



Evangelical Left Blames the Culture War on Conservatives in Last-Ditch Effort to 'Pause' Kavanaugh

Tyler O'Neil

July 22, 2018

"The 'Call to Pause' is just the latest effort by the Evangelical left to blame the culture war on conservatives," Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), told PJ Media Sunday. He insisted that the "Call to Pause" is doomed to failure, and more likely to damage the reputations of its supporters than to achieve any cultural or political change.

The left-wing evangelical group Freedom Road launched the Call to Pause on July 9, assembling evangelical women who oppose Kavanaugh's confirmation. The group urged evangelical women to call Senators and demand "a moderate independent Justice," to fast for God's discernment and repent from "a Culture War mindset," and to listen to the testimonies of people of color.

The group denounced the idea of a culture war, declaring that in war: "there are only allies and enemies, no human beings; You cannot be wrong in war; [and] There is always collateral damage in war."

A great many evangelical leaders joined the "Call to Pause," including Freedom Road President Lisa Sharon Harper, bestselling author Jen Hatmaker, Calvin College Dean Christina Barland Edmondson, Fuller Theological Seminary President Mark Labberton, Sojourners Founder Jim Wallis, and Shane Claiborne, founder of Red Letter Christians. While Freedom Road described these leaders as "conservative," they mostly fall on the left side of the political spectrum.

Mohler fought back against the idea that conservative evangelicals are to blame for the culture war. "It was liberals who pushed the new ethic of personal autonomy and sexual liberation, and it was liberals who championed legalized abortion and celebrated the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973," the SBTS president told PJ Media.

He noted that "you can date organized evangelical involvement in American politics to *Roe v. Wade*," noting that the conservative evangelical movement was largely a reaction to the Left's culture war coups achieved by the Supreme Court. This became even more clear in light of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), which supercharged conservatives' emphasis on the Supreme Court.

"Now, just after the nomination of a clearly conservative judge, Brett Kavanaugh, as the next justice of the Supreme Court, the evangelical left is predictably opposing the nominee, and calling for a 'pause' in the culture war," Mohler noted. "Amazingly enough, those behind the 'Call to Pause' are transparent about their fear that *Roe v. Wade* might be reversed, or even that abortion rights might be curtailed."

In light of this focus on *Roe*, the SBTS president declared that "the 'Call to Pause' is really a demand for evangelical surrender on the issue of abortion." Frankly, he added, "That is not going to happen."

Mohler did not just emphasize the fact that conservative evangelicals will not back down, however. He rightly placed the blame for the culture war squarely in the liberals' court — or should I say, Court?

"Interestingly, it was the left in American politics that politicized the courts and decided to go around the legislative process by forcing vast moral and cultural change through the courts," he noted. For this reason, the Left is terrified of justices who will apply the Constitution, rather than bending it toward their own social and political priorities.

"The nomination of Supreme Court justices who are committed to the actual words and text of the Constitution is vital to the survival of America's grand experiment in constitutional self-government," Mohler declared. "Evangelicals and conservatives in the United States have been working toward this goal for well over a generation. This is no time to hit the pause button."

The SBTS president suggested most conservative Christians see through the "Call to Pause" movement. "When the 'Call to Pause' openly opposes a conservative nominee and warns of a threat to *Roe v. Wade*, conservative evangelicals know exactly what we see — an effort to protect *Roe* and legalized abortion."

"I have no fear that evangelicals will be swayed by the 'Call to Pause,' but it will be very revealing to see what names will eventually be attached to this document," Mohler said.

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council (FRC), pointed out the hypocrisy behind the "Call to Pause." "Why didn't they call for hitting 'pause' when Obama was in the White House as he was pushing to redefine marriage and forcing religious organizations like the Little Sisters of the Poor to fund initiatives that were counter to their core beliefs?" he asked.

"How can we hit pause on our Christian witness?" Perkins added, with a powerful follow-up: "What scripture backs that up?" In light of the Obama administration's assault on religious liberty, it seems particularly noxious to hear liberals bemoaning the "culture war."

"It is just very convenient to call for a truce when they are losing ground," Perkins quipped.

Legal scholars suggested that the "Call to Pause" movement has a wrong-headed view of the Supreme Court and nominee Kavanaugh.

"A lot of people, a lot of organizations, when they evaluate judicial nominees, they think this is picking a super legislator," Ilya Shapiro, senior fellow in constitutional studies at the Cato Institute, told PJ Media.

"I don't understand the logic of how any conservative nominee would exacerbate the culture wars," Shapiro added. He said these claims "seem not just truly political, but bizarre."

The Cato scholar cut right to the chase, noting that Kavanaugh joining the Court would replace Justice Anthony Kennedy with Chief Justice John Roberts "as the median vote." Importantly, "Roberts is by nature an incrementalist," he suggested. This means Roberts' key rulings will be more like *NFIB v. Sebelius* (2012), which upheld Obamacare's individual mandate by redefining it as a tax.

"It's not that overnight we'll see an extreme shift," Shapiro explained.

"This idea that Judge Kavanaugh is going to be this conservative culture warrior on the Court is misguided and it's not supported by his record of service as a judge," [Elizabeth Slattery](#), legal fellow at the Heritage Foundation, told PJ Media.

Slattery argued that this fear "shows that [the liberals] don't understand what the purpose of the federal judiciary is — It's not this body that grants rights to people. They're there to interpret the law and the Constitution before them, not to discover new rights."

Contrary to claims about the "culture war," the Supreme Court does not just "pluck things out of the news," Slattery explained. "They have to wait for a case to come to them. The Court waits for things to percolate for a while before they take up an issue."

In a good year, the Supreme Court hears roughly 70 to 75 cases — although most years it hears closer to 68 cases. By contrast, district courts hear about 500,000 cases every year, while the appeals courts hear about 55,000.

Beyond that, originalists like Kavanaugh do not try to rewrite the law using the courts.

"Kavanaugh's view of the law is that the text of the law is the law and that the same goes for the Constitution, and that things need to be interpreted in light of their original meaning and history," Slattery noted. "Judges are not supposed to read new things into the law and the Constitution that aren't there. That's beyond the scope of the judicial power."

"Congress passes the laws and state legislators pass state laws. Supreme Court justices do not," Slattery added, as if teaching Civics 101. "We need more members of the Supreme Court who understand that they need to minimize their views as much as possible when judging the law."

Rather than following the Constitution, the Left unleashed a culture war by "pursuing its agenda in the Courts when it has not been able to win those victories in Congress or in state houses across the country," Slattery noted. "Every time there's a Supreme Court vacancy, it's a four-alarm fire because this is the way they get their policies through and that's not the role of the courts."

It was the Left, not the Right, that made the Supreme Court overly political, and it was the Left, not the Right, that unleashed the culture wars. It is extremely telling that the Left cannot stomach a Supreme Court justice who would read the Constitution as written and intended by the founders.

If Lisa Sharon Harper, Jen Hatmaker, Jim Wallis, and Shane Claiborne really do want to de-escalate the culture war, they should be the first to champion originalist justices like Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh.