

How Big Tech Censors Religious Voices, and How to Fight Back

August 26, 2021

Hosted by the Ethics and Public Policy Center and the Napa Legal Institute

Clare Morell ([00:05](#)):

Welcome. My name is Clare Morell, and I have the privilege of serving as a policy analyst at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, heading up our Big Tech project. We thank you for tuning in today to this important online event from the Ethics and Public Policy Center: How Big Tech Censors Religious Voices, and How to Fight Back. Big Tech's censorship of conservative voices and speech has only been increasing, particularly as applied to religious voices and organizations. To better understand this phenomenon, I will be interviewing three distinguished panelists today. First we have EPPC President, Ryan T. Anderson, as well as EPPC fellow, Carl R. Trueman, and lastly, Napa Legal Institute, Vice President, Joshua D. Holdenried, who will speak to us on their own experiences with Big Tech's censorship, as well as overall trends and patterns in how religious voices specifically are being targeted. We'll also discuss what religious organizations and individuals can do to protect themselves as well as possible policy solutions to Big Tech's censorship.

Clare Morell ([01:14](#)):

So without further ado, let me introduce our three distinguished panelists to you. First, we have Ryan Anderson. Ryan, is the President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, the founding editor of Public Discourse and the John Paul II Teaching fellow in social thought at the University of Dallas. He is the author as well of several books, including, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*, that was recently delisted by Amazon. And for nine years, Ryan Anderson was the William E. Simon senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation. And his scholarship has been cited by two U.S Supreme court justices in two cases.

Clare Morell ([01:56](#)):

And next we have, Carl R. Trueman. Carl R. Trueman, is a fellow in EPPC's Evangelicals in Civic Life program, where his work focuses on helping civic leaders and policy makers better understand the deep roots of our current cultural malaise. He also serves as a professor at Grove City College. And Carl is the author of the best-selling, award-winning 2020 book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. His commentaries on contemporary issues appear regularly in *First Things*, and he has also been published in *Public Discourse*, *Deseret News* and *Catholic World Report*.

Clare Morell ([02:40](#)):

And finally, we have Joshua D. Holdenried, and Josh, serves as the Vice President and Executive Director for the Napa Legal Institute. Before joining Napa Legal, he was associate director of coalition relations at

the Heritage Foundation, where he focused on strategic partnerships and policy promotion. Joshua's commentary has been published in the Wall Street Journal, Fox News, the New York Post, First Things, the National Catholic Register, the Claremont Review of Books, and elsewhere.

Clare Morell ([03:07](#)):

So as you can see, we have a really distinguished panel of guests today. I want to start off our time talking about Big Tech's recent censorship of religious voices. And so I wanted to just ask you all about your own experiences with and observations of religious censorship. And so just to start with the most recent instance of Big Tech censorship against religious voices, our own Carl R. Trueman. Carl, can you just explain what happened to you recently during the lecture that you were giving out in California?

Carl R. Trueman ([03:36](#)):

Yes. Early this month, I was lecturing on the topic of my book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, over at a conference in California, hosted by a Baptist Church. And during, I think, it was the first session, the live stream by YouTube was pulled because of copyright violation. So say the organizers had been playing some music in the background that violated copyright. So the organizers sorted that issue out and then started the live stream again. And the live stream was canceled the second time, this time for content violation, apparently relative to something I said. What makes this interesting is there were two live streams going, only one of which had been made public. And it was the public one that was shut down, which would seem to indicate that the reason for the shutdown was not some algorithm catching some word or something I'd said, but it actually stemmed from a complaint from somebody watching online.

Carl R. Trueman ([04:38](#)):

The second thing is that the lectures now are up on YouTube in an unedited form, which would seem to indicate that nothing I said actually violated content. What interested me was, on the one hand, and Ryan can attest to this, if you speak on certain subjects, if you're out in the public eye, you unfortunately attract certain people who watch every move you make and will do everything they can to try to disrupt you. On the other hand, I was interested in the fact that YouTube automatically assumed that anybody who has a complaint made against them by somebody presumably on the left or the progressive side of things is assumed to be guilty. And the presentation they're giving is immediately disrupted without any detail being given as to what was said that was problematic, or indeed as it emerged later, anything actually being said, that was problematic. So it was an interesting experience from that perspective. A, I'm being watched, and B people like me are assumed to be guilty, even when we've done nothing wrong.

Clare Morell ([05:53](#)):

Wow! And Carl, can I ask, is this the first time that you had been censored like this? Are there other instances as well where this has happened to you when giving talks or posting things?

Carl R. Trueman ([06:07](#)):

Yeah. There was an incident in May, when I was giving exactly the same set of lectures as it happens to a faculty at a Christian high school in the South, who advertised the lecture for the public on their Instagram accounts. And the Instagram account was suspended until I'm told all references to me and my lecture were removed, at which point the Instagram account was reinstated. Again, it plays to my sense of paranoia that somebody is watching me, but it's also very interesting that these Big Tech

groups have such power to disrupt what are really fairly bland. And while I would regard as run of the mill presentations on topics of pressing public interest.

