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## Political Visions and Illusions | David Koyzis & Erin Dienst

October 15, 2020



### The Veritas Forum

A conversation with Political Scientist, Author, and Professor, David Koyzis, interviewed by Erin Dienst of The Veritas Forum. A discussion about political ideologies and how each claims to fix our broken world. • Please like, share, subscribe to, and review this podcast. Thank you.

### Transcript

Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is, which one has the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with. How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are a mystery, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this involved. Today we hear from author and political science professor, David Koyzis.

In an interview with Erin Dienst, the senior digital outreach and social media content producer at the Veritas Forum. As they discuss political ideologies and how each claims to fix our broken world. I'm here with Professor Fosas.

We're going to discuss his book that he wrote a few years ago, *Political Visions and Illusions*. It was something that just came to light after Tim Keller tweeted it in August, just about it was his favorite book that he's read on political theory this year. We're excited to get into that.

Before we do that, I'll also introduce myself. My name is Erin Dienst, and I am a master's candidate at George Washington University in D.C. and in the School of International Affairs. So I've been getting into some of these concepts like liberalism and I'm excited to discuss more of the range of theories and what I do that Professor Koyzis has covered in his book.

So I also wanted to mention, yeah, he's the Professor Emeritus of Political Science at

Redeemer University in Hamilton, Ontario. And I loved in one of your bios, I saw that you call yourself a Franco-Greek Cypriot Fino Anglican Canadian. That's quite a mouthful.

Yeah, Franco-Greek Cypriot Fino-Anglo American Canadian. Wow, that's a mouthful. One of the smallest ethnic minorities in the country.

Yeah, wow, that's quite a range of intersections there. So to get started, I would love to, if you could tell us more about yourself and what led you to write this book. Yeah, sure.

Yeah, I was, I'm American by birth, I was born just outside of Chicago, and I grew up in a very politically minded household. My father was from the Greek Cypriot community in the island of Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. That's where he grew up.

And we were always talking about politics when I was a child. It was the era of the Cold War. One of my first political memories was the election contest between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960.

And then of course, one of the most traumatic political memories was the assassination of Kennedy three years later. And of course, people in my generation, that's something that we remember. And even at the time when it happened, at the age of eight years old, I knew that this people were going to be talking about this for decades to come, even at that young age.

And so I've always had an interest in politics. I majored in politics at Bethel College. Now it's Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

I attended the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. And then I got my PhD in government and international studies from the University of Notre Dame. I'm shortly after that, I started teaching in Canada at Redeemer University College, as you mentioned.

And one of the courses that I was supposed to teach was a course in political ideologies. And so back then, there was no internet. I had to look through these orange hardbound volumes, books in print to find which books would be available.

And then I would have to go through ordering through snail mail to the publisher, and then they would send review copies and so forth. And I didn't really find a book that I thought needed to do what I thought needed to be done in a course like that. So all of these books dealt with liberalism, socialism, some anarchism.

I don't deal with anarchism as such in my book, conservatism and the like. But they were all fairly superficial treatments. And I really thought that in order to understand the political ideologies, we need to see them as intrinsically religious.

That's something which no book that I came across was able to do. So a few years later,

this was about 1994, I started writing this book. And I came up fairly quickly with five chapters.

I ended up scrapping probably about three of them, I think, if I remember correctly. And then shortly after the turn of the millennium, it was published. So the first edition came out in 2003.

The second edition came out just last year. And it sold steadily for In Diversity Press, the publisher over the years. And this second edition has some notable differences from the first edition, including a focus on the redemptive narratives, the redemptive stories that are underpinning the political ideologies, which I didn't deal with in so overt a fashion in the first edition.

And then there's a postscript at the end of the second edition, which deals with the place of the institutional church. And it's addressed to pastors, it's addressed to people who are studying in seminaries, that are thinking of going into church work in some fashion. So that's who I am, and that's what my book is about.

