From Billy Graham to Sarah Palin: Evangelicals and the Betrayal of American Conservatism
Darryl G. Hart
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011
252 pp. $25.00 hardback
Reviewed by: Bradley G. Green

D.G. Hart, who teaches history at Hillsdale College (Michigan) has a knack for writing provocative and punchy volumes. His latest book is no exception. Hart’s thesis is repeated throughout the volume: politically-engaged evangelicals of both right and left persuasions have attempted to use the Bible to support various policy proposals for the last five to six decades, but have generally failed to engage seriously with—and therefore to reap the benefits from—the older and more authentic conservatism (a conservatism rooted in thinkers such as Edmund Burke, Russell Kirk, and Richard Weaver). Additionally, most evangelicals have been disinterested in, or oblivious to, the actual political structures, traditions and realities of the American political system—in particular, republicanism, federalism, and constitutionalism, as they have attempted to change the nation for Christ, whether this change is of the left or right wing variety.

Seven main chapters constitute the volume. In Chapter One, “Silent Minority,” Hart sketches the general political trajectory and inclinations of American Evangelicalism. Hart’s key point is that both more traditional Christians and more liberal Christians have similar approaches to politics. In Chapter Two, “Young and Leftist,” Hart provides a summary of the early (1970s) iteration of the more left-leaning component of American Evangelism, beginning with the 1973 “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern,” and moving forward with figures such as Richard Pierard and David O. Moberg. In Chapter Three, “The Search for a Usable Past,” Hart surveys key efforts to reconstruct a Christian history and an understanding of the providential governance of America’s origin and America’s history. In Chapter Four, “Party-Crashers,” Hart continues his narrative by providing a sketch of the rise of the “Religious Right” and its key personalities (Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, and Pat Robertson). In Chapter Five, “The Faith-Based Right,” Hart surveys key Christian leaders who were part of the generally more conservative trajectory, but who could not fairly be lumped in with the “fundamentalists”: Charles Colson, Ralph Reed, Marvin Olasky, and James W. Skillen. In Chapter Six, “Left-Turn,” Hart looks at the world of left-leaning (or often simply left-wing) strand of evangelical political thought: Jim Wallis, Randall Balmer, Tony Campolo, and Ron Sider. In Chapter Seven, “Conservatism Without Heroism,” Michael Gerson serves as a foil—and as a representative of “conservatism” far-removed from traditional conservatism.

Hart is refreshing because he is not afraid to make comparisons that might offend the evangelical academic establishment. For example, Hart notes positively that the Religious Right was often working in an authentically conservative mode. Hart writes: “As much as it strains credulity, Jerry Falwell’s Listen, America! echoed Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the French Revolution because the Virginia fundamentalist sensed, like the British statesman, an effort by political ideologues to refashion society without regard for the customs and beliefs of average citizens” (215). Similarly, Hart does not avoid pointing out the negative effects of centralizing political power and control during the 1960s and 1970s which “edged the country in the direction of greater uniformity and undermined the authority of states, school, districts, religious schools, churches, and families” (215).

In his conclusion Hart again recommends that evangelicals turn to the writings and insights of an older and more authentic conservatism. As Hart writes, “born-again Protestants could well benefit, because [authentic] conservatives have the best store of
public arguments for defending the families, schools, churches, and voluntary associations on which evangelicals depend” (216). He continues: “Evangelical Protestants would be better served in trying to understand the value of American order by reading not the pages of the Old or New Testaments but the debates between the federalists and anti-federalists, Whigs and Democrats, or Populists and Progressives” (217). However, it seems that if one takes Paul’s teaching in Romans 13 concerning submission to the governing authorities seriously—which in a U.S. context means the very republicanism, federalism, and constitutionalism Hart admires so much—then would it not be the case that on biblical grounds Christians should work for political change within the legal and structural channels found within republicanism, federalism, and constitutionalism?

Given that evangelical political activism (both left and right) of the 20th and 21st centuries has never seriously engaged with nor learned from authentic (Burkean, Kirkian, Weaverian) conservatism, the thorny question is whether ignoring “authentic conservatism” is detrimental to Christian political ends. Authentic conservatism may indeed be a prudent option for American Christians living in a pluralistic culture. But whether traditional conservatism can serve as a long-term political framework, in light of the lordship of Jesus over the whole created order, is another question altogether.

**Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian**  
John Piper  
Wheaton: Crossway, 2011  
304 pp. $22.99 hardback

Reviewed by: M. Sydney Park

This recent volume by John Piper (foreword by Tim Keller), is a strong argument for the gospel message as the solution for one of the most unrelenting problems of humanity—racism. As any reader familiar with Piper’s work would expect, *Bloodlines* ultimately seeks to glorify God in the pursuit of racial reconciliation in 21st century America. For Piper, the past and present sins of racial discrimination can only be effectively resolved through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, racial reconciliation is, ultimately, inseparable from the gospel message of Jesus Christ preached by the New Testament writers.

The book has two main sections. The first section provides the necessary foundation: a description and assessment of the relevant issues in racial relations. Piper’s testimony (31ff.) of his own conversion from the quiet yet active racism of his youth is not only touching but profound, since he lived through an era of blatant racism in the Deep South (1960s, Greenville, SC). His transparency enhances the rest of the first section as he explores the labyrinthine issues and nuances of modern day racism, particularly in America. He gives a rationale for his exclusive focus on black-white relations in America (59ff.), but one wonders if further attention to other ethnic groups (Asians, Hispanics, etc.) would have been more helpful, especially in light of U.S. population increases among non-Caucasian and non-African