Clare Morell ([06:54](#)):

Thank you for sharing that. And my last question for you is just, you got at this at the end, but what exactly do you think Big Tech is censoring you for? What are they taking issue with that you're talking about?

Carl R. Trueman ([07:11](#)):

I suppose I'm having to speculate at this point. Given the content of my lectures, which essentially patterned the content of my book. What I do in my book is I historicize and relativize sexual identity. I historicize and relativize the debates we're now having about gender in the Public Square that doesn't fit with the dominant narrative that wants to see these things as fixed, as historically transcendent, and wants to demonize anybody who doesn't hold to that emerging dominant narrative as somehow bigoted or problematic. So my best guess is Big Tech doesn't like good historical scholarship because it challenges some of the myths by which the progressives in the United States, wish to reorganize our society.

Clare Morell ([08:00](#)):

Yes. Well, thank you so much for sharing about that. And now I want to move on to another recent incident of Big Tech censorship, was our very own EPPC's President Ryan Anderson. So Ryan, I know you've spoken about this publicly before, but could you share who censored you and what they were censoring you for?

Ryan T. Anderson ([08:22](#)):

Sure. It's Amazon, it was my most recent book. And the backstory to this is, for three years, they gladly sold the book. I think when the paperback edition came out of the book, it was number three on the Washington Post's bestseller list for DC books, it's a policy wonk public intellectual style readership. And so when Donald Trump was president, when Bill Barr, was the AG, when Senator Hawley, was in the majority with committee power, they sold the book gladly, because if had they gotten rid of it, they were probably afraid of what would happen, would the DOJ open an investigation? Would, Hawley, call a hearing? Et cetera, et cetera. And so instead what happened was, in February, so shortly after we have the change in the administration in January, shortly after I become President of EPPC, February 1st, I become President of EPPC.

Ryan T. Anderson ([09:21](#)):

And then it's the end of February, the weekend before the House of Representatives is set to vote on the Equality Act. That's when the book is disappeared. And the reason I mentioned the timing here that it's suspicious is that they later claimed that the book violates their content policies. So similar to what, Carl, experienced with YouTube, they say it violates the content policy. And it's, all right, how did the book not violate the content policy for the first three years? I didn't go back and rewrite anything, and you've been selling the same exact book for three years and suspicious that you only now discovered it violates the content policy after the Trump Administration leaves office and after the Republicans no longer have the majority in the Senate, and conveniently, right before the House is set to vote on the Equality Act, given that I was one of the most outspoken critics of the Equality Act. The day that Amazon disappeared the book, I had an op-ed appeared in the New York Post opposing the Equality Act.

Ryan T. Anderson ([10:21](#)):

Obviously, they didn't do it in response to the Post op-ed because they didn't know that, that was in the works, but it just shows you the confluence of events. Maybe it's all just happenstance or maybe something was going on there. One of the reasons that I mentioned that last point about the House vote is that there's a state action possibility here that someone from one of the House offices, someone from the government, asked Amazon to do this, to discredit a critic. And obviously that would be unconstitutional, because it's unconstitutional for the government to ask a private business to do what it would be unconstitutional for the government to do itself. The first amendment doesn't apply entirely to private entities, it does apply when they're being an agent of the state. Right?

Clare Morell ([11:09](#)):

Yes.

Ryan T. Anderson ([11:10](#)):

Questions there. I think for people who haven't read the book, the title can be somewhat tongue in cheek for people, it's meant to actually, if you read the first couple of pages, it explains where the title comes from. A generation ago when, Harry, met, Sally, was arguing that men and women were so different, they couldn't just be friends. Whereas today, the argument is that men and women are interchangeable and that the concept of male and female is fluid or on a spectrum. If you've never read the book though, and you don't know anything about me, what you hear is, "There's some bomb-throwing bigot, who wrote a book making fun of transgender people with the title, When Harry Became Sally." Of course, Amazon is going to refuse to sell hate speech. So there's a serious risk of long-term damage to reputation, also professional reputation in particular going on here.

Ryan T. Anderson ([12:02](#)):

And then lastly, if Amazon was just like the Mom and Pop brick and mortar LGBT bookseller in DC, like go to Dupont Circle, go to a niche bookseller, I wouldn't care. I don't expect the Christian book seller to sell LGBT books. And I don't expect an LGBT book seller to sell a conservative policy book or something like that. But when you control 70 to 80% of all new adults, nonfiction books, when you control something like 80 to 90% of all eBooks, when you advertise yourself and build your market dominance by being the, "Everything store," and then after you put out of business all the brick and mortar stores, or you put out of business all the small independent stores, then you start saying, "We have a an unarticulated content policy that we're now going to decide retroactively to remove books."

Ryan T. Anderson ([13:00](#)):

And even in the way that they did this, they're supposed to contact the author and the publisher first to notify them to try to work it out. They didn't follow any of their own procedures. This strikes me much more like an abuse of market dominance to try to control public speech, in particular, on a matter of huge public import. We're about to have Congress redefine our civil rights laws to enshrine the concept of gender identity as a protected class with huge consequences. So I mean, that's more or less what I had experienced there. And we're now five, six months later, and all of the efforts behind the scenes with Amazon to try to get them to reinstate the book have failed. Various members of Congress sent letters. There was a House letter, there was a Senate letter, they've gone nowhere. I'm exploring other possible options, but nothing yet to report on that.