Well, that's wonderful. Thank you for doing just the deep comprehensive work of summarizing all of what's out there in those different theories, especially in an age when you had to order those books manually and go through them page by page. I find myself in a different position, starting a master's now where so much is digitized.

But yeah, but yeah, I think the summary of those theories was just did a lot of legwork for me. No, thank you. Yeah, so let's move ahead to the structure of the book.

I liked how each chapter summarized a different branch of these major ideologies. Would you be willing to briefly go over each ideology's redemption narrative, what it says, what's wrong about our world, and how we can fix it. And if there were any major misconceptions you came across as you as you researched them.

Yeah, well, I can tell you the misconceptions first. So it's the idea that somehow these ideologies are neutral, religiously neutral. That Christians can simply adhere to any of these of these ideologies, even though it divides the body of Christ in a very profound way.

If we look at the ideologies as as the religions, as having their own redemptive narratives, then I think we're going to be more careful. We're going to see what's good about the ideologies, but we're also going to see the ways in which they go astray. So that said, let me talk about, I talk about five ideologies in this book.

So beginning with liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, democratism, which is a very inelegant word. I didn't use it in the first edition, but I do in the second. And then finally, socialism.

And so with liberalism, there's an implicit redemptive narrative that we are constantly moving towards greater and greater degrees of freedom. And so there's the counterpart to the biblical redemptive narrative, which is one of creation, the fall into sin, redemption in Jesus Christ, and the final consummation of the kingdom of God and the return of Christ. There's a corresponding redemptive narrative in liberalism.

So there's perhaps a kind of primitive freedom that maybe our ancestors held at some point. There's a kind of state of nature, which we find in people like Hobbes and Locke and Rousseau, some of these classic modern political theorists. And in that state of nature, it's either a warlike state or it's a state that's filled with various inconveniences that we struggle to try to overcome.

And so liberalism has us establishing a state apparatus that does the bidding of the individuals who have brought it into being in a kind of contract. And then it enables us and somehow this state, this civil commonwealth to be able to regain freedom in such a way that we're going to be happier again. So there's an implicit redemptive narrative.

It's not as overt in liberalism as it is in, for example, Marxism, where it's quite overt. Conservatism is somewhat different. And those of you who have read the book will note that I do not have a redemptive narrative that's associated with conservatism.

Because conservatism is different from the other ideologies in that it's more reactive. It's trying to preserve something. No, we don't know exactly what unless you ask a specific conservative, what is it that you're trying to conserve? And you'll get a lot of different different answers from conservatives.

So a 19th century Russian conservative might talk about the Orthodox Church, Tsarism, absolutism, any Russian nationality. If you talk to an American conservative, it has to do with constitutional government. This 1787, Constitution of the United States, democratic means and so forth.

So different conservatives are going to tell you different things. So you can't really find a redemptive narrative in conservatism. But you can in nationalism.

So nationalism revolves around national liberation. So there's an assumption that there's a kind of primitive peoplehood. And that primitive peoplehood is put an end to by maybe an outside imperial power that captures the nation and keeps it within its oppressor grasp.

And then at some point, nationalism works itself out. The people reclaim their freedom through a revolution or a war of secession. And then they are able to develop their nationhood freely again.

So there's this implicit redemptive narrative within nationalism. Democracy, that's a bit harder to see perhaps because democracy is a mere form of government. Winston

Churchill, former prime minister of the United Kingdom, famously said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried from time to time.

And so somebody like Churchill, he did not have redemptive expectations for democracy. But at the time 30 years ago, when communism was collapsing in the former Soviet Union and the former Eastern bloc, everybody wanted democracy. And for them, for many of them, it meant being happy once again.

That they had been oppressed under communism. They wanted to be free. They wanted prosperity in East Germany.

They wanted West German prosperity. When the wall was opened on the 9th of November, 1989, people streamed through the wall from East Berlin and they didn't go to the hot house, the city hall to see democratic government at work. They wanted a coffee shop, the shopping arcade in West Berlin.

And for them, that's what democracy meant. There are many people around the world who invest democracy with redemptive expectations. That's where I've used the word democratism.

