I read his tweets and addresses, his executive orders, his hiring and firing of various members in his administration, how he interacts with other world leaders, and what he says of other nations and

their relationship with the USA, the story line is one of fear. It was epitomized in his signature election pledge to the American people: building a wall on the whole length of the US-Mexico border. The performance of fear is evident in the relentless pursuit of nationalism—what John Stott called “a blinkered and exaggerated loyalty to ‘my country right or wrong,’”¹² which is rooted in structures of race and racism. Nationalism thrives on intolerance of “the other” and is the very antithesis of the motif of one human family, in a single habitat. These three traits—fear, nationalism, and intolerance—are what define what *The Call* named as “the new fascism.”

Thus, when America voted for Trump, they voted for fear. The fact that the majority of white American evangelicals voted for Trump should be seen in the same light: a vote in favor of fear of the other. That now provides the meaning of “evangelical” identity and location in America and the world. *The Call* rightly points out that this is a form of dangerous political leadership that is emerging in different parts of the world. It did not surprise me when Yoweri Museveni, the military dictator, who this year is entering his thirty-fifth year as president of Uganda, praised Trump as “one of the best presidents ever” for America. This was two weeks after Trump described African nations, along with Haiti and El Salvador, as “shithole countries” whose inhabitants were not desirable as immigrants to the United States.¹³

Narratives grounded in fear are the very antithesis of the gospel story because the essence and logic of the gospel is love: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus himself said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ and . . . ‘Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). The Apostle John captured it very well: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18). Therefore, in my view, the question that the next US general election presents to evangelical Christians in the USA is whether to grasp the opportunity to repent of fear and seek a path of love. Will American evangelicals repent of the pursuit of building walls and choose building bridges (justice, peace, and reconciliation)? Will you move beyond narratives of fear, to the hard and joyful work of love?

12. John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 180.

13. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/23/ugandan-president-says-he-loves-trump-he-talks-to-africans-frankly/>.