Clare Morell ([13:58](#)):

Yeah. No. Thank you for sharing about that. And also for just sharing your own experiences and trying to get to the bottom of it. And I think that something you said, Ryan, that seems to also be in common with Carl's situation is that these companies, whether it's YouTube or Amazon are just so dominant. This is the main place that people go to buy their books on Amazon or access lectures and talks and other video content is YouTube. And so I think that gets at some of why this censorship is so significant is that these companies are so dominant in their spheres, that there really aren't alternative options. And so that they're denying this content to people unfairly.

Ryan T. Anderson ([14:43](#)):

And then one thing that people say in response is, "Look, you probably got a sales bump," which is true. The notoriety that it's known as the Streisand effect. But that's short-lived, and it's very particular because what publisher is going to want to publish a book, knowing that they might miss out on the market controller who has 70 to 80% of market share? If I'm a publisher and someone sends me a proposal saying, "Hey, I want to write a book telling the truth about transgender medicine." I might think twice before publishing that book. And so there's a chilling effect that we won't even know what books ever get published, which authors censor themselves, which publishers spike proposals, all out of fear that Amazon won't sell it. And then they won't get the Streisand effect because after a while, the media stops covering books that don't get published.

Ryan T. Anderson ([15:40](#)):

So there's that. I also think there's a radicalization aspect of this. So people will say, "Look someone like, Ryan, he was really careful in his rhetoric. He doesn't throw bombs, he's very measured and he still got canceled. So why even make those efforts, let's just throw bombs. Let's just be all out there." And so I think it could have a really, really bad effect where it silences reasonable voices and then it radicalizes more extreme voices, which would have a really, really bad polarizing effect. And so it's to my mind sad and pathetic that Amazon who claims they want to be elevating the discourse and improving the discussion. The consequence of this long-term strike me as directly counter to what they claim to be interested in.

Clare Morell ([16:34](#)):

Right. No, that's an excellent point. I want to also now turn to Josh, to ask just on a broader scale. It seems like Big Tech has only become more aggressive in its censorship, particularly of religious voices. And so Josh, your organization, Napa Legal Institute has been trying to track what's going on in terms of this religious censorship and specifically following what's been happening to religious nonprofits and organizations. Could you share a little bit about the report that you all put together and some of those general trends and patterns that you all were seeing in terms of religious censorship?

Joshua D. Holdenried ([17:14](#)):

Of course. And listening to, Ryan's story and listening to Carl's story and trying to figure out what's going on in the Public Square is a good example of a pattern that our team at Napa Legal Institute began to notice. And again, Napa Legal, we're focused on helping faith-based nonprofits navigate the Public Square and the Public Square is increasingly a digital square. So we started to notice as early as last fall, that several faith-based voices, faith-based organizations were being censored, deplatformed. And you'd sometimes see a story maybe by the National Catholic Register, or elsewhere, small religious outlets reporting on this stuff. And so we started to take notice and we started doing some preliminary research

and we're suddenly realizing no one's really paying attention to this. No, one's tracking this. So it's, well, we should start tracking this.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([18:10](#)):

So after some extensive research, we actually found that for several months, Big Tech companies have been actually silencing de-platforming or censoring faith-based organizations or faith-based voices at a rate of at least once a week.

Clare Morell ([18:26](#)):

Wow!

Joshua D. Holdenried ([18:26](#)):

And so we published this report and made a pretty big splash because a lot of the noise in the Public Square is about, "It's conservative voices, political conservatives being censored by Big Tech." The problem is actually bigger and deeper than that. And again, a lot of the organizations and both, Carl, and Ryan, were alluding to this, the organizations that are getting censored from the faith-based perspective, are ones that are weighing in on important cultural issues. Again, the faith-based organization that runs a soup kitchen or a homeless shelter, it's not those organizations that are getting censored, it's the organizations that are putting forth, speaking the truth, about certain issues that doesn't align with what folks in Silicon Valley thinks should be appropriate for the digital Public Square.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([19:15](#)):

And then when you get to dig deeper into why is the censorship happening and why does this pattern continue to exist with impunity? If you start to look at case by case why organizations are getting censored, is it because they're being bigoted or whatever it might be? Again, the fact that Ryan got deplatformed and his book got deplatformed, really did signal, hey, this problem's a little bit larger than someone trying to throw a bomb. For example, Twitter banned Daily Citizen, which is operated by Focus on the Family for an evergreen tweet that basically read, again, this was back during the confirmation period at HHS. "Dr. Levine is a transgender woman that is a man who believes he is a woman."

Joshua D. Holdenried ([20:01](#)):

That was the tweet. That was the sentence. And then they were to shut down, deplatformed. So again, it's not as if that's just stating a fact, it's not as if they're saying something egregiously mean or anything like that. And then of course, what's interesting too, about all this is, it's not just because Big Tech companies are going after faith-based organizations because they hate religion or they hate faith-based people that might have something to do with it. But actually, there's also what I would argue, just widespread ignorance about religion. Again, we live in an increasingly secular society where certain phrases or images or icons, or things like that might confuse people or make them think that, what's going on over here?