Socialism is something which has been on the scene for a very long time, at least since the 19th century, maybe even going back as far as Plato 2500 years ago, the idea of trying to consolidate ownership in one single community that everybody is part of in some fashion. In the United States, socialism used to be the kiss of death for practical politicians. If anybody mentioned socialism, they would say, oh my goodness, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China.

And of course, that is no longer, you know, China is no longer communist in the same sense that it was on a Mount St. Ohm. The Soviet Union is gone now, replaced by the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, a number of successor states. And communism and socialism have basically lost their capacity to incite fear in the hearts of Americans.

So now you have younger people who have been born either shortly before the collapse of communism or since that. And they are fascinated by socialism. So now you have people like Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, claiming quite explicitly to be democratic socialists.

In Canada, we've always had a socialist party in the new democratic party, and everybody has accepted that since the 1930s. So it's not new here. But in the States, it is because it was like a cuss word at one time.

But now there are more younger Americans that are willing to listen to see, well, what is this socialism? What does it mean? What does it do? What does it promise? But there is a

redemptive narrative. And the idea that somehow, if you can consolidate all ownership into one single community, then somehow that's going to bring redemption. Somehow, we are going to be living in what Karl Marx style the classless society, in which nobody is a shepherd or a critic or a sailor.

But you can move from one activity, from morning to the afternoon to the evening to the following day, and move from one activity as you desire. And somehow that would be the best society in which to live. That was a very helpful summary of all the different ideologies.

I feel that it's hard. It'll look too long for us. No, well, I think it's really difficult also to get kind of a handle on some of these because they're tricky and they've looked different over the centuries.

Oh yeah, they've changed reality over the centuries. They haven't changed quite true. Yeah.

But it's really interesting this idea that there is also a religious narrative a part of each of them. I'm kind of curious about the symmetry of that in each. Where do you think that that comes from that echo of the same kind of arc? Yeah.

Well, Leslie Newbigen was a British missionary to India. He was a bishop in the Church of South India. And he came back to the United Kingdom after his missionary term of service had ended when he was older when he had retired.

And he found that the Church seat in Great Britain was very different from what it was at the time that he left. And he found that the Church has had basically been hollowed out in the time that he was away. So he was very much aware of the impact of various secular ideologies in the world, and especially in his native, native Great Britain.

And he said that one of the preconditions for a political ideology is the preaching of the gospel. And that's a really weird thing because you wouldn't think so. The gospel is preached and all of a sudden people are aware of things like liberalism and Marxism and the like.

And why is that? Well, it's because when people have heard the gospel and they recognize that salvation can come and will come within history and that the whole of history where we redeemed at the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. Once we know that as sinful human beings, we try to bring about that salvation on our own terms. So this is something that the Apostle Paul understood already nearly 2000 years ago.

It's something that we've seen over and over again. As soon as we hear the gospel and we recognize that salvation will come and it can come, we want to try to have that salvation on our own terms. And if that means increasing human freedom, individual freedom, if it means the bringing about the class of society through a kind of messianic

proletariat, then so be it.

But that's one of the real ironies insofar as Western civilization, as had a huge impact, influence clear around the globe. And the gospel has had an impact as well along with that. And people are suddenly prey now to the political ideologies that come along with Western influence.

Yeah, it's amazing that there is kind of this collective longing that is kind of seeking, yeah, just these solutions in different ways. But yeah, that there's these these deep yearnings and size that are there. Knowing that, you know, you use the word ideology to describe these different perspectives and implicit in that is that there's that it fails at some point that they fall short.

And I'm wondering, especially right before you joined this conversation, I had asked the audience to share an emoji about how they feel about politics right now, and there were a few. And I know this is a month that many, especially in the US, are feeling a weariness of that. And you know, with ideologies fall short at some point, how would you recommend that we can participate in politics without being overly consumed or ultimately disappointed? I'm coming back.