Joshua D. Holdenried ([20:48](#)):

For example, there is an ad that was put out by Just Love Prints, which was a vinyl sticker company. And the sticker says, "Rest in Him." And then they got censored by Facebook because it was apparently sexually suggestive in manner. And again, there's also ads for a Christian author named, Regina Domine. She published a children's book titled, Stations of the Cross, and that book includes non-gory depictions of the Crucifixion. And that was removed because those depictions were apparently according to

Facebook, "shocking, sensational, inflammatory, or excessively violent content." So again, I also think that this problem goes a little bit deeper in terms of a lot of these folks who work in these Big Tech companies. I don't think have a lot of devout Christians or religious people who might be able to help them understand that this is not supposed to be some sensational, violent depiction. The crucified Christ is an important image of the Christian faith.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([21:50](#)):

Again, that report really highlighted the problem and we catalog the instances and it's a pattern. It was once a week that organizations were being censored or deplatformed, religious organizations. So then we started to say, okay, now that we've spotlighted the issue, why is it happening? And again, this was getting back to what both, Carl, and Ryan were saying, you go back and you have to start to read the fine print. Now I think all of us, most of us have iPhones, use apps on the App Store. And we all see the terms and conditions we scroll down, click, "I Agree", and move on. But then we decided to read those terms and conditions, so you don't have to.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([22:28](#)):

Basically, our survey looked at 25 major tech companies and their subsidiaries, and we went through all their terms and conditions. And we found out of those 25 companies, 21 of them have problematic language that could be used unnecessarily against a religious organization. So I'll just spotlight my favorite user agreement, which came from Apple. Their app store prohibits content that is "offensive, insensitive, upsetting, or even just plain creepy." That's literally the language that they use to determine whether they're going to kick you out of the App Store.

Clare Morell ([23:06](#)):

Wow!

Joshua D. Holdenried ([23:07](#)):

And so again, this goes back to the fact that oftentimes, we assume, "Yeah, terms and conditions. This just means don't do something that's unlawful on my platform." That's not what this is about. Clearly, the folks that are working at these large monopolistic tech companies hold all the power and they get to decide at a whim, that's creepy. The crucified Christ is creepy. A figurine of the Virgin Mary is creepy. This is the problem that I'm getting at when I was talking earlier that this also goes back to some civic education that needs to happen for folks that are working at Big Tech companies.

Clare Morell ([23:45](#)):

No, that's really helpful. Well, you were just giving a perfect segue into my next question for all three of you, anyone can jump in and answer. Just getting at the, "Why," that you were talking about, why in particular does Big Tech want to censor such religious content? And I guess, the other part of that why, it's not just why they want to censor it, but why are they? Is it that their employees are all biased against religious voices? Or are they responding to cultural pressures, they're businesses and they might be getting pressures from the other side that want them to censor religious content that might be controversial? Or is it politicians on the Left pressuring these companies? This is a more question of speculation, but just even Josh, from what you've seen and observed in your report, and Ryan, and Carl, from your own experiences, why do you think Big Tech is specifically going after religious content? And what might be behind that?

Carl R. Trueman ([24:52](#)):

Certainly, the way Josh described things there made me think that that Big Tech is functioning really as a giant therapist. If we live in a very therapeutic culture and very therapeutic society, then institutions will tend to see their role as that of making and keeping people happy and comfortable. And traditional religion, certainly Christianity, is predicated on the idea that we're not actually in and of ourselves in the right place. We're not to be made comfortable. We're too, I don't want to sound too Northern European, but we're to be made miserable in order to bring us to our senses and see where the truth lies.

Carl R. Trueman ([25:30](#)):

So what, Josh, was describing there made me think, well, maybe this isn't an anti-religious polemic in the first instance. But it is by implication because religion challenges human beings where they are and says that where they are is not where they should be. And that makes people uncomfortable. That is a difficult sale. And in a therapeutic society, that's not what institutions do, particularly, institutions that are intending to sell their wares and make money from being popular with people. So perhaps, it's a function of the broader therapeutic nature of society.

Ryan T. Anderson ([26:07](#)):

I think what Carl just said is entirely correct. And I also think it's a sign of weakness because they want to shut down a debate, on an issue that they think they should have already won. Because, when I think of my book, which doesn't really make religious arguments. But in the popular imagination, the only reason someone would be opposed to anything having to do with LGBT issues is for religious reasons. But take, Abigail Shrier's book, for example, it's not religious at all. It makes a whole bunch of secular arguments about the lack of science, the lack of medicine, the stories of regret, something new is going on that a condition, gender dysphoria, which historically afflicted males, little boys and middle aged man was all of a sudden impacting teens and 20 something women.

Ryan T. Anderson ([27:01](#)):

And Abigail, writes a great book on this, did hundreds of interviews with a bunch of experts and Target refuses to sell it. And then there were employees of Amazon who petitioned Amazon to get rid of it, the way they had gotten rid of my book. And I think what this is, is we're trying to discredit any opposition. We're trying to silence the people who are ringing the alarm, raising the arm. And then we are trying to send a social signal that anyone who questions our sacred dogma will be marginalized. This is unacceptable. This is one of the conclusions. And so therefore, it functions almost like a religion of the reverse here. There's a certain set of sacred beliefs that can't be questioned. There's a new index of forbidden books, et cetera, et cetera. And so anyway, I think that's a sign on the part of, whoever asked Amazon to get rid of my book, it's a sign of weakness, not strength. Because they're afraid that if people actually read the book and they learn the arguments inside, they might have second thoughts about aspects of transgender ideology as well.

Ryan T. Anderson ([28:11](#)):

And then the last thing I'll say is, it's a terrible vision of what books are for, because it assumes that the only reason people read books is because they already agree with them. The vast majority of the books that I have read in my life, are things that I disagree with, and the books that I most enjoy reading are the books that I disagree with. And so, Amazon is showing that it has a vision of learning and education that looks more like indoctrination. We don't want someone to read this book because they might agree

with it. And the only reason someone would read it would be to agree with it, rather than, one reason that we're such a polarized country that we can't even understand each other. And part of understanding each other would be reading each other's books and listening to each other's lectures, understanding where people are coming from. So again, it's a very shallow vision of what the entire intellectual process being a bookseller is all about.

Carl R. Trueman ([29:09](#)):

And I would add, I think evidence that supports one of Ryan's earlier points there is that, it was ironic on the very day that, Ryan, was canceled, and my wife was saying, she just read this on Twitter. I got an email from Amazon trying to sell me the Unabomber's latest book on Technological Slavery, I think. And it struck me, is interesting that the Unabomber continues to be sold to this day. Ryan, himself has mentioned in times past, Mein Kampf continues to be sold, the works of Stalin, Mao, continue to be sold. But of course, none of them are threats, they're long ago and far away. I think it's because Ryan's book, it was perceived to be such a threat. Got it singled out for special treatment at this time.

Clare Morell ([29:56](#)):

The other thing I wanted to ask before we turn more to solutions, was getting at what you were just barely both talking about, Ryan and Carl, why in particular is the censorship of religious voices such a threat to America and to our freedoms? I guess just that deeper question is, why is this a problem? Why are we talking about this today? What's the threat on a broader level to our country and our society today? And anyone can jump in and answer.

Carl R. Trueman ([30:36](#)):

I wonder if part of it is that for many generations, the outward trappings of Christianity, Christian morality, social values tracked very closely with the values of wider society. Now there is a real divergence, if not an antithesis emerging between those. And that carries us back to the second century where Christianity was seen as seditious, religion was seen as something that made you very, very suspect in the Public Square, because, of course, religion does call on religious people to owe their ultimate loyalty to a higher authority. And I wonder if some of what we're seeing is Christians, other religious conservatives, are starting at this point to look seditious, precisely because the terms of membership in society, a secular society is now dictating them as simply not ones that religious conservatives can conform to. And that makes us look like dangerous subversive outsiders at this point.

Clare Morell ([31:41](#)):

Yeah.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([31:42](#)):

I would add, what's interesting about this too, is it's interesting. When we talk about rights and the language of rights, there's a lot of confusion and a lot of misunderstanding that now plagues the Public Square. And something I always catch on to, and it annoys me is when folks say they'll go forward and say, "My First Amendment Right, this is my First Amendment Right?" There's no such thing. You have rights protected under the First Amendment, but those rights come from elsewhere, obviously from the higher power. So when you start to go after the right of religious freedom, that's our first freedom. And that freedom does not come from government. That's something that we need to understand as Americans. And that's why we've created a system that really checks itself against tyranny.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([32:31](#)):

So I just, obviously, think that censorship, whether being done by the government or monopolistic mega corporations, is bad. And it says something that's basically demonstrates a problem that's deeper in our culture that needs to be fleshed out and have a dialogue that's done, because if we don't fix this, now it's only going to get worse. And obviously, trying to highlight this issue on the fact that, no, it's not just censorship of people who were at the January 6th riot. And no, no, no, this censorship problem goes well beyond that. And obviously, that instance and that problem happened then, but this problem continues. And it's like that what happened on January 6th, it would be maybe being used to perpetuate the censorship problem further and use an excuse to perpetuate against people who had nothing to do with that. Or they're just trying to sell a Christian children's book. So that's why the problem goes a little bit deeper in my opinion, and that's why we need to continue the dialogue.

Ryan T. Anderson ([33:37](#)):

And then Clare, when you were first starting to ask your question, I interpreted it slightly differently to be, what's at stake for the religious nonprofits and religious communities themselves.

Clare Morell ([33:53](#)):

Yeah.

Ryan T. Anderson ([33:54](#)):

So I don't know if you were going in that way or not. To my mind, what's at stake here for us as a relatively new president of a think tank is, what I've seen happen to other people is banks won't allow them to have accounts any longer, donation processing companies won't process their charitable donations. I've heard Donor Advised Fund refusing to grant donations to certain, to my mind, bone fide excellent religious nonprofits because the Donor Advised Fund says, "Well, they're a hate group," something like that.