My iPad is very quickly losing power. So I'll just plug it in so I can. Sorry.

I get it. No problem. Yeah.

Yeah. So that's right. We rephrase the question again.

Yeah. How would you recommend that we can participate in politics without becoming overly consumed or disappointed and avoid ideological thinking? Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

It's not easy to do, you know, and I think when this book first came out in 2003, there were some critics that objected to my use of the term idolatry, because when you use that automatically, people think, Oh, you're pointing fingers, you know, you're pointing fingers at somebody out there. But as a matter of fact, if we're going to point fingers at all, we have to point it right in the direction of our own hearts. And that's something that St. Augustine understood 1500 years ago.

He said that our hearts are restless until they, until they rest in you. Speaking to God. And so there's a kind of restlessness that human beings have within them.

And that restlessness can be still only through God himself. And of course, various political ideologies try to delude us in the thinking that, well, we can now we can bring about this rest. We can bring about a great society.

This is the term that Lyndon Johnson used in the 1960s when he became president, that we can some of Pier Trudeau in the 1970s and the early 80s talked about

the just society that he wanted to try to bring about for Canada. And of course, that's, that's, that's putting too much of our expectations too much for hopes in policy programs. Now, we do indeed need to pursue policy programs that are in accordance with justice.

There's no doubt about that. But I think we need to, we need to dampen our expectations. We need to recognize that all of our policy proposals will be flawed in some, in some way.

Political ideologies tell us something different. If we can only do this or that or the other thing, then we will have reached a kind of perfect society. At least that's the implicit, that's the implicit lesson that we're being taught by the followers of these ideologies.

So I think what we need to do is to, is to curtail our expectations. So not expect things to be, to be great when the next president, whether it's it's Donald Trump or returning to office or it's Joe Biden. Each one will have considerable flaws.

Each one does have considerable flaws. And I think what we, as Christians, we vote, we may vote for different candidates perhaps, but we have an obligation to pray that the, that the strength of the candidates of a particular party will outweigh the considerable defects in them. Yeah, it seems like if people are banking on their political view to be the ultimate solution, that it can cause them to feel really disappointed at some level or, yeah, or yeah, for the whole engagement to feel really intense, though it is valuable.

You mentioned, yeah, just thinking about Christian people in this time, the difficulty it is for the church. And I'm wondering also, you mentioned in your book that a central problem with taking sides is that it leaves Christian people fragmented and scattered. Do you have any ideas on how, how can Christian people face this tension of wanting to be meaningfully engaged, but also represent wealth? Yeah, well, that's right.

And if, if you were going to get heavily involved in practical, practical politics, you're going to have to join a political party of some sort. There's, there's, there's no way around that. There are, of course, various kinds of lobby groups that you can get involved with, pro-lifers tend to get involved with pro-life lobby groups.

And that's a very good thing. Interest groups try to influence the policy process. If you want to be internal to the policy process, if you want to be one of the people who is contributing from the inside to the making of policy, then you will have to join a political party of some sort.

And different Christians have made different, have made different choices, as to which party to, to, to join. Whether it's the Republican party or the Democratic party. There are, of course, minor parties as well.

There's, there's one called the American Solidarity Party that is on the ballot in a number



of states. Unfortunately, it is, it is running only presidential and vice presidential candidates rather than a full slate of, of members of the House of Representatives and, and the third of the Senate that's up for, for reelection this year as well. But there are, I, I would love to see a third party get off the ground.

Something that would, something like the American Solidarity Party, something like Abraham Kuiper's Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands, in the 19th and into the 20th, 20th centuries. I'd love to see something like that get off the ground, because I honestly think that the two major parties in the United States are, are severely broken. They've become diseased, um, parodies of their former selves.

I cannot imagine, uh, Dwight Eisenhower or even Richard Nixon recognizing today's Republican party. I can't imagine Franklin Roosevelt or Harry Truman recognizing today's Democratic party. They would, they would, they would be strangers to what those two parties have become.