Ryan T. Anderson ([34:30](#)):

And so it's not just a matter of, Twitter locks an account for a week, or Amazon won't sell a book. What happens when your banking options dry up, your donor processing, the ability to even have donor advised funds honoring the intentions of the donors, because the Fund views the particular nonprofit as somehow suspicious. I mean, Josh, your report probably covers this in much greater detail, but I think there's a lot that's at stake just given that we live in a Big Tech environment.

Ryan T. Anderson ([35:05](#)):

If you're a religious nonprofit, you can't fulfill your mission without engaging with technology. You need phones, you need computers, you need websites, all of this, you need bank accounts. And so I think what's at stake here is exclusion from the modern day Public Square, but also exclusion from the modern day infrastructure. The banking infrastructure, the donor infrastructure, the communications infrastructure, if everyone that controls the modern day infrastructure has a common ideology, and then they use that ideology to censor, deplatform, and otherwise marginalize the people with whom they disagree.

Clare Morell ([35:50](#)):

Yeah. No, I'm glad you brought that point up, because I think that's important as well. I think we do focus a lot on just the threat of just not having access to the Public Square to make our ideas known and driving us away. But even the infrastructure issues are also important just to recognize that, that's a real threat to religious organizations and nonprofits. So now turning a little bit more towards solutions, I want to talk about what can religious organizations and individuals do to protect themselves from such censorship. And Josh, I wanted to start with you since I know this is really what Napa Legal does in advising faith-based nonprofits on these topics. So what advice do you all give to religious organizations in terms of protecting themselves from some of these threats, both Big Tech censorship, and then even some of the infrastructure issues that, Ryan, was mentioning?

Joshua D. Holdenried ([36:47](#)):

So one of the things I always tell faith leaders when we're talking about Big Tech censorship, and what to do, or how to prepare for, I usually cite, Matthew 25:1-13, where the takeaway from that verse is simply this, wise leaders plan ahead, because you might not know the hour nor the day you will be censored. So of course, this gets to the fact, to the idea that folks need to plan ahead and assume that if they are a religious organization or faith-based organization operating in the Public Square and focused on an issue that's related to pro-life, marriage, sexuality, Christian anthropology, they should just assume that they will eventually run afoul of these vague and arbitrary terms and conditions that exist with these Big Tech platforms.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([37:36](#)):

So I first say, that you had to do three things, identify the core services for what your nonprofit relies on that's related to Big Tech. Then develop a short-term plan to implement if the service interruptions occur, and then also develop a long-term plan to reduce your nonprofits dependence on Big Tech platforms that have proven to be particularly egregious against faith-based voices. So at Napa Legal Institute, one of the things that we do is we have a nonprofit library where we publish white papers, strategies, things like that. And of course, one of the things that we've published in our Big Tech section of our nonprofit library is a deplatforming example action plan, which again, goes into detail of those three things that I said that nonprofit faith-based leaders need to be doing. So again, we also advise, for example, faith-based leaders to develop media relationships. And again, in their action plans, have a list of reporters that have proven to be friendly on our side of this issue that can disseminate when this happens.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([38:40](#)):

The thing about say, Carl, and Ryan, is they both have significant platforms, but there's also faith-based leaders and faith-based organizations that don't have those media platforms. So that's why they need to be a little bit more intentional and engaged in the public conversation by developing those relationships that can prove to be helpful later down the road. And then also one of the things, again, from this example action plan, is we tell folks, it seems like common sense, but you'd be amazed how nobody does this, backup your contact lists, backup your content, backup your videos.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([39:14](#)):

Again, there's several faith-based organizations and people who have all of their content lives on their YouTube page. Then they get locked out of the YouTube page and it might be indefinite and they've lost, hundreds, thousands of hours of content and they might never get it back. So again, these are the

things, some of the stuff's common sense, some of the stuff's a little bit more strategic, but I would just encourage folks to visit, because we've been thinking about this issue for a long time and working with faith-based nonprofits to visit our nonprofit library to talk through or think through strategies that they can implement now in the likely event that they might get censored.

Clare Morell ([39:51](#)):

No, that's really helpful, Josh. And then I want to just ask, Carl, as a theologian and a Professor at a Christian college, if you're talking to other pastors or faith leaders or even professors, what advice do you give to them in terms of how they should think about speaking on these controversial topics? Do you have advice that you would offer to individuals?

Carl R. Trueman ([40:18](#)):

Yeah. That's a good question. I think there's a sense of which I want to respond to that by saying, the changing circumstances shouldn't change how Christians speak. I think it behoves Christians always to speak with grace, to speak in calm ways, to be very careful to present those whom they're criticizing in a way that those they are criticizing should recognize themselves. I did my PhD under a high Methodist who studied, Huldrych Zwingli. And I remember once asking him, "Why have you spent your life studying this figure whose theology you despised?" And his comment to me was, "Because I felt if I could present him fairly and objectively, then I've done my job as an academic historian." And I think that's not a bad motto for a Christian. I think we should speak graciously and accurately at all times.

Carl R. Trueman ([41:15](#)):

One of the things about my own small cancellation recently was I knew that nothing I'd said had caused it. I had a clear conscience on that. I had not spoken disrespectfully about anyone, I had not used inappropriate language in referring to people I was talking about. So I think first and foremost, Christian leaders, we need not to take the bait, but continue to do what we should always do. Have I always done it? No, I'm not saying that if you find everything I've ever written, I've always spoken graciously and fairly, not at all. We're all sinful. We can all make terrible mistakes, but in principle, we should speak fairly, and graciously, even about those with whom we are disagreeing because at the end of the day, we want to persuade people. Ryan, didn't write his book in order to smash the transgender movement by hurting people. Ryan, wrote his book in the way he did, because he genuinely wanted to persuade people that there is a better way.

Carl R. Trueman ([42:12](#)):

And I think that's what we as Christians and as figures in the Public Square need to do, particularly, I think for the younger generation. I teach at a Christian Liberal Arts College, but I have students in class who don't hold my views on things. I'm aware that there's a variety of views presented, and I see my job as a teacher to persuade them. That my way is better, maybe it may be, I don't succeed, but if I fail, I want to fail simply because they've decided not to agree with me, not because I used a word or I spoke in a certain way that drove them away, that made them feel they couldn't engage in conversation with me. So my basic advice would be, Christians should do what they've always should've been doing that is speaking in grace and truth.

Carl R. Trueman ([43:01](#)):

Will it save us from censorship? No, because I don't think we're up against people who play fair. I don't think we're in an era now, I'm thinking at the moment, I'm just writing a little article, which touches on,

George Marsden and Mark Knowles, writings of the 90s, where they argued that if Christian academics are good honest academics, then we can find a place at the table. That seems 1000 years ago now, because now we know that just being a Christian academic can be regarded as immoral in some quarters. But it doesn't mean that we shouldn't aspire to be fair, but we should expect, I think, to be counseled and to have life made difficult.

Carl R. Trueman ([43:44](#)):

But certainly if you're a Christian, you worship a God whose Son had his life made very difficult, precisely because he spoke graciously and truthfully about the human condition. So I don't think from a Christian perspective, the aggravation that's coming our way should be a surprise. It will be unpleasant time, I'm sure. Let's just make sure that it comes our way because it's nasty people out to get us and not because we have provided them with enough evidence to convict us.

Clare Morell ([44:16](#)):

Wow! That was really well said. Thank you so much. And then lastly, I wanted to just ask on a broader solution level, thinking about potential policy solutions, not just what individuals can do, but what maybe should the government do about this? Ryan, I know you've thought and written about this before, but how should conservatives think about possible policy solutions to religious censorship, even from just a philosophical perspective?

Ryan T. Anderson ([44:48](#)):

I think the first thing is to recognize that we shouldn't deny that there is a problem. I think there are some conservatives who are a little blahzay saying, "Well, look, if you just don't say anything objectionable, you won't ever be silenced, censored, deplatformed." And as Carl just pointed out, it's not how we say it, frequently, it's just what we believe. And that shouldn't be a reason for us either to censor ourselves and go quiet or for us to speak ungraciously. But just realize even when you make a rigorous argument in the most charitable way possible, you're going to be at risk. And so we should take that seriously. The starting point here is to recognize there is a problem. And then the second part would be to at least be willing to explore, what are the legal mechanisms at hand that might make the problem less bad?

Ryan T. Anderson ([45:40](#)):

Okay. I'm not a utopian. I don't think government is going to make a heaven on earth. We're not going to make perfection, but I do think that prudent public policies can serve the common good. And we have a variety of economic policies, a variety of economic and other government regulations that we have said are going to be worth the cost benefit analysis. And from a natural law perspective, economic rights are not absolute, that all of our liberties have limits. The dissertation that I wrote at Notre Dame was titled, *Neither Liberal Nor Libertarian: A Natural Law Approach to Property Rights and Economic Freedoms*. And the idea here was that look, economic freedoms matter, property rights are real rights, but neither the economic freedoms nor the property rights are unlimited, absolute, et cetera, et cetera. And so we have to think, what does justice require in terms of the conditions? What are the limits? What are the proper regulations? Et cetera, et cetera.

Ryan T. Anderson ([46:43](#)):

And so to my mind, there's a variety of existing paradigms. Some of them might fit really well. Some of them, we might need a new paradigm for thinking about Big Tech. There's the antitrust and monopoly

paradigm. There's the common carrier, public accommodation and anti-discrimination paradigm. There's Section 230 reform. There've been discussions about State Action, I had mentioned that with Amazon. There's limited public forums, as applied to something like a company town, normally limited public forums of the government. And I think all of those should be on the table. We should be thinking through all of those different existing legal paradigms where the government regulates businesses. And saying, "Look, how do we make sure that our economic freedoms actually serve the common good that we try to have markets that work well."

Ryan T. Anderson ([47:34](#)):

You might need an antitrust regulation. You might need to break up a big business in order to have better market competition. I actually want to turn the question to you because this is not my policy expertise. I know the philosophy that undergirds economic thinking, but I have not done the deep dive into the policy work and I know you have, you'd organized a really good EPPC conference on this. So actually, on some of those buckets that I just mentioned, maybe the two or three that you think are most promising, could you actually just say a little bit about, how should viewers be thinking about? What are the policy solutions on offer? And what are the strengths and weaknesses? Where can they learn more about the different policy solutions?

Clare Morell ([48:20](#)):

Yeah. Well, no, thank you for asking. Well, I think you mentioned some of the most prominent that I would call attention to. I think the first, which is definitely the most hot topic is Section 230 reform. And I think it's might be up for debate in terms of what the best way forward is. But I think there's agreement that the current way it's been interpreted, it has gone too far and that companies are able to use the term, "otherwise objectionable" in the Good Samaritan provision of Section 230 to censor content that they don't like, religious content, conservative content, whatever it might be. And so, it could be possible that the courts, if the right case makes it up to the Supreme Court, that they could even right the interpretation of it. And then, of course, there's lots of legislative proposals trying to address, clarifying some of that, otherwise objectionable language.

Clare Morell ([49:13](#)):

I think another really promising area is common carrier law. Justice Thomas wrote on this in his opinion back in April of this year. And I think that, whether that'd be at the federal or state level, a common carrier type statute with a narrow non-discrimination provision, just to say that, your business provides a public good. And so you're not the government, but the government has an interest in how that good is provided and you have to serve all comers equally. And so you cannot discriminate against users based on their religion or religious viewpoint or political viewpoint. So that's another, I think promising approach that could be taken.

Clare Morell ([49:54](#)):

And then the last thing I'll mention is what you've mentioned at the state level, there's an opportunity, I think for states to pass legislation, narrow anti-discrimination laws. And I wrote on this in the recent op-ed in the Wall Street Journal with Columbia Law Professor Philip Hamburger, just saying that states could pass a narrow anti-discrimination law to say that these social media platforms can not discriminate against users on the basis of their viewpoint, whether that's a political or religious viewpoint. So it would be tailored to viewpoint discrimination. And I think that's another potential path forward.

Clare Morell ([50:30](#)):

So those are three things I would mention but then Ryan, as you said, we did host a virtual, Big Tech Symposium back in June. We had several the Congress members and then expert panels who really did a deep dive on these different policy approaches. So I'd recommend that to all of you who might be interested in learning more about the policy solutions, the transcript and the video recordings for that are all on EPPC's website. That's what I'll say on that without going into too much more detail. Well, I think we're at our conclusion, I just wanted to say, is there anything else we didn't touch on? Anything any of you want to offer before we conclude?

Ryan T. Anderson ([51:15](#)):

The only thing I would add is, as bad as everything we've been discussing, if the Equality Act were to become law, it would be that much worse because now it wouldn't just be Silicone Valley that was doing this, but it would be the government. And so, even as we conclude by thinking about what are some good pieces of public policy that could be enacted to help better the situation, we also need to realize that there are some bad pieces of public policy in the wings that if they were enacted, it would be government directly shutting down, and otherwise penalizing people because they believe the truth about the human person. And that's what's at stake with the Equality Act. And so I would just highlight that we need to be concerned both about Big Tech and about big government when both of them get basic anthropology, metaphysics, ontology wrong. And that's what we're witnessing right now.

Clare Morell ([52:11](#)):

Wow! Yeah. Anyone else before I close?

Joshua D. Holdenried ([52:18](#)):

I was just going to mention one of my favorite books is by, Archbishop Charles Chaput, Strangers in a Strange Land. And it's obviously directed towards religious people. And I think that's how we need to start understanding ourselves because the default moral framework of our culture is no longer a latent Christianity. We're increasingly having a secularized culture where people just by default, except the moral framework of basically secular liberalism and anything outside of that moral framework is considered, well, immoral. And then again, that gets to this idea of why people of faith are being targeted, because what they are saying is perceived as immoral within the framework that's being pushed by a particular side of the aisle. I think the challenge here basically goes that Christians and people of faith, more generally, need to be proactive about their religious Liberty.

Joshua D. Holdenried ([53:21](#)):

It can no longer be, we fight our battles in the court and we just want our religious liberty, leave us alone and everything will be fine. We've got to do more than that. We need to start thinking about religious liberty in a more robust way and thinking about a proactive approach rather than just simply a reactive approach. And that's, again, what we're trying to do at Napa Legal Institute with our resources and our strategic documents and things like that. But I'm just also saying, and in a broader sense, whether it's Big Tech censorship, or government censorship, people of faith need to just start being a little bit more proactive about their religious liberty rather than saying, well, there's a Supreme Court decision that happened that will protect me, in the short-term, or maybe long-term and then we just move on from there. That would be my challenge.

Clare Morell ([54:12](#)):

Well, thank you for joining us all for this important conversation today, and thank you to the three of you for your really insightful comments and remarks. Really helpful. If you're at all interested in learning more about these topics that we discussed today, particularly on Big Tech, you can find helpful articles and resources on the Big Tech Project page at eppc.org. And then as, Josh mentioned, if you go to Napa Legal's website, you can find their report on their tracking of religious censorship instances, as well as resources for faith-based organizations and nonprofits. Lastly, if you're really interested in following along with Big Tech, you can subscribe to a weekly, Big Tech newsletter that I send out each Friday with a summary of news highlights from the past week relating to Big Tech. So thank you all so much for joining us today. We hope you were able to learn a lot from this important conversation. Thank you.