Yeah, it's a word of, um, a word of caution while proceeding in our engagement. So, yeah. That's right.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

You know that, yeah. In recent years, since you wrote this book, a lot has changed. It even feels like this past year has felt like 10 years of new cycles and, um, well, no, yeah, everything, it seems like a lot, a lot of times fell apart this year.

And of course, we're dealing with the pandemic ongoing. Um, we don't know how long that's going to last. Um, the United States has, has, has been, um, probably the biggest sufferer from the pandemic in recent months, um, since it burst into public consciousness at the beginning of this, of this year.

We've had, um, riots in the streets in some cities, including Minneapolis, um, where George Floyd was killed just, just very close to a house that I lived in with, with a bunch of guys back in the, uh, 1977, you know, so I know the neighborhood where that, where that took place in South Minneapolis. And, um, and it seems like, like so many things are up in the air right now. And people's, um, tempers are frayed.

People are on edge. And of course, that's going to have political ramifications as well. Yeah.

For sure. I know as we come up to the end of our time here, just a final question is, um, what, you know, in this time concerns you, what gives you hope for just the future with where things are today? Yeah. Well, I guess, you know, one of the things that gives me hope is that as an increasing numbers of Christians in North America are dissatisfied with, uh, with the politics, politics as usual, uh, they're increasing numbers that are dissatisfied with the, with, with the major political parties.

So it may be at the time for something like the American solidarity, party. Um, maybe, maybe that time has, has come at the present. But I think one of the things that gives me the most hope is that I have a lot of international connections, especially with Brazil.

Uh, my political visions and illusions was published in a, um, in Portuguese back in 2014. So this is what it looks like. So I see, you saw, there may be a number of people from Brazil that are, are tuning into, um, into this podcast or whatever you would call it, um, at the present.

And, and for them, I would say, boy, good old, that's why I say to my, my Brazilian readers. And Brazil is an amazing country. It's, um, in 1970, there were just about a hundred million Brazilians.

And about 5% of the population could be called evangelical Christian, or in some sort. There are now, today, uh, 50 years later, there are more than 200 million Brazilians. In other words, the country has doubled in size in the last, um, uh, in the last 50 years.

And the number of evangelical Christians has, is now stands at about 22%, which is almost one quarter of the population as a whole. And even with that phenomenal growth, Brazil is still the largest Catholic country in the world. And, you know, the growth of evangelical Protestantism seems not to have made much of a dent in that.

It's still the largest Catholic country in the world. So there's a country with, with a huge amount of promise. And I think many Brazilian Christians are tired of business as usual in their country, uh, endemic corruption and the high, high levels of government.

And, uh, and they want to see things, get better. And I think they, they, many of them are, are, are, are looking to people like Abraham Kuiper, the Dutch statesman prime minister at the turn of the last century, some of his writings and some of his reflections on Christianity and politics is something which they're looking at. And, uh, and I see that as, as, as containing a tremendous amount of hope.

So Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world, both in population and in area. On their other countries like Indonesia, I've made connections recently with Indonesia, an amazing country, again, one of the largest countries in the world in terms of population. And so when I look at the, at the global outlook, uh, Christianity is growing tremendously in most, in the vast majority of countries throughout the world.

Uh, and maybe not in Western Europe, maybe not in, in Canada and the United States, but, but many other countries, countries that you wouldn't even imagine, um, it's growing. And China in another 10 years may become the largest Christian country in the world. So there, there's, um, you know, there are, um, reverses, but there's also a tremendous, there are tremendous reasons for hope out there.

It's a good idea too. I think when we feel frustrated about our culture wars or things

happening within our countries, it's a good idea to look at the bigger picture, what, what is happening elsewhere. So, absolutely.

Absolutely. Canada and the United States are, are, are very small portions of the world in many respects, you know, and the things that are, are trending in, in those countries, may be very different from what's trending in India or China or Brazil or Indonesia. If you like this and you want to hear more, like, share, review, and subscribe to this podcast.

And from all of us here at the Veritas Forum, thank you